4. Global Civility on the Desert Route to India
Henry Abbott's *A Trip …Across the Grand Desart of Arabia* (1789)

The previous chapter has demonstrated how English seamen and Pacific Islanders established mutually beneficial exchanges on the beach and contextualised George Keate's *Account of the Pelew Islands* (1788) within eighteenth century discourses of travel, sensibility and commerce. By focussing on the cultural traffic between the landward and seaward sides of the beach, it has shown that radical cultural difference need not give rise to inequality, misunderstandings or armed conflict. The present chapter, too, addresses even-handed interaction between representatives of two entirely different, yet complementary, cultures and traces the ways in which English travellers and their Arab guides on the 'Great Desert Caravan Route' between Aleppo and Basra actively lived and practiced global civility. Whilst it discusses several travellers taking the same route in the course of the eighteenth century, Henry Abbott is the chapter's protagonist. His *A Trip…Across the Grand Desart of Arabia* (1789) represents the encounter between himself and his Arab hosts as governed by mutual respect and cooperation, and differs decisively from nineteenth century depictions of the so-called Orient, such as A.W. Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844), which portrayed Europe's others as barbaric and backward. Abbott's text, by contrast, is a prime example of Enlightenment's cosmopolitan spirit and represents the desert Arabs as part of an inclusive and global vision. In so doing, it emerges as the Middle Eastern equivalent to Keate's favourable representation of the Palauans and further extends global civility's reach in both representational and geographical terms.

When they set out to India, English travellers could choose between several routes. The first section in the present chapter will introduce the two most popular ones and discuss their similarities and differences by focussing

on the experiential dimensions and spatial configurations to which travellers were exposed in the desert and the sea, respectively. From the start, Abbott sets himself apart from his travelling contemporaries on the Desert Route and recommends treating the Arabs 'with common civility.'[1] Just as Keate's *Account* frequently emphasises both the sensibility and civility of the Palauans, Abbott's *Trip* insists on the human dignity of the ill-reputed Arabs and rationalises their behaviour within a comprehensive and comparative perspective of human conduct. The second section takes a closer look at breaches of civility and introduces the stories of two boastful characters in order to emphasise Abbott's readiness to approach his interlocutors openly and unconditionally. The following section proceeds from behavioural patterns and comparative frameworks to the reenactive character of Middle Eastern travel, discussing the complex 'dialectic of novelty and repetition'[2] at the heart of European interaction with Islamic lands. During pre-imperial times, this interaction was part of multi-dimensional and complex exchanges 'between what have come to be thought of as separate spheres: East and West.'[3] By challenging the prejudices of some of his contemporaries, Abbott complicates such seemingly straightforward categorisations and their historical rootedness considerably. The fourth section thus discusses his readiness to be favourably impressed in the late eighteenth century, the time identified by Edwards Said as the onset of modern Orientalism.[4] The fifth and final section in this chapter transposes the discussion of civility from the human to the animal realm and places the culturally specific interaction between humans and their beasts of burden in a comparative perspective. As we shall see, the rich and diverse nature of both interactional patterns and mutually beneficial arrangements on the Caravan Route represented by Abbott defies simplistic conclusions of life in the putatively empty space of the Syrian Desert. However, those who refused to engage with either its inhabitants or ecological intricacies were bound to find their journey across the sandy contact zone monotonous, strenuous and tedious.

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1 Henry Abbott, *A Trip…Across the Grand Desart of Arabia* (Calcutta: Joseph Cooper, 1789), 7; (All further references are to this edition).

2 Donna Landry, 'Saddle Time,' *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 46: 3 (2004), 441-58, here 441.

3 Gerald MacLean, 'Introduction: Re-Orienting the Renaissance,' in MacLean, ed., *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 1-28, here 1.

4 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; rpt. London: Penguin, 1995), 3

1. Kindred Spirits on the Way to India

In a letter to a friend in England written in 1748, Captain Gaylard Roberts, then on his journey back from India by way of the Syrian Desert, recounts the tedium of the overland journey as follows:

> Near all that has been wrote by those who have journalized this way, has been that they set out such an hour in the morning, pitched their tents such an hour in the evening, that the ground was stony, or uneven, in some places gravel, sand, or level in others, that they met with pretty good water in some places, bad in others, and often get hares or antelopes, which the Arabs knock down with their sticks. This indeed is the greatest part of what a man can write of with any certainty who keeps a journal.[5]

