

University of North Carolina at Asheville

In Search of Knowledge

*The Travel Accounts of Edward William Lane, Sophia Lane-Poole,
Rifa'a al-Tahawi, and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi*

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Throughout the early nineteenth century, the East and West met in a variety of ways for multiple reasons; one of the most interesting and telling ways they came into contact was through travel. Although European travel to the East had been popular since the Crusades, Muslim travel to Europe was extremely rare until the beginning of the nineteenth century. During this time the Ottoman Empire began to realize more immediately their growing loss of military supremacy to the West, all the while European knowledge about the East was on the rise. These changes spawned an era of increased travel between East and West in search of knowledge and new experiences. Among the numerous travelers during this time, two stand apart from the rest because they broke new ground and revolutionized their respective fields while having lasting impacts in their own societies.

Unlike other travelers of their day, E. W. Lane and Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi had uncharacteristically balanced views, opinions, and perceptions of the “other.” The two travelers were at times slightly paternalistic, though rarely overtly prejudiced. While their specific missions differed slightly, the two shared a common goal: to learn about and educate their respective countrymen about very different societies, customs, and cultures. Theirs is just one example of the two-way discourse that existed between East and West, an idea that challenges Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism both because his treatment of nineteenth century European travel literature is too homogenous and because he ignores and silences the other half of the discourse in Eastern travelers such as al-Tahtawi.

During the early nineteenth century, Victorian England had an almost obsessive desire for all types of knowledge, particularly when this knowledge was about a “mysterious” people, culture, or land. The Enlightenment values of opening the entire world up for scrutiny and a general desire to use rational proofs rather than meta-narratives to explain the world led to abundant characterizations and depictions of “Oriental” culture in art, literature, theater, and a new type of visualization, the exhibition. Visual representations of the East were on the rise; they were the West’s attempt to “create a world as a picture to be viewed, experienced

and investigated.”¹ By the middle of the century these depictions began to emphasize aspects of reality by including traveler’s accounts and depictions of modern “Oriental” life.²

European travelers tended to be of two types; those seeking to make a name for themselves in an academic field, and those seeking personal enjoyment, adventure, or fodder for artistic purposes such as painting, literature, and theater. Travelers “often carried with them ideological and polemical baggage that burdened their accounts.”³ They tended to focus on the strange and bizarre, and most portrayed the “Orient” as being filled with “lascivious sexuality and violence.”⁴ European travelers outside of academic Orientalists had a very minimal understanding of Arabic, and thus their accounts were filled with misunderstandings and biased interpretations of public scenes as being “absurd, stupid, strange or morally degenerate.”⁵ Often the traveler displayed a sense of Western superiority in that they were exposing another culture, and acting as an adventurous hero, “rescuing the Orient from obscurity, strangeness, and alienation.”⁶

Edward William Lane defied the average European traveler and was arguably one of the most influential and studied academic Orientalists of the nineteenth century. Lane was born on September 17, 1801. He was a gifted and hardworking student his entire life, though he gave up his childhood dream of becoming a student at Cambridge to study engraving with his brother in London.⁷ In 1821 Lane visited Belzoni’s exhibit of Egyptian antiquities,⁸ an experience that is often credited with instilling in him a passion for Egypt and its people.⁹ He spent the next three years teaching himself Arabic and learning as much as possible about Egyptian and Islamic culture. He embarked on the first of his three

¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6.

² Edward Ziter, *The Orient on The Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.

³ Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xxxi.

⁴ Rana Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 5-6.

⁵ Leila Ahmed, *Edward W. Lane* (London: Longman, 1978), 68-69.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 21.

⁷ A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), 89.

⁸ Jason Thompson, “Edward William Lane’s ‘Description of Egypt’,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 4 (Nov., 1996), 565. Giovanni Battista Belzoni opened his exhibit of Egyptian antiquities in 1821 in Piccadilly.

⁹ Ahmed, 59.

journeys to Egypt in 1826. The result of this visit was the monumental *Description of Egypt*, containing extensive observations of ancient monuments as well as the impetus for his later work, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*.¹⁰ *Modern Egyptians* was the sole purpose of his second visit to Egypt from 1833-1835. The account was original and innovative because it “reflected the themes and concerns of its day and was inextricably part of the contemporary travel literature.”¹¹ His third and final trip to Egypt between 1842-1849 was in preparation for his *English-Arabic Lexicon* and also to assist his sister Sophia Lane-Poole in writing her travel account, *An Englishwoman in Egypt*.¹²

The eighteenth century saw the beginning of the Ottoman Empire’s collapse militarily, economically, and intellectually. By the early nineteenth century they were consistently losing provinces and were challenged by the growing independence of leaders in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and the Wahhabis in Arabia.¹³ The “citizens within the Ottoman Empire were feeling less secure and more oppressed as a result of blatant corruption, miscarriages of justice, and arbitrary rulings by government officials,” which led to an atmosphere of doubt and general apprehension.¹⁴ The successful invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 proved how far the East lagged behind militarily, and with the occupation came a feeling of intellectual inferiority as well. After Napoleon was ousted, in 1801 Muhammad ‘Ali gained control and proceeded to take Egypt through a series of important reforms and changes modeled after French styled institutions first introduced during the occupation. These reforms were realized, articulated, and supported by many travelers sent to the West under ‘Ali’s authority.

¹⁰ For the purpose of this study I will be using Lane’s *Description* and *Manners and Customs*, as well as his translated version of *The Arabian Nights*.

¹¹ Ahmed, 51-52.

¹² Thompson, 573-574.

¹³ Caroline Finkel, *The History of the Ottoman Empire: Osman’s Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 372-412.

¹⁴ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 5.

Simultaneously, a new trend was beginning in the Muslim world, that of traveling and publishing the findings and experiences for the advancement of the Muslim world. Travelers like al-Shidyah, Bustrus, Harayri, and Marrash all went to France to investigate social structures, manners, material culture, and to describe their civilization.¹⁵ Two travelers stand out during this time, Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, al-Tahtawi because of his well-rounded account of French culture and society, and al-Tunisi because of his in-depth analysis of the specific reasons for European advancement.¹⁶ Regardless of the traveler, most displayed a consistent desire to emulate certain aspects of Western culture, such as technology and education, while defending and justifying the emulation with references to the Golden Age of Islam and with passages from the Quran and Hadith.

Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi was born on October 14, 1801 in Tahta, Egypt to a struggling but well-educated and notable family. He was given a traditional Islamic education and began studying at al-Azhar in 1817 at the age of 16.¹⁷ It was here that he met his mentor Shaykh Hasan al-‘Attar,¹⁸ who instilled in him a love of knowledge beyond the Islamic sciences and recommended him to serve as imam on Muhammad Ali’s first student mission to Paris.¹⁹ Al-Tahtawi’s stay in Paris between 1826-1831 was inspired by Egypt’s Pasha, Muhammad ‘Ali’s, desire to create an educated elite who could implement his reform programs, run his new schools, and translate textbooks. While Muhammad Ali’s

¹⁵ Abu-Lughod, 77-79.

¹⁶ Al-Tunisi was a very prominent figure in Tunisia. He participated in drafting the first Tunisian Constitution and was influential in politics during the second half of the nineteenth century. Much like al-Tahtawi, al-Tunisi traveled to Europe and wrote a travel account on Western forms of government and the reasons for Western political and social successes. The introduction to his travel account contains his personal attitude, thoughts, and perceptions of European political organization, as well as how and why such organization should be introduced into the Muslim world.

¹⁷ Located in Cairo, al-Azhar, a prominent university until today, was focused mainly on Islamic law, religion, and the Arabic language. Educational reforms were just beginning to be introduced during al-Tahtawi’s time, and European subjects in the sciences were very unpopular amongst the ‘ulama that taught at al-Azhar.

¹⁸ J. Heyworth-Dunne, “Rifa‘ah Badawi Rafi’ al-Tahtawi: The Egyptian Revivalist, Part 1,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London* 9, no. 4 (1939), 962. Al-‘Attar was heavily influenced by French science and education, both of which he was exposed to during the French occupation of Egypt between 1798-1801. It is from al-‘Attar that al-Tahtawi grew to appreciate geography, history and literature.

¹⁹ Daniel L. Newman, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric 1826-1831* (London: Saqi, 2004), 32.

goal may have been self-serving, al-Tahtawi succeeded in making his own unique contribution to society through his personal travel account, and later political, social, and educational involvement.²⁰ After arriving back in Egypt and publishing his account, *takhlis al-ibriz fi takhlis bariz*,²¹ in 1834 al-Tahtawi entered a long career in public service, most notably as head of the School of Translation.²²

Analysis of E. W. Lane's *Modern Egyptians* shows a consistent curiosity and desire to learn about Arab and Islamic culture; he devoted his entire life to the field of academic Orientalism and unlike other travelers to the Muslim world he did not persistently display a sense of European superiority. Lane's intention and reason for visiting Egypt was to make "some of my countrymen better acquainted with the domiciliated classes of one of the most interesting nations of the world."²³ Lane's account is relentlessly detailed, as he describes everything from the markets and living quarters, to an extensive tutorial on Islam and Muslim prayer, to descriptions of public and private festivals. His tone is consistently dry and largely explanatory, therefore, one rarely gets a firm notion of his personal opinion. Exceptions occur though, in particular in his treatment and perceptions of Islam, Egyptian political and social institutions, and descriptions of women, as well as the presence of European innovation and progress in Egypt.

When it comes to Islam it is no exaggeration to say that most Europeans had a healthy curiosity as well as a bit of fear and prejudice that often colored their perceptions. Lane's initial impression of Islam was upon arriving in Alexandria during his first visit to Egypt when he commented that "the sight of the Moos'lim engaged in his devotions never failed to impress me with some degree of veneration;

²⁰ Elie & Sylvia Kedouri, eds., *Modern Egypt: Studies in Politics and Society* (London: F.Cass, 1980), 17.

²¹ *The Extraction of Gold from a Distillation of Paris*

²² Heyworth-Dunne, 965-966. Al-Tahtawi served on the Council of School Administration and reorganized the School of Translation in 1837 with himself as its leader. The school was a mix of traditional Islamic education and European education.

²³ Edward W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, v.1 (London: Elibron Classics, 2005, First Published in 1836 by Charles Knight & Co.), iii.

but particularly when witnessed for the first time.”²⁴ He observed early on that many Egyptian social customs and laws were determined by their religion, though oftentimes the Pasha was not obliged to follow the advice or rulings of the shaykhs.²⁵ Throughout his discussion of Islam and law he was quick to dispel false beliefs held by Europeans, such as the belief that Muslim women had no souls, or that Muslims prayed to their Prophet and not to God.²⁶ Lane’s opinion was that Europeans “have very imperfect and erroneous notions” of Islam, and thus he went over the basic tenets of their faith in great detail, describing in words and via visual representation their approach to prayer and even a typical Friday sermon. He also touched on popular topics in European society such as holy war, stating that “the duty of waging war against infidels is strongly and repeatedly urged in the Quran,” and emphasizing that Muslims should not associate or make companions of non-Muslims.²⁷ This uncertainty of opinion in regard to Islam runs throughout Lane’s account, which shows how truthful he was in his observations and opinions, and how unwilling he was to perpetuate a negative stereotype. Despite the fact that he wanted to educate his countrymen about the truths of Islam, he was, after all, a Victorian man who was interested, and no doubt alarmed, at ideas such as holy war. Personal curiosity aside, Lane was also an author who wished to sell a book once he returned to England. By including subjects that filled European imaginations about the East he was sure to please any prospective publisher.

However, real European sentiments break through when he describes polygamy, saying that it is detrimental to morality and the general well-being of men and women, despite the fact that it is religiously sanctioned.²⁸ Though even with polygamy Lane attempts to be balanced, saying that it is

²⁴ Edward Lane, *Description of Egypt*, ed. Jason Thompson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 5.

²⁵ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:141. Here Lane is referring to the Muhammad ‘Ali going against the shaykhs wishes and allowing the dissection of human bodies for the progress of science.

²⁶ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:74,107.

²⁷ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:111.

²⁸ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:115.

rare for a man to take more than one wife and that despite his personal feelings towards the system it does not seem to be depraved in the way many Europeans may imagine.²⁹ Lane's sister, Sophia Lane-Poole, also extended fair treatment to polygamy. Despite the fact that she felt it was impossible to imagine living under such circumstances, she insisted that the European belief that the harems were immoral and that the women were mistreated was wrong.³⁰ Such empathy and fair treatment of polygamy is rare in European travel accounts, especially among female travelers.

In his treatment of the Egyptian government and leadership, under Pasha Muhammad 'Ali, Lane becomes much more judgmental and it is here one gets a sense of his suppressed European superiority. He was extremely harsh on 'Ali's agricultural policy,³¹ his sense of justice and his absolutist rule, his oppression of peasants, and most importantly his desires for foreign conquest and economic independence from the West.³² Lane lived in Egypt during a very fast-paced time, when the country was undergoing growing pains from new innovations and was on the verge of becoming completely independent from the Ottoman Empire. He was critical of 'Ali's absolutism, but admitted that "severity is a characteristic of this prince, rather than wanton cruelty; the boundless ambition has prompted him to almost every action by which he has attracted either praise or censure."³³ Here, Lane made a valid observation of the immense undertaking that 'Ali was attempting and the fact that at times his power was used in autocratic ways. His fair-minded and empathetic response to Eastern leaders and policy shows how honest and engaged Lane was with his subject.

The domestic life of the upper and middle classes in Egypt is a major emphasis in both *Modern Egyptians* and *An Englishwoman in Egypt*; while Sophia Lane-Poole spent most of her time in the

²⁹ Edward W. Lane, Trans., *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments-or The Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1944), 1103-1104. Here he also calls polygamy in Muslim society "a necessary evil."

³⁰ Sophia Lane-Poole, *The Englishwomen in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 116, 136.

³¹ Muhammad 'Ali confiscated the majority of useful agricultural land and forced peasants to sell their crops to him at fixed rates, which he in turn exported to European countries for profit.

³² Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:28. Lane is referring here to 'Ali's expeditions in Sudan and Syria as well as to his desire to create more manufacturing capabilities within Egypt.

³³ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:129.

female quarters, E. W. Lane gave a more general overview. The most emphasized habits were smoking tobacco and drinking coffee, something mentioned often enough to make an ignorant reader believe that was all Egyptians did. Lane's descriptions of eating habits are interesting for their apparent contrast with Western customs; he stresses the fact that typically the men eat alone and that "the manner of eating with the fingers, as practiced in Egypt and other Eastern countries, is more delicate than may be imagined by Europeans who have not witnessed it, nor heard it correctly described."³⁴ Sophia focused on the generous hospitality of her hosts and aspects of their dining she found desirable such as eating around the small round tables that Egyptians used because "they are infinitely more comfortable than the large square or oblong tables used in England."³⁵

Their perceptions of food and etiquette show how open-minded the two could be towards Egyptian customs. This was not always the case though, specifically with regards to slavery and marriage. The fact that slaves and servants were common in almost all middle and upper class households was a topic of much discussion and interest. The discomfort of both can be sensed in their obvious disapproval but hesitation of harsh judgment. E. W. Lane mentioned that oftentimes it was better to be a black slave than a free servant, because they are treated as one of the family and with much greater respect.³⁶ Sophia Lane-Poole was more overtly prejudiced. She found slavery repulsive, though she said "slavery in the East is not what you imagine it to be...generally speaking the Eastern slave is exceedingly indulged, and many who have been cruelly torn from their parents at an early age, find and acknowledge fathers and mothers in those to whom they are sold."³⁷ Thus, even with subject matters

³⁴ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:179. Here Lane insists that they eat with bread in hand, and not with their bare fingers.

³⁵ Lane-Poole, 115.

³⁶ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:192. Here Lane exhibits great prejudice not towards Muslims, but the black slaves, calling them "lazy" and "fanatical."

³⁷ Lane-Poole, 118.

they found uncomfortable the two were able to appreciate Eastern culture for what it was without labeling it wrong, backward, or disgusting.

Marriage intrigued most Western travelers because of the many contrasts between Eastern and Western practices and customs. Lane said he experienced “much inconvenience and discomfort during my stay in this country, and endured many reproaches,” due to being single.³⁸ Though, he was much more reluctant than his sister to share his personal feelings on the age and particular process that young women often endured to become brides. Sophia seemed a bit confused by Muslim marriage. As she moved from feelings of disgust at their lack of familiarity with their future husbands to a reluctant acceptance, “I am perfectly confirmed in my opinion that the women themselves would shrink with horror at the proposal to make an intended husband personally acquainted with his wife before the marriage.”³⁹ Unlike her brother, Sophia was stunned at what she felt were the negative effects of early marriage upon young men, turning them into selfish and dimwitted individuals.⁴⁰

E. W. Lane was very concerned with education, primarily it seems because the types of education available to all people tended to be religious, leaving a large majority of the population illiterate. Lane was astonished that the Pasha had confiscated the lands owned by the mosques, (the only revenue they had to support education), and that the government did not pay salaries to their instructors, leaving them and their students essentially impoverished.⁴¹ Also disturbing to him was the lack of Western subjects such as history, geography, math, and science, which he attributed to the fact that the primary educators were ‘ulama⁴², who allowed their faith to hold back the progress of education.⁴³

Always willing to dismiss the false perceptions of Europeans, Lane noted that, “it is a very prevalent

³⁸ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:193.

³⁹ Lane-Poole, 104,143.

⁴⁰ Lane-Poole, 190-191.

⁴¹ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:268-269.

⁴² A learned religious scholar, leader, or teacher of Islamic faith and tradition.

⁴³ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1: 271.

notion among the Christians of Europe, that the Moos'lims are enemies to almost every branch of knowledge. This is an erroneous idea; but it is true that their studies, in the present age, are confined within very narrow limits."⁴⁴ Sophia often spoke with amazement at the high level of knowledge Egyptian women had of politics and world events, particularly England's role in the Muslim world and Ottoman affairs.⁴⁵

It is a common critique of European travelers to the "Orient" that they apply a sense of timelessness to the culture, society, and people,⁴⁶ and Lane though willing to admit change, is guilty of a certain nostalgia for Egyptian antiquity. This becomes apparent when he opens his discussion of Egyptian industry by saying, "it is melancholy to contrast the present poverty of Egypt with its prosperity in ancient times."⁴⁷ He could not mask his disappointment in the fact that Egyptians were adopting Western styles of architecture, as if the adoption somehow made them *less* Egyptian. The same sense of lament and criticism of Egyptian "progress" can be found in Lane's remarks on early manufacturing and factories.⁴⁸ Sophia Lane-Poole made similar comments about Muhammad 'Ali's efforts to clean up and rebuild downtown Cairo: "Cairo, therefore, will no longer be an Arab city, and will no longer possess those qualities which render it so picturesque and attractive."⁴⁹

Lane's scholarly tone kept him from making too many blatantly opinionated statements about what he observed while in Egypt, though he broke his own rule at times. Whereas Lane appreciated a distinct ancient and cultured aesthetic with regard to Egypt's architecture, it is clear that he would have liked to see more "westernization" in social customs. He made it clear that the "advance of civilization"

⁴⁴ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:277. That Islam was somehow opposed to Western science and learning was a topic of much debate throughout the nineteenth century. French Orientalist Renan claimed this in a series of letters, which would be answered in various ways by Muslim intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. See: Nikki R. Keddie and Hamid Algar, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴⁵ Lane-Poole, 126.