The desert's charms seem to have been strictly limited for Roberts in terms of both its inhabitants – human as well as animal – and the daily routines on the trip. His letter suggests a lack of interest in, and engagement with, the space he traversed and 'journalized.' However, the rich and century-old tradition of writing on desert travel in general, and the Syrian Desert in particular, is much more nuanced than Roberts's sweeping generalisations might suggest: the 'Syrian Desert is a great surprise to many travellers'[6] as it was indeed 'the main channel by which the riches of the East flowed to the West.'[7] Textual or pictorial representations of this crucial channel are 'apt to conjure up a picture of golden sands blown into dunes, only less mobile than the sea.'[8] But mobility and movement are crucial in this context: not only were the sea and the desert of immense commercial value in the past by virtue of being 'crisscrossed by trade routes,'[9] they are also environmentally extreme in-between spaces; so

5 Gaylard Roberts, 'Account of a Journey from Basra to Aleppo in 1748,' in Douglas Carruthers, ed., *The Desert Route to India: Being the Journals of Four Travellers by the Great Desert Caravan Route between Aleppo and Basra, 1745-1751* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1928), 41-47, here 44.

6 Christina Phelps Grant, *The Syrian Desert: Caravans, Travel and Exploration* (London: A.&C. Black, 1937), 6.

7 Douglas Carruthers, 'Introduction,' in Carruthers, ed., xi-xxxvi, here xi.

8 Grant, *The Syrian Desert*, 6.

9 Donna Landry, 'Rewriting the Sea from the Desert Shore: Equine and Equestrian Perspectives on a New Maritime History,' in Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood & Mohamed-Salah Omri, eds., *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy* (London & New York: Tauris, 2010), 253-277, here 253.

much so that their protean character resisted complete appropriation by imperial powers, since both can serve as 'agent[s] of colonial oppression' on the one hand, and as loci 'of indigenous resistance and native empowerment'[10] on the other. They have accordingly always been represented as 'geopolitically overwritten, strategically important spaces' 'bear[ing] to each other relations of comparability as well as adjacency or contingency.'[11] And what is more, both the sea and the desert 'may at first sight appear empty to those unfamiliar with their intricate ecosystems.'[12] Yet these ecosystems and their historical, cultural and material interconnections are likely to 'provoke experiences of the sublime,'[13] eventually leading to attempts either materially to conquer or artistically to capture their oceanic and overpowering vastness. The rich traditions of literary, operatic and filmic representations of both spaces thus indicate the tremendous efforts of travellers, artists, merchants, soldiers or rulers to come to grips with the fear and awe they inspire.[14]

Contrary to Captain Roberts's reductive summary of desert travel, then, the experiences of Europeans in the Syrian Desert were varied, often telling of hardships, deprivations and harsh weather conditions at the same time as they allude to rare pleasures.[15] Experiences of maritime long distance travel could be equally challenging so that the sea often lurks surreptitiously as the desert's kindred spirit when we follow merchants, soldiers and travellers on their respective journeys to the Indian subcontinent. Bengal had served as colonial foothold from the 1760 onwards,[16] and adventurous Britons primarily used two different, yet intimately linked, routes to get there:

> [I]n the latter half of the eighteenth century, quite a number of Englishmen, chiefly East India Company officials going to or returning from India, used the 'Overland' route, known as the 'Great Desert Caravan Route,' as a short cut from the Mediterranean ports to the Indian Seas, preferring the tedious

10 Bernhard Klein & Gesa Mackenthun, 'Introduction: The Sea is History' in Klein & Mackenthun, *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 1-12, here 3.

11 Landry, 'Rewriting the Sea from the Desert Shore,' 253.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Donna Landry, 'Saddle Time,' *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 46: 3 (2004), 441-58, here 445.

16 Juergen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18.Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 22.

> desert journey, from Aleppo to Baghdad or Basra, to the long sea passage round the Cape, or the more hazardous way of the Red Sea and Egypt.[17]

Abbott, too, chose the 'Great Desert Caravan Route' on his way to India in 1784 and preserved his experiences in his *A Trip…Across the Grand Desart of Arabia* (1789). It offers vivid accounts of his adventures among his Arab guides, their animals and the environmental conditions to which he was exposed. Unlike Captain Roberts's disgruntled summary, Abbott's light-hearted account is an enticing invitation for his readers to rethink their preconceptions of both the desert and its inhabitants. Whilst initially making light of his literary abilities by stating that he does not attempt to write 'a flowery novel – but a friendly letter' (2) and conceding that 'a clearer head and an abler pen might afford entertainment' (1), he quickly switches over to presenting himself as semi-heroic figure. As such, he overcomes various dangers along the road and subtly asserts his discursive authority on the subject of desert travel. In this position, he is not afraid of directly addressing what he perceives as prejudicial knowledge about Europe's others:

> You have, to my knowledge, read various authors on this subject, and I have frequently heard you exclaim with astonishment, that any civilized man in his senses could prefer journeying through so inhospitable and barbarous a country, to going quietly in a vessel round the Cape of Good Hope; - These reflections have excited in me an ardent desire, my friend, to undeceive you in many erroneous conclusions you must necessarily draw from the perusal of erroneous narratives. (3; emphasis in original)

Even after 'nine years residence in Arabia' (6), Abbott is still hungry for knowledge and readily chooses 'the tedious desert journey,' its many uncertainties, hardships and potential perils notwithstanding. Just as Henry Blount 'would not sit downe with a booke knowledge' of 'the *Turkish* nation,"[18] Abbott knows that '[m]imetic action is required'[19] in order to do away with widely circulated and deeply entrenched stereotypes.

On their journey through the Syrian Desert, Abbott and his companion Captain Rochfort followed in the footsteps of previous Oriental travellers and

17 Carruthers, 'Introduction,' xi.

18 Blount, Henry, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London: John Legatt, 1636), 4.

19 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 454.

necessarily encountered what they had seen, orally reported or textually represented. In so doing, the two Englishmen re-enacted the journeys of those who went before them at the same time as they added yet another layer to the palimpsestic texture of Middle Eastern travel.[20] Either consciously or obliviously, Westerners in the Middle East cannot not re-enact their predecessors, since these territories have proved attractive for travellers, adventurers and potential conquerors from Biblical times down to the present day. For example, whereas Captain Wilson and his men found themselves in uncharted territory after the loss of their ship, Abbott and Rochfort could not only rely on already existing knowledge, they were also in a position actively to contribute to its revision. In his attempt to 'undeceive' his friend from 'erroneous conclusions,' Abbott refers to western archives and textual constructions of Oriental routes, even if only to demonstrate that they rest on '*erroneous* narratives.' Unfortunately, however, not much is known about this apparently inquisitive traveller or his time in Arabia beyond the information provided by his *Trip*; but judging from what we have, he seems to have been acquainted with the laws of the land and several languages, among them Arabic and Italian. He, too, must have possessed a healthy spirit of adventure, bolstered by a general interest in 'seeing countries, which are worth [the traveller's] curiosity' (100). And by emphasising that 'the inconveniences throughout this journey, to me, have appeared so trifling that I should at any time prefer it to a long sea voyage round the Cape' (17), he not only expresses his enjoyment of the trip, but also reveals that he was familiar with alternative routes, their hazards and, most likely, their textual representations.

Seemingly unimpressed by the experiences of his predecessors, and always keen on appearing 'as intrepid as possible,'[21] Abbott is convinced that he who is prepared to treat his Arabic interlocutors 'with common civility' can make the journey 'almost a party of pleasure' (7). In keeping with the cosmopolitan spirit of his age, Abbott represents his hosts in favourable fashion and incorporates them into an enlightened, inclusive and adaptable vision of global civility whilst simultaneously trying to appear as virtuous and benevolent traveller in foreign lands. The European rhetoric we have already witnessed in Keate's *Account* thus resurfaces in the *Trip* and demonstrates that encounters by the sea or in the desert 'encourag[e] forms of sociality that

20 Ibid., 448.

21 Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 155.

might be understood as less hierarchical and more egalitarian than those bred by other localities.'[22] Accordingly, Abbott's suggestion to bring '[t]obacco and pipes to offer to the Sheik in an evening' (110) blends in with the dialogic character of his text but also serves to emphasise his own civility. When at the end of their journey Abbott and his companion express their gratitude to the caravan leader, Abbott implies that he had expected him to treat foreigners well:

> Our first care was to call the Sheik, and having treated him with a dish of coffee, to insist on his accepting of our tent, mahaffees, kitchen furniture, and all our remaining provisions, as a reward for his good behaviour; which he did, with a deal of modesty and thankfulness, and generously bestowed many of the articles on the Arabs of his party. (91)

The two Englishmen probably no longer require these items on their onward journey and could have sold them at their destination in Basra. But instead of making a fast buck, they choose to reward the caravan leader and his men for their services with this gesture of gratitude and cooperation, albeit in a slightly condescending fashion by drawing attention to 'his good behaviour.' But the Sheik is nonetheless represented by Abbott as subject in his own right, sharing the gifts with his men and demonstrating that responsible leadership rather than oriental despotism ensures a safe journey for travellers and locals alike. Viewed in this way, civility in this passage emerges as global by emphasising the beneficial outcome of openness, trust and good conduct across cultural divides.