⁴⁶ Said, 65.

⁴⁷ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 2:1.

⁴⁸ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 2:146.

⁴⁹ Lane-Poole, 130.

was tied to “European customs” and a “legislative assembly.”⁵⁰ He noticed how the Turkish population of Egypt had adopted European customs, something he thought contributed to an “indifference to religion.”⁵¹ While Lane saw change around the corner, Sophia was much more pessimistic in her forecast, believing that it was the “people’s prejudices” that would make material change nearly impossible.⁵²

While E. W. Lane was in Egypt working on *Manners and Customs*, Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi was in France on a state-sponsored mission to learn about French science, education, and technology. Although al-Tahtawi spoke about many of the same aspects of society that Lane did, his perceptions and purposes differ in significant ways. Al-Tahtawi’s was a trip for knowledge, but one that could not be as simple as description alone. He faced the task of justifying the importance of certain Western institutions via Islamic tradition to a Muslim readership that was largely uninformed of such institutions and fairly anti-Western in sentiment.⁵³ Also, unlike E. W. Lane, who had a history of travel and a field of academic Orientalism behind him, al-Tahtawi was charged with explaining everything from Western entertainments to political organization on his own.

The first step for any Muslim traveling to the West during the nineteenth century in search of practical knowledge was to justify this adoption in terms of their faith. One of the best ways to do this successfully was to clarify from the beginning that adopting Western knowledge did not mean adopting Christianity or claiming its superiority in any way. Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi made this clear, “there is no reason to reject or ignore something which is correct and demonstrable simply because it comes from

⁵⁰ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 2:349.

⁵¹ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 2:350. Lane also thought that the Egyptians would eventually follow the Turks lead and adopt European customs, and that eventually religion would play a much weaker role in society as a result.

⁵² Lane-Poole, 187.

⁵³ Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Paul & Janet Starkey, eds, *Travelers of Egypt* (London: Tauris, 1998). Khaldun S. Al-Husry, *Origins of Modern Arab Political Thought* (New York: Caravan Books, 1966).

others, especially if we had formerly possessed it and it had been taken from us.”⁵⁴ Al-Tahtawi agreed and said that since the Muslim world gave the Europeans much knowledge and pulled them out of their Dark Age, they should seize the opportunity to gain some of it back.⁵⁵ Al-Tahtawi stated that although both France and Egypt had attained the highest level of civilization, both were lagging in certain proficiencies. Muslims were behind in philosophy and science, and the French in the fact that “they have not pursued the straight path.”⁵⁶ These statements, along with a quotation of a famous Hadith stating, “Wisdom is the stray sheep of the believer who must seize it wherever he finds it,”⁵⁷ provide an Islamic foundation and justification for adopting certain Western innovations at home.

While in Paris, al-Tahtawi studied a wide variety of subjects, including French grammar, the history of Greece, Egypt, Syria, Rome and India, mythology, geography, and the political philosophy of Voltaire, Racine, Rousseau, and Montesquieu.⁵⁸ The education of the French and their intellectual curiosities were interesting to al-Tahtawi because of their reverence and demand for rational proofs for all knowledge.⁵⁹ Education of all children, male and female, and the high level of literacy were aspects of French society that al-Tahtawi admired and found to be missing in Egypt. He stressed early on that education and progress would be impossible if the ruler did not support and encourage it. He seemed to have been in favor of the education of women, an assumption made from the fact that he never once said anything negative about the subject.

⁵⁴ Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, *The Surest Path to Knowledge Concerning the Conditions of Countries*, trans. L. Carl Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 74-75.

⁵⁵ Rifā‘a Rafī‘ al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric 1826-1831*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2004), 105-106.

⁵⁶ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 105.

⁵⁷ Euben, 35. This was a popular justification among Muslim travelers to search for knowledge abroad. For the Arabic version see: Muhammad Ibn Najah, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d), 2: 1395 and Muhammad al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994), 7: 927.

⁵⁸ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 292.

⁵⁹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 298. Tahtawi seemed particularly surprised that even respected teachers had to *prove* their knowledge to their students and the public.

Religion was a matter of much consideration, given the polarizing effects a French secular society must have had upon him as a devout Muslim. Al-Tahtawi seemed to be outright impressed with the fact that although the French were not overtly religious in nature, they nevertheless had a respect for religious beliefs and general tolerance of others' spirituality. He stressed that though they were predominately Christians, it was in name only, since they did not practice the tenets of their faith or follow religious mandates.⁶⁰ There were many aspects of Catholicism that al-Tahtawi found disturbing, among them was the act of the Eucharist and its implied personification of Christ. Most disturbing though was that priests had to remain celibate, which he thought increased "their sinfulness and moral depravity even more."⁶¹ Perhaps most startling for al-Tahtawi was the fact that religion could be replaced by rationality, and the idea that as civilization progressed religion would slowly be replaced with political law.⁶² To this end the French often denied fate, which al-Tahtawi found to be a general vice. However, he admitted that too much reliance on fate was not productive as it often just made excuses and stunted progress.⁶³

One of the most important aspects of French culture that al-Tahtawi discussed was their political organization and the French Constitution of 1814. He respected the fact that despite the Parisians' tendency to change their moods often, they were unwavering in their political loyalties. Though he desired to emulate aspects of their political organization, he compared French government with certain classical Islamic concepts to ensure familiarity and justify its accordance with shari'a. Accordingly, he describes the Council of Peers as those who "support and protect the rights of the crown," and compared them to "people of primary consultation," a concept that would have been very familiar to the average

⁶⁰ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, .250-251.

⁶¹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 250.

⁶² Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 178-179. Here he stresses that religion and politics serve the same purpose for the French, to promote good and reject bad

⁶³ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 180.

Egyptian.⁶⁴ Al-Tunisi also justified limiting the power of the ruler by combining Western notions of Parliament onto Islamic notions of consultation. He believed that there were many benefits in limiting power because “the hands of the officials are restrained from aggression against the subjects,” and the rulers will allow this “in order to enjoy the authority and civilization that will follow.”⁶⁵ This type of compromise and meshing of Eastern and Western values is one example of how both al-Tahtawi and al-Tunisi were open-minded and fair in their perceptions of European culture and society.

Al-Tahtawi was a groundbreaking figure for many reasons, among them that he was the first Arab to translate the French Constitution and explain the meaning and significance of its contents in book form for the general public. His observations are interesting because they show his familiarity with Western liberal ideas and to what degree he thought they should be adopted. Article 1 of the Constitution states that all are equal before the law, a concept he admired for its justice to the poor and oppressed.⁶⁶ The notion of a tax rate that was applied equally to all members of society was something that al-Tahtawi thought would be greatly appreciated among the Egyptians who were constantly harassed and treated harshly with conspicuous and unfair tax policies.⁶⁷ Equal opportunity for all to serve in their government was a promising notion as well, since it encouraged education and aspiration that would increase civilization and progress. Article 8 guaranteed freedom to express opinions in speech and writing and this was of particular interest to al-Tahtawi. He praised the fact that it allowed newspapers and journals to educate the general population about current and world events, and for its

⁶⁴ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 189. *Mashwara*, a loose translation of the classical Islamic reference to the consultation by kings of community leaders is often referred to by Muslims when trying to explain European Parliament and justify the limitation of a king's authority. This group is often called the ‘people who loosen and bind’ (*ahl al-hall wa 'l-'aqd*), meaning that they temper authority. The concept of consultation can be traced back to the Caliph ‘Umar’s appointment of a group to choose his successor.

⁶⁵ Al-Tunisi, 174-175.

⁶⁶ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 206.

⁶⁷ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 208.

ability to serve as a moral guidepost for what is good and what is morally reprehensible.⁶⁸ Interestingly, al-Tahtawi agreed with the article pertaining to the government's right to seize private property, though, believing it was "clearly appropriate" for the government to reimburse the people with a fair price for their land.⁶⁹

Al-Tahtawi's descriptions of everyday entertainments of the French, their food and drink, as well as their clothing choices reveal distinct Eastern prejudices and at times much approval. He found many things to admire in French theater and opera, which much like their newspapers he thought had a powerful ability to educate people in morality and teach useful life lessons. He praised their singers and dancers for being refined and avoiding indecency unlike the Egyptian *awalim*, who Lane believed were the most beautiful women in Cairo.⁷⁰ He also visited the displays of panoramas while in Paris; these were a popular way for the average European to visualize "Oriental" life. Upon viewing the panorama of Cairo, he said, "it is as if you were standing on the minaret of (the mosque of) Sultan Hasan, and below you see al-Rumayla and the rest of the city."⁷¹ Other entertainments, specifically the private balls that were attended by both men and women, were much more curious and unseemly to al-Tahtawi. He was startled that the women often bared their arms and backs at these balls and that the men thought nothing less of them and did not consider their attire indecent in any way.⁷² Equally surprising was the fact that women aimed to dance with numerous men and that the dance involved close physical contact

⁶⁸ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 209. Tahtawi thought that because newspapers praised good deeds and shamed those who did awful things in public they reminded the people of how they should act.

⁶⁹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 209. This is a significant passage, given the fact that 'Ali's land reforms were doing quite the opposite and that Tahtawi's father lost the majority of his land due to these reforms, which left the family largely impoverished.

⁷⁰ *Awalim* refers to the women in charge of organizing the performances of dancing girls.

Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 226. These were public dancers who were little respected and considered indecent. E. W. Lane lamented the fact that 'Ali outlawed public dancing during his second trip to Egypt.

⁷¹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 229. His experience was much more positive than what Timothy Mitchell would suggest, and his reaction to the Cairo panorama seems to imply its apparent accuracy.

⁷² Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 230.

in “which the man puts his arm around the waist of his partner, while holding her hand most of the time,” despite the fact that he may not know this woman.⁷³

There were certain aspects of French society that seemed to truly interest al-Tahtawi and experiences that he seemed to favor over others; examples are French social welfare or charity and the Revolution of 1830. For al-Tahtawi, generosity was a trait “peculiar to the Arabs” and as such he identified the French as the opposite, as “avaricious” in nature and quite selfish with possessions while giving charity only in words.⁷⁴ He observed that the French people worked for a living and that because there were many charitable organizations provided, both privately and through the government, individual charity was rare. He praised their many hospitals, orphanages, and hostels for the homeless, as well as the Council of Charity, but he chastised the effect it had upon the individual’s willingness to lend a helping hand.⁷⁵ It is interesting to compare this with Lane’s reactions to Muslim charity, which felt was somewhat disingenuous because it was a religious mandate. The sincerity of the charity was taken away according to Lane, and the true goal was not to aid the poor but to reach heaven.⁷⁶

Al-Tahtawi’s perceptions and descriptions of the French Revolution of 1830 must have put him in a very precarious position, given that he answered to a fairly absolute authority in Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha, and that anything too sympathetic of the French cause might imply that he agreed with the ousting of the French king by the French people.⁷⁷ However, he did seem to side with the people in very interesting ways and justified it quite successfully. He explained their revolution as taking place because of injustices committed by King Charles X, mainly for abandoning certain principles of the Constitution and for censoring the press. He then quoted a Hadith saying that committing injustice

⁷³ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 231.

⁷⁴ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 124.

⁷⁵ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 241.

⁷⁶ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:370. Lane made similar comments in regards to Arab hospitality, which he thought made Egyptians ungrateful because such hospitality was looked at as a duty and therefore expected and unappreciated, Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1:378.

⁷⁷ The 1830 revolution was also known as the July Revolution, the French ousted King Charles X and replaced him with Louis-Philippe.

brings defeat, possibly an attempt to justify his sympathy with the French cause.⁷⁸ According to al-Tahtawi, the success of the revolt and revolution was due to the fact that the common people were included and understood the cause they fought for, “the very essence of eloquence is indeed that it is understood by the common folk and accepted by the notables.”⁷⁹ Surprisingly, he put quite a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the king for his loss of power, and blamed him for not recognizing the fact that freedom had become “natural” to the French people.⁸⁰

What is most significant about al-Tahtawi’s account is that ideas such as patriotism and charity appeared for the first time, and could then be traced through his various later works. In one of his greatest works after the *Takhlis*, he tackles the issues of poverty and welfare and it is undeniable that his experiences while in Paris color many of his opinions.⁸¹ His main argument throughout is profound and bold, that government-sponsored social programs are only half of what is needed to improve society. It is the help of the wealthy and of individuals that is necessary to truly care for the poor, ill, and disabled.