Although the Sheik is the only individualised Arab in his account, Abbott's views of the representatives of his host culture are markedly different from some of his countrymen. On their way to India, he and Captain Rochfort organised their own caravan, a not unusual move for English travellers at the time who often hired 'a complete outfit, including both riding and baggage camels, as well as a small force of armed guards.'[23] Convenient though it may have been for travellers to be independent of the merchant caravans, it also meant that they were at the whim of individual sheiks and their men. John Carmichael, who had been a 'Gunner at Anjengo,'[24] was on his way back to India in 1751 and his journey was a far cry from the pleasures that Abbott was

22 Landry, 'Rewriting the Sea from the Desert Shore,' 253.

23 Carruthers, 'Introduction,' xxxiii-xxxiv.

24 John Carmichael, 'Narrative of a Journey from Aleppo to Basra in 1751,' in Carruthers, ed., 129-180, here p. 131.

to experience about three decades later. Whilst Abbott, too, represents the guards and camel drivers collectively, he is always ready either to be favourably impressed or to practice 'common civility' (7) in his transactions with them. Carmichael, by contrast, recommends caution against the same group of people: 'It is not amiss to caution travellers that locks and keys are extremely necessary against the Arab camellers, who have not the greatest regard for the eighth article of the Decalogue.'[25] As we shall see, this comment on the caravan's rank and file is not the only instance in which he expresses disregard for the people of Arabia.

Frequently dwelling on geographical measurements and navigational details, Carmichael writes with an educated European audience in mind. Whereas Abbott unhesitatingly digresses whenever there is an interesting story to relate about the traditional lifeways of the Arabs, Carmichael's comments illustrate how Europeans unaccustomed to the desert's environmental conditions – hot during the day, cold in the night – were surprised by what they encountered en route to Basra. He hardly ever mentions the interactional dimensions of his journey and instead chooses to concentrate on the hardships caused by climatic extremes:

> Our bedding and other equipage being frozen, and the ground very slippery and dangerous for the camels, we were obliged to wait till the sun had thawed; were forced to remain here till half an hour after nine.
>
> The night proved extremely cold; most of our bedding was frozen, so that our lodging was very disagreeable.
>
> A hard frost this morning, which detained us till the sun had dried and thawed our bedding, &c.
>
> The country plain; soil hard and stony. A small S.W. breeze, and pleasant weather.[26]

Even though he does not comment any further on the ice, Carmichael's remarks on the cumbersome process of drying his equipment, and the delays it causes, suggest that he did not expect such problems to occur in the desert. The above passages are taken from the 22nd, 23rd, 26th and 27th of November,

25 Ibid., 176

26 Ibid., 168, 169, 170 & 171.

respectively, and indicate extremes on the weather continuum ('frozen' and 'sun') as well as quick shifts as a feature of the region in question ('frost this morning' and 'pleasant weather'). However, towards the end of his trip (10th of December) his verdict is a very different one:

> I found the weather not to be complained of, and water in plenty, for which reason, as I before observed, winter seems to me the best time for crossing the desart. It certainly must be much worse in summer, both on account of the scarcity of water and the excessive heats, which at that time, and on those dry barren sands, must be intolerable.[27]

Carmichael, it seems, is rather inconsistent in his judgments and limited in his outlook. Solely concentrating on meteorological phenomena, he emphasises the deprivations he was subjected to or the pleasure of finally arriving at his destination. But the desert's ecological intricacies and potential dangers, environmental as well as human, emerge merely as hindrances in his descriptions, illustrating, in Doreen Massey's words, that [t]he chance of space' 'entails the unexpected.'[28] Although Abbott, on the other, was impelled by 'private concerns' (18) to leave Aleppo, he was almost enthusiastic about braving the sands of the Syrian Desert and initially 'thought of hazarding [himself] with a single messenger' (19). But the 'execution of this rash design,' he continues, 'would perhaps have been attended with fatal consequences; the heat of the sun being excessive, to which I must inevitably have been exposed' (19). However, Captain Rochfort's arrival from England, and his 'hurry to proceed to India by way of Bussora,' finally lead to the plan of 'forming a private caravan' (19). Both Carmichael and Abbott, then, travelled by caravan and were exposed to the desert and its inhabitants; but where the one was open and receptive to them, the other remained unresponsive at the same time as he emerged as self-centred traveller in the lands of the desert Arabs.