More incredible than this was al-Tahtawi’s insistence upon social justice, fair wages, and rights for Egyptian workers, specifically the impoverished landed peasants. Juan R. I. Cole argues that al-Tahtawi had a labor theory of value and that he fought for social justice.⁸² Al-Tahtawi was troubled by the harsh oppression that Egyptian peasants endured and upset that “the ones who pick the fruits of these agricultural improvements and reap the benefits of this betterment of farming...and monopolize the profitable yields are the owners alone. They, and not those who practice the profession of agriculture,

⁷⁸ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 306. The hadith says “he who pulls out the sword of injustice, against him the sword of defeat is drawn, and sorrow will stay with him forever.”

⁷⁹ Al-Tahtawi, 309. This could be Tahtawi’s critique of ‘Ali’s failed reforms, and that he failed to win over the common people.

⁸⁰ Al-Tahtawi, 311. Tahtawi is referencing the king’s censure of freedom of speech and opinion. He is clearly coming down on the side of the French people, rather than the French King.

⁸¹ Juan R. I. Cole, “Al-Tahtawi on Poverty and Welfare,” in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael Bonner, Mine Ener and Amy Singer (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003). This article features translations of Tahtawi’s thought on poverty and welfare written in, *Manahij al-albab al-misriyya fi mabahu al-adab al-‘asriyya* (Paths for Egyptian Minds to the Delights of Modern Culture)

⁸² Cole, 230-232.

enjoy the greatest advantages.”⁸³ The idea that this type of oppression could be called “pure injustice” seems to come directly from his experiences in Paris and his adoption of Western ideas of liberty and freedom, though he tethered these ideas to Islamic tradition.⁸⁴

In another of his later works al-Tahtawi tackled the subject of patriotism and the meaning and importance of one’s fatherland. Patriotism, al-Tahtawi says, is rooted in Islamic tradition, because God desired the “sons of the fatherland be united always by their language, by their allegiance to one king, and by their obedience to one divine law and political administration.”⁸⁵ This type of unity is further clarified when Tahtawi states, “it is not fitting that one nation be divided into numerous parties on the basis of different opinions, because partisanship begets contradictory pressures, envy, and rancour with consequent lack of security in the fatherland.”⁸⁶ This is interesting when compared with some of the comments and observations that he made while in Paris about the royalists and loyalists ideologies being divergent.⁸⁷ Much like al-Tunisi, he seemed to be quite hesitant to condone Western styled Parliament in the East. Al-Tunisi had very understandable worries about unity and how diverse ethnic and religious populations could make communication within a parliamentary system very difficult.⁸⁸ Al-Tahtawi was stunned by the lack of unity between the royalists and loyalists and how quickly such differences could turn to violence, and that “the wide differences in (political) opinions among the French are even reflected in the seating arrangements within the Chamber.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Cole, 233. Lane is also critical on the treatment of the poor peasantry who he says are oppressed as a result of ‘Ali seizing their land and because of the ‘Ali’s appointed governors who are particularly tough with taxes. *Modern Egyptians*, 156-158.

⁸⁴ Hadiths used for this particular justification include that the Prophet took only 50% of the crops from the people of Khaybar after conquering their lands, which Tahtawi says is proof that the Egyptian peasants are owed their fair share. Also referenced are hadiths stating that Muslims shouldn’t profit from other Muslims and that the seed belongs to the sower. See: G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden: Koninklijke, 2007), 662.

⁸⁵ Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi, “Fatherland and Patriotism,” in *Islam in Tradition: Muslim Perspectives*, ed. John J. Donohue and John J. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

⁸⁶ Al-Tahtawi, “Fatherland and Patriotism,” 9.

⁸⁷ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 303-204.

⁸⁸ Al-Tunisi, 118.

⁸⁹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 317.

Key in his discussion of patriotism are the ideas of civilization, reason, and Islam. For al-Tahtawi, Islamic principles were essentially equal to natural law: “the rational deductions arrived at by the intellects of the other civilized nations... rarely go beyond these principles on which the branches of jurisprudence are build and around which human relations turn.”⁹⁰ Al-Tunisi agreed that many of the principles of Western government fit perfectly within classical Islamic jurisprudence and that combining some new ideas with their traditional roots would only strengthen the Muslim world.⁹¹ Unlike al-Tahtawi, al-Tunisi was much more cautious and apprehensive about European power and their involvement and motivations in the East, believing that they encourage advancement in the hopes of breaking up the Ottoman Empire.⁹² It is this balance between the adoption of Western innovations in government and the retention of traditional Islamic ideals that characterizes the works and perceptions of al-Tahtawi and al-Tunisi. Theirs was definitely an attempt to reconcile “how to become part of the modern world while remaining Muslims.”⁹³ A combination of the two was believed to make freedom all that much stronger because, “if laws should also be endowed with divine grace and sanctity, as is the case with our immaculate shari‘a, then their being violated would be even more likely to cause decline in this world, not to mention the punishment which would ensue in the next.”⁹⁴

Nazik S. Yared has argued that in explaining and justifying Western science and innovation, al-Tahtawi and al-Tunisi ignored important aspects of Islam and their own culture that ran counter, such slavery and the treatment of women. Further, Yared argued that “they did not wholeheartedly embrace the Philosophical basis on which the freedom of the French Revolution was founded.”⁹⁵ Implicit in this common critique is that there is an obvious conflict between the East and West that cannot be overcome

⁹⁰ Al-Tahtawi, “Fatherland and Patriotism”, 11. Tahtawi also says “what we call justice and good works, they call freedom and equality.”

⁹¹ Al-Tunisi, 86, 113.

⁹² Al-Tunisi, 117.

⁹³ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970),

⁹⁴ Al-Tunisi, 176.

⁹⁵ Nazik Saba Yared, *Arab Travelers and Western Civilization*, trans. Sumayya Damluji Shahbandar (London: Saqi Books, 1996), 21.

until the East can separate Islam from the state and political institutions. This notion of inherent inconsistencies between East and West is simply unfounded in their works; a better place to look for ideas of cultural incompatibility would be in the works of Western travelers to the Muslim world. For instance, Sophia Lane-Poole commented often about “the perfect contrast which the customs of Eastern life present to the whole construction of European society.”⁹⁶ Al-Tahtawi and al-Tunisi had few difficulties in justifying the changes they spoke of and did so with a consistent belief that the two were very much reconcilable.

Both E. W. Lane and al-Tahtawi spent several years in each other’s part of the world, and among the similarities of their descriptions are simplistic and generalized treatment of women and the characteristics and traits of people in general. E. W. Lane ranges from odd and general statements like “Egyptian women are very fertile,” to more perceptive observations about their “exquisitely soft eyes,” and the fact that the veil’s purpose in concealing the women’s beauty and avoiding male attraction falls short because it only enhances the eyes and one’s curiosities.⁹⁷ Most surprising of a man so inclined towards unbiased reporting is the fact that he believed in the general wickedness of Egyptian women saying they were “generally prone to criminal intrigues” and oftentimes spoke in manners that would offend the lowliest of Englishmen.⁹⁸ Sophia made a similar comment about the “indelicate” language of Egyptian women, and she attributed this as a general effect of the harem.⁹⁹ Contrary to the popular European belief that “Oriental” women were oppressed, Lane said, “this is not commonly the case; on the contrary, the Egyptian wife who is attached to her husband is apt to think, if he allow her unusual

⁹⁶ Lane-Poole, 104.

⁹⁷ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1: 41, 52, 161.

⁹⁸ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1: 219.

⁹⁹ Lane-Poole, 185.

liberty, that he neglects her, and does not sufficiently love her.”¹⁰⁰ Surprisingly, whereas travelers such as Burton and Flaubert would focus on the more exotic aspects of Egyptian society, Lane mentions attractions such as dancing girls relatively rarely. Though much like travelers before and after himself, he admitted to finding them “the finest women of Egypt.”¹⁰¹

Al-Tahtawi on the other hand seemed horrified that “men are slaves to the women here, and under their command, irrespective of whether they are pretty or not.”¹⁰² He generally found French women to be quite charming and admittedly beautiful. He spoke of enjoying their company and remarked on their intelligence and love for travel saying, “they are like men in every aspect.”¹⁰³ Despite the numerous compliments, the fact that French women were allowed a significant amount of freedom, specifically sexual freedom, meant that they were less virtuous.¹⁰⁴ Further, he wanted to clear up the misunderstanding that the veil made women chaste, “Rather, it is linked to whether a woman has a good or bad education, whether she is accustomed to loving only one man rather than sharing her love among others and whether there is peace and harmony within the couple.”¹⁰⁵

Nowhere were E. W. Lane or al-Tahtawi more willing to make assumptions and generalizations than in their description of personality traits. Both took what was unique to the inhabitants of Cairo and Paris and applied them to Muslims/Egyptians and French/Europeans in general. Among Lane’s observations were that Egyptians were affable, sincerely religious despite the fact that they were often licentious in conversation, “extremely courteous to each other,” and not quick to laugh aloud.¹⁰⁶ He also

¹⁰⁰ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 1: 225.

¹⁰¹ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 2:97. Lane devotes a full 8 page chapter to dancing girls, and several comments throughout his account.

¹⁰² Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 177.

¹⁰³ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 219.

¹⁰⁴ Sexual freedom not by modern standards, but due to the fact that they could dress as they wished, even if this meant baring their arms, shoulders, and backs. This sexual freedom also means their ability to associate freely with men.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 364.

¹⁰⁶ Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 261.

said that Egyptians tended to be selfish and deceitful in their business transactions, and he attributed this to their tyrannical government.¹⁰⁷

Al-Tahtawi accredited the French with great intelligence, perceptiveness, curiosity and dexterity, unlike the Christian Copts of Egypt whom he said “display a natural tendency towards ignorance and stupidity.”¹⁰⁸ Also admirable was their punctuality and committed work ethic, their sincerity and graciousness, their tendency to keep their word, and their avoidance of cheating.¹⁰⁹ There were, of course, many characteristics that he labeled vices and found clearly reprehensible. For example, they spent far too much money on material possessions and “diabolical urges,” they were not prone to jealousy of their women, and they tended to think higher of philosophers than prophets.¹¹⁰

Misguided and prejudiced descriptions of religion were also found in both E. W. Lane and Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi’s travel accounts. In fact, upon reviewing al-Tahtawi’s travel account, famed Orientalist Silvester de Sacy rebuked him for generalizing an irreligious sentiment to all French people. Al-Tahtawi responded by saying that “what led him to express himself in this manner is the fact that he is one of those who are religious. However, there are so few of them that they are of no consequence.”¹¹¹ Lane too was guilty of making sweeping generalizations about Egyptians being “very superstitious people” who defy their Prophet by attributing to him miracles and worshiping saints.¹¹² Sophia Lane-Poole could also be judgmental and prejudiced in her treatment of Islam. She mocked Muslims for their belief in genii and the personification of evil, though she also said “we may always feel a mixture of pity

¹⁰⁷ Sophia Lane-Poole also believes that oppression of some women in Egypt is due to “the oppression which its exercisers themselves suffer,” *An Englishwomen in Egypt*, p. 147

¹⁰⁸ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 173.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 174-176.

¹¹⁰ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 176-178.

¹¹¹ Al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, 249.

¹¹² Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, vol.1, 283, 301.

and admiration when we believe our fellow creatures to be in earnest in the service of God, however mistaken their opinions.”¹¹³

In addition to being incredibly interesting individuals, Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi and E. W. Lane serve as a striking example of the diversity of opinions and perceptions that existed between travelers of their day. Both challenged stereotypes in their fair observations and open-minded opinions of cultures very different from their own. Throughout their accounts there is a clear sense of inquisitiveness that one would expect from a traveler in a different part of the world, but, there is also a great deal of respect and appreciation as well.

In 1978 Edward Said published his magnum opus, *Orientalism*, which proposed theories that still reverberate through many academic fields today. Throughout, he aimed to prove that what is known and believed about the East is a discourse that has been created out of the power and political might of the West over the East. Said argued that there is a “strategic formation” to this discourse, in that all knowledge is essentially referential. What is believed about the East/Muslims/Arabs is a lore that has been passed down from century to century via travel accounts and Western political involvement in the region.

Said’s project in *Orientalism* was to prove three claims that are very much interconnected. First, is the relationship between European colonialism and imperial strategy in the East, and the centuries of academic inquiry in the region. Said believed there is an implicit relationship between these two, essentially that academic Orientalists served certain political ends through their scholarship. The academic depictions of Easterners not only set the stage for the numerous stereotypes believed in the

¹¹³ Lane-Poole, 18, 100.

West today, but more significantly, they served to justify colonial and imperial rule over the East. They allowed the West to feel it was their duty to carry out a civilizing mission in the East.