2. Some Remarks on Textual Authority: The 'Merchant of Quality' and Mr. Hare

Carmichael, however, is not alone with his lack of receptivity to the human dimensions of extreme travel. In Henry Blount's *Voyage into the Levant* (1636)

27 Ibid., 177 [my emphasis].

28 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 111.

and Abbott's *Trip* we can find instances of the ignorance of travellers to either the shifting nature of cultural and power relations or the unknown complexity of local customs. At first sight, these situations seem to disrupt the dialogic character of both accounts by virtue of the coarse and self-centred attitudes they represent; however, if we read them within the discursive framework of global civility, they buttress the authors' claims to originality, openness and cross-cultural curiosity. If we briefly return to Blount's time in the Ottoman Balkans, we find 'foure *Spahy-Timariots*'[29] [horsemen], who invited him to sit down and eat with them. Shortly after

> they met the Caravan, where was the Rhagusean, a Merchant of quality, who came in at Spalatro to goe for Constantinople, he being clothed in the Italian fashion, and spruce, they justled him: He not yet considering, how the place had changed his condition, stood upon his termes, till they with their Axes, and iron Maces (the weapons of that Country,) broke two of his ribs, in which case, we left him behind, halfe dead, either to get backe as he could, or be devoured of beasts.[30]

At first, the horsemen approached Abbott, too, 'with lookes very ugly,' but he finds means other than language to resolve this potentially dangerous situation, enter into a gestural dialogue with them and turn the spot into a space of male conviviality. [31] In so doing, he signals in nonverbal fashion that he both understands the laws of the land and is aware that 'Ottoman horsemen deserved respect, certainly within their own empire.'[32] The 'Merchant of quality', however, seemed to favour confrontation rather than cooperation.

In Abbott's *Trip*, a similar moment occurs when he relates the story of one Mr. Hare, whose 'behaviour to the Arabs was very rude and disagreeable' (9). On his way back from India, Mr. Hare 'joined some gentlemen [in Bussora]

29 Blount, Voyage, 98.

30 Ibid.

31 'I not understanding what they would, stood still, till they menacing their weapons, rose, and came to mee, with lookes very ugly; I smiling met them, and taking him who seemed of most port, by the hand, layed it to my forehead, which with them is the greatest signe of *love*, and *honour*, then often calling him *Sultanum*, spoke *English*, which though none of the kindest, yet gave it such a sound, as to them who understood no further, might seeme *affectionate*, *humble*, and *hearty*; which so appeased them, as they made me fit, and eate together, and parted loving.' Ibid.

32 Gerald MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 171

who were bent on the same route' (8); after their failed attempt 'to form a caravan to carry them to Aleppo' (8), he set out on his own 'by the way of Bagdat' (8-9). Concluding from Abbott's portrayal, we can infer that Mr. Hare must have been a rather boastful and ignorant character:

> He hired a boat, and some Arab guards, and leaving his companions, took his departure up the river Tygris. By all accounts, his behaviour to the Arabs was very rude and disagreeable, nor was his ostentation less conspicuous, for he would often gather such of them as he thought deserving of attention, and amuse them with the sight of diamond rings, gold snuff-boxes, chains and such gewgaws, as proofs of the wonderful ingenuity of European artists; and the more he saw their admiration kindled, the more fuel he would add to it, by producing something new. (9)

In this passage, there is no cross-cultural sensitivity. Whilst Blount, for example, set out to survey 'people, whose *institutions* much differ from ours'[33] and George Keate utilises sentimentalism's discursive fractures to incorporate the Palauans in his inclusive vision of global civility, the Middle East simply serves as stage for Mr. Hare's ostentatiousness. Exemplifying what Said has called 'flexible *positional* superiority,'[34] Mr Hare takes for granted the Arabs' impressionability and passivity in what is, in effect, both a disregard for his companions' advice and a lack of local knowledge. [35] Consequently, his end is an inglorious one:

> By the time they [Mr. Hare and his guards] had been together eight or ten days, he had carried his misbehaviour to such extremities, that neither the dictates of their religion, nor their natural pride, could allow them to let it pass over with impunity. [...] [H]e was saluted by a sharp pointed lance, through the window; he started, but before he could collect his senses, was pierced in many places; he made a desperate spring towards

33 Blount, *Voyage*, 1; see also MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel*, 135: 'The logic of Blount's argument is clear enough: the human intellect desires knowledge, and since experience of difference increases knowledge in proportion to increase in difference, the desiring intellect craves experience of radical difference.'

34 Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

35 See p. Abbott, *Trip*, 8-9: 'Mr Hare's patience, it seems, was not proof against such disappointments, nor could all the arguments of the resident, and others, withhold him from attempting to brave the dangers that threatened a journey by the way of Bagdat.'

> the shore, where they, following him with their sabres, soon put an end to his existence. (10)

We could read this passage as an instance of the very barbarity that Abbott tries to refute; but instead of simply integrating it into his account as an example of the dangers of extreme travel, he both contextualises and rationalises it within a cross-cultural survey of criminal offences. In lieu of condemning the Arabs for killing an Englishman impervious to advice, Abbott transposes his benchmark from an *intra*cultural to an *inter*cultural level, when he writes 'that (comparatively speaking) much more is to be apprehended, and many more are the instances of murders and robberies committed in some of the most civilized parts of Europe (as we daily read in the papers) than what we find in these barbarous parts' (6-7).[36] Consequently, he neither limits moral rectitude to Europeans nor represents it as concept inapplicable to the Arabs; it is rather a judgment only to be conferred after a detailed enquiry into a particular case.

In addition to the comparative rationalisation of the behaviour of the Arabs, the interior story of Mr. Hare also serves to emphasise Abbott's achievements as both traveller and author. He set out to travel across the desert and actually enjoyed his trip whereas Carmichael frequently complained about the weather and Mr. Hare never arrived at his destination, albeit this failure was self-inflicted. But despite his achievements, Abbott appears to be rather modest about his skills as writer, especially in the preface and the opening pages of his account:

> The Reader 'must not expect here to find a regular history of them [the Arabs]; the following sheets containing little more than a simple narration of the daily occurrences, on a Journey across the Grand Desart of Arabia.' (i/ii)

> I cannot better apologize for the style of it, than by assuring him [the reader], it was not intended for publication till very lately, when a number

36 Another example from Abbott's *Trip* can be found on p. 10-1: 'At the same time we lament this untimely fate of a fellow creature, and by all accounts a valuable member of society, can we help blaming his imprudence, after having received the most ample caution against the steps he so inconsiderately took? One the other hand, do we not most frequently meet with actions in Englishmen, far more atrocious than what these Arabs were guilty of, and those perhaps with not half the provocation?'

> of gentlemen whom I have the honour of being acquainted with, after having perused the manuscript, expressed their desire of being furnished with copies. (iii)
>
> Should it prove instrumental to the safety or comfort of any future traveller, my end is answered; and the lashes of a few interested critics shall not distress me, if I am fortunate enough to secure the approbation of my steady and indulgent readers. (iv)
>
> [...] a clearer head and an abler pen, might afford entertainment [...] (1)
>
> [...] you will most probably have room to find fault with my diction [...] (2)

Abbott's ubiquitous modesty, however, invites further scrutiny, since his apologies and explicit self-characterisations draw on rhetorical traditions and topoi. On the one hand, he emphasises his apparent shortcomings just as Socrates publicly contrasts his personal and philosophical flaws with the volubility of his accusers in Plato's *Apology*. The intended effect in both cases is, of course, to subtly discredit potential and actual antagonists in order to accentuate one's own eloquence and intellectual capabilities. The figure of meiosis, which deliberately expresses understatement and evokes the opposite of a given term or concept, comes in handy either situation. On the other, Abbott emphasises the practical, real world use of his *Trip* by denying its literary merits. He writes for travellers in the Orient, either those following in his footsteps or armchair tourists at home, and seems to be keen on asserting his authority on the subject of Middle Eastern travel by writing a factual rather than a literary account. The story of Mr. Hare fits in with this pattern, since Abbott provides a detailed and smooth account of this gentleman's fate, including dates (1783), objects he showed off and psychological introspection (he went to sleep 'with an idea of the most perfect security' [10]). However, he neither mentions any sources nor Mr. Hare's companions, who could have passed on the information to him. In this perspective, then, this story, too, serves to underscore Abbott's accomplishments and he may very well have made it up in order to show that he not only successfully braved the sands of the Syrian Desert, but also managed to textualise the journey as part of his legacy. Whilst Blount, for example, is 'putting off the old man' and refashions

himself into a 'passenger'[37] before setting out, Abbott similarly constructs a travelling self for the journey ahead, albeit in much more subtle ways. The function of Blount's move 'is to authorize, or more exactly, to *found*'[38] a space for his enquiries, whereas the aim of Abbott's subtle contrivances is to raise the admiration of readers for his achievements on the way to India.[39]

3. Re-presentation, Re-enactment and the Actuality of History

According to Abbott, one of the rare pleasures of his journey is that of 'visiting those parts so much renowned in ancient history' (6), which is one of the reasons for his choosing this route rather than a passage by sea. His main objectives in doing so are to 'undeceive' and to confront 'erroneous conclusions' (3) about the country and its inhabitants as well as to deliver more than Gaylard Roberts's somewhat sweeping generalisations on the region's emptiness. However, Abbott's allusion to its historical yield inevitably evokes, and thus works with and profits from, the citational history of Middle Eastern travel in which the region 'was always already familiar as the object of representation – written, printed, painted, orally transmitted.'[40] And what is more, he does not buy into the paradigms and degeneration narratives that had begun to govern discourses on 'the orient' during the latter eighteenth century; rather, he quotes them in order to refute them:

> [...] I will venture to vouch, as well from personal experience, as from what little knowledge of those parts I have been able to acquire during my nine years residence in Arabia, that (comparatively speaking) much more is to be apprehended, and many more are the instances of murders and robberies committed in some of the most civilized parts of Europe (as we daily read in the papers) than we find in these barbarous parts. (6-7)

37 Blount, *Voyage*, 4.

38 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 123.

39 I am greatly indebted to Mohammad Sakhnini who discussed this part of Abbott's *Trip* with me.

40 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

He calls western superiority – moral, social and cultural – into question by comparatively enquiring into the habits of both Europeans and Arabs. And he continues to establish this cross-cultural perspective:

> [I]t would be ungenerous to impute to a whole nation the faults of a few; and if we reflect but a moment, and draw a parallel, between what we call the Arabian savages, and the lower order of the civilized Englishmen, I fear we shall find vast occasion to blush for the latter. (11-12)

If there is one conclusion to draw from these passages, it is the obvious illegitimacy of many western representations of things oriental, since they 'tel[l] us more about the preconceptions of the author than the objects described'[41] and point to the internal consistency of Orientalist discourses rather than their referential qualities.[42] Challenging such biases, Abbott's register is comparable to Blount's rhetoric in its use of the words 'barbarous' and 'civilized.' Whilst 'barbarous' has come to carry connotations of uncouthness, crudity and even truculence, 'civilized' is synonymous with socially accepted and refined conduct. Historically, however, barbarous peoples were simply non-Greek (βάρβαροι). For example, when Blount sets out to see whether 'the *Turkish* way appeare absolutely barbarous, as we are given to understand, or rather an other kinde of civilitie, different from ours […],'[43] the word has at least two meanings: on the one hand, it denotes cultural alterity, and, on the other, it signifies dissimilar behavioural patterns bred by foreign localities. Accordingly, when both Blount and Abbott are turning east they do not use 'barbarous' pejoratively but rather as a vague cultural and geographical marker.

Especially Abbott's even-handed approach to the Arabs and their culture, as well as the inclusive and dialogic parlance of his *Trip*, demonstrates that 'the tension between shared space and unshared values'[44] need not give rise to an unbridgeable gulf. His epistolary day-to-day account focuses on local practices and knowledge, specially adapted lifeways and strives to ascertain the dignity of the ill-reputed Arabs: 'They *are not* treacherous, they are not

41 Ibid., 455.

42 Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens*, 24.

43 Blount, *Voyage*, 2.

44 Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 11.

wantonly cruel, nor unworthy of trust, nor hypocrites, nor are they mercenary' (12). Fluent in Arabic, Abbott becomes immersed in, and reliant on, the customs of the locals and repeatedly emphasises that he who is prepared to treat his Arabic interlocutors 'with common civility' can make the journey 'almost a party of pleasure' (7). Published at a crucial historical juncture,[45] and offering its readers representations of the lived ideal of 'the cosmopolitanism of the age of Enlightenment,'[46] Abbott's *Trip* provides gateways into 'the global reference field of knowledge,' which 'dwindled away in the course of the nineteenth century.'[47] The fragile intellectual equilibrium between Europe and the Middle East was slowly but surely dismantled in the Victorian period and gave way to fully-fledged colonial cruelty, epistomised by Colonel Kurtz's infamous dictum: " 'Exterminate all the brutes!' "[48] The age of high imperialism thus overshadowed and distorted the perception of earlier times when East-West relations differed considerably from Said's dichotomously structured framework and its clear-cut power differential. Hence, cross-cultural curiosity, the readiness to be favourably impressed and 'imperial envy' – the envious gaze to the Ottoman Empire and the implicit desire for an imperial identity[49] in early modern England – was on the wane when Britons extended their increasingly global reach.

By contrast, Abbott's short survey of the Arabs, their history and common social practices (12-17) provides insight into a world that Europeans may have known from a then already century-old tradition of Anglo-Ottoman, or, more generally, Anglo-Islamic, interaction. Indeed, many writers 'felt empowered to write about those they called "Turks."'[50] Most of them were, however, what Batholomew Plaisted has called 'chamber geographers' in his *Narrative*

45 Said, *Orientalism*, 3: 'Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.'

46 Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens*, 21 [my Translation].

47 Ibid., p. 20 [my Translation].

48 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (London: Penguin, 1994), 72.

49 MacLean, Gerald, 'Ottomanism Before Orientalism? Bishop Henry King praises Henry Blount, Passenger in the Levant,' in Ivo Kamps & Jyotsna G. Singh, eds., *Travel Knowledge: European Discoveries in the Early Modern Period* (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 85-96, here 91.

50 MacLean, *Looking East*, x.

of a Journey from Basra to Aleppo in 1750: they 'describe whole kingdoms, and their different roads, without ever having stept out of their mother-country.'[51] Accordingly, questions as to what an early modern or Enlightenment reader could know about Europe's oriental others 'are fundamental questions about the social and cultural anchorage of knowledge, about the possibilities of members of one civilisation appropriately to envision the members of another one.'[52] Concentrating on the Arabs, Abbott provides valuable knowledge about their conduct, treatment of foreigners and compliance with agreements at the same time as he openly criticises European representations of them. He does everything to avoid a biased account and is both ready and willing to approach his hosts with a healthy mixture of self-criticism and curiosity. Certain that 'the poor Arabs have been very uncharitably handled by their European guests' (16), Abbott summons up an allegorical comparison: 'Thus, if you place their virtues and vices in opposite scales, you will find it turn much in their favour' (16) – that the forceful image of Lady Justice (*Iustitia*) lurks between the lines here is surely no accident.

But more importantly, Abbott insists on the humanity of the Arabs, showing his readers the diversity of human lifeways and their adaptations to specific environmental challenges. In so doing, he writes an 'Enlightenment history in a way that sees the world as a unity containing many differences' and prefigures the decentredness that empowers so-called peripheral peoples and eventually leads to 'abandoning the view of Europe as the centre of the world.'[53] In this perspective, Middle Eastern ethno-religious diversity, as well as the hospitality of the locals, is neither exotically different for European readers nor extraneous to cosmopolitan knowledge production, but rather warrants the emergence of the Arabs as a dignified, trustworthy people in their own right, *although* a European is speaking for them:

> They are hospitable, even to excess; if a party of Arabs are setting at their meal, and a stranger passes by, be he a Christian, a Turk, a Jew, or an infidel, they never fail to invite him to partake of their fare, and will hold it as a mark of disrespect, if the passenger does not honour their invitation, by dipping

51 Bartholomew Plaisted, 'Narrative of a Journey from Basra to Aleppo in 1750,' in Carruthers, ed., 49 – 128, here 57.

52 Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung* Asiens, 21 [my translation].

53 Dorinda Outram, 'Cross-cultural Encounters in the Enlightenment,' in Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf & Ian McCalman, eds., *The Enlightenment World* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 551-567, here: 565

> his fingers in the dish, and taking, though it were only a mouthful. (13-4; emphasis in original)

This representation of local practices is certainly conducive to heightening European attention to the region's particularities and can aid in both unravelling stereotypes and restoring voices and agency to the Arabs. This process is inextricably linked with, and based on, knowledge because Abbott's era 'saw the golden age of travelling for information,' in which '[e]xploration fed global flows'[54] of commercial and cultural traffic. When he accordingly declares that 'now every branch of knowledge is brought to such a height of perfection' (5), Enlightenment discourse takes centre stage and is, in conjunction with the refutation of pejorative clichés, expanded to include Europe's others.

Abbott's decisive recalibration of essentialised depictions and his will to informational innovation notwithstanding, he joins a multi-layered citational system and experiences, whilst contributing to, the complex 'dialectic of novelty and repetition'[55] that governs extreme travel in the Middle East. Palimpsestic and strenuous in nature, it consists of more than simply treading trodden trails in the sand: 'Western travellers were consciously reenacting the journeys about which they knew, but they also followed obliviously in the wake of those of whom they remained ignorant.'[56] Whether one knows it or not, entanglement, which reaches considerably beyond the actual journey, is inevitable in this respect: '[E]ach work on the Orient, *affiliates* itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself.'[57] Hence, when Abbott wishes to '[visit] those parts so much renowned in ancient history' (6) and at the same time tries to provide 'useful hints to such as may hereafter travel that way' (ii) he both reenacts previous journeys and contributes to 'ever deepening layers of previousness.'[58] In other words, his journey is subject to 'novelty and repetition,' too.

In such an elaborate configuration, some travellers and their texts are incredibly close without necessarily knowing each other face to face. Creating a network of experiential intertextuality, Abbott and Carmichael's accounts, for example, offer some very different, yet inextricably intertwined, descriptions of the city of 'Meshed Ali' (Najaf