The second claim Said made was slightly philosophical and esoteric. He argued that in defining the East, the West was actually defining itself. Tied very much to his first claim, it is here that academic Orientalists were able to define themselves, and simultaneously begin to believe in their superiority over a stagnant East. Thus, according to Said, travelers like E. W. Lane began to feel a sense of power over their subject, they were the educated and detached observers, while the Easterners were the objects to be defined and prodded. Finally, Said argued that the entire enterprise of academic Orientalism has created lasting stereotypes and a skewed perception of Arab and Islamic culture. The foundation of this claim is in itself somewhat philosophical as well, since it rests firmly on questions of identity. More specifically, Said questioned whether it is possible to know another culture without actually being a part of it, and ultimately whether it is possible to represent an “other” at all. At the center of the matter is the question of whether there are any genuine attributes that can be called Arab or Islamic.¹¹⁴ It is here that Said questioned and criticized academic Orientalists for perpetuating a false belief that there are certain characteristics that can be labeled Arab or Islamic.

Though extremely provocative, interesting, and no doubt significant and useful today, Said’s argument is inconsistent, and poorly supported by the tradition of academic Orientalism. The majority of the critiques of *Orientalism* have focused on issues of whether or not Said’s “Orient” was real or imagined,¹¹⁵ how his treatment of Foucault was incorrect,¹¹⁶ his lack of focus on German Orientalists, and his lack of empirical evidence and respect for all that the field of academic Orientalism

¹¹⁴ Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg, “The Challenge of Orientalism,” *Economy and Society* 14, no. 2 (1984): 184-187.

¹¹⁵ Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2006).

¹¹⁶ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Said references and rests upon Foucault’s theory that knowledge is essentially a discourse of power. However, many have critiqued Said because, unlike Foucault, he gives the individual a strong and meaningful voice in his theory.

accomplished.¹¹⁷ However, rarely critiqued is Said's strange interpretation of travel literature, in particular his treatment of E. W. Lane. Said's criticism of Lane often bordered on the petty, with his long list of complaints about Lane's descriptive style, "sheer overpowering, monumental description," and dry tone serving as the best example.¹¹⁸ It would seem from Said's harsh criticism of other author's being too involved in their subject matter and too opinionated that Lane's detached scholarship would be refreshing and appreciated. Said's main critique of Lane seems to be that "while one portion of Lane's identity floats easily in the unsuspecting Muslim sea, a submerged part retains its secret power, to comment on, acquire, and possess everything around it."¹¹⁹ This is a prime example of how Said often forced Lane into his theory of Orientalism, by punishing him for both being a European in Egypt and for attempting to live as an Egyptian while there.¹²⁰

Throughout *Orientalism* the reader is taken from the fifteenth century to the twentieth and everywhere in between. Besides being slightly disorienting, it simply does not work in Said's favor to apply late twentieth and early twenty-first century notions of imperialism and Western domination onto periods of time when the Ottoman Empire was independent and relatively strong. Further, in attempting to make a connection between academic knowledge about the "Orient" and later European political involvement in the region, Said gives Orientalists too much influence and power. The Arab/Muslim voice was not silent, Said made a choice to silence it by emphasizing the Orientalists ownership over the "Orient" and their defining power. There were many incredible scholars, politicians, and leaders in the East who were defining and redefining what it meant to be an Arab or a Muslim during the rapidly

¹¹⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See Chapter Six "The Question of Orientalism" for Lewis' critique of Said.

¹¹⁸ Said, 162.

¹¹⁹ Said, 160.

¹²⁰ Lane, *Description of Egypt*, p.90. Lane purposefully segregated himself from Europeans and European customs while he resided in Egypt. This meant dressing, eating, praying and socializing as Egyptians did. While Said chooses to treat this as Lane's attempt to fool Egyptians and play dress up, to Lane's credit it gave him unprecedented access, experience, and insight into Egyptian society.

changing times of the nineteenth century. Said simply stifled their voices because without their silence his theory is severely challenged.

Thus, Said is guilty of the same sins he critiques Orientalists of. He ignored the diversity of opinion and perceptions of Westerners and focused on what interested his theory, and he only listened to half of the conversation. E. W. Lane and Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi are just two examples of the lively exchange that existed between travelers during the nineteenth century. There were many others like them who desired to bring knowledge about a culture very different from their own back home in hopes of better educating their countrymen. Through examination of their travel accounts it becomes clear that a discourse between the East and the West existed, one where neither side truly dominated the other. Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism is challenged by this two-way discourse, since the foundation of his theory rests upon the silence of Easterners, which is simply not the case. In fact, travelers like al-Tahtawi and al-Tunisi helped to create, through their experiences abroad and employment at home, educational, social, and political change. This change was not forced upon them; it would be decades before the British or French would occupy any Ottoman territory in a meaningful or lasting way. The changes they championed and innovations they supported were motivated by their own desire for progress, and it in no way was a whitewash of forced Western liberalism, but an articulate and careful mixture of new ideas with Islamic tradition. Furthermore, through analysis of both Lane and al-Tahtawi’s perceptions and experiences abroad, it becomes apparent that both were guilty of generalizations and that perhaps it is not so much a phenomenon of Western dominance over the East that creates these generalization and stereotypes, but a simple fact of human nature and the individuals response to difference.



Throughout the early nineteenth century European travel to Egypt and the Muslim world served diverse purposes, from to the academic to the personal desire for adventure. Simultaneously, Muslim travelers to Europe were mainly concerned with extracting knowledge about social, political, and scientific innovation to adopt in their own countries. In both cases, there were relative notions of superiority and the traveler's perceptions oftentimes reflected a prejudiced, even at times a racist or sexist bias. E. W. Lane, though not entirely innocent of Western prejudices, stands apart from the majority of other travelers because of his insistence upon honest scholarship, his dedication to his academic field, and his familiarity with the Arabic language. Muslim travelers and general perceptions of European culture during the early Nineteenth Century varied immensely. There were many like Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi who traveled in search of knowledge with a belief that Western science, education, military organization, and even certain political structures were needed in the Muslim world. Though Edward Said was correct in being critical of the intentions of many European travelers to the Muslim world, his treatment of Lane was inaccurate, and by silencing the Muslim voice he discredited his own theory. The works and perceptions of E. W. Lane, Sophia Lane-Poole, Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi show that there was a discourse between the East and West that was much more complex than Said suggests, one where lasting stereotypes were created, but also where a genuine desire to learn from and about the "other" often took occurred.

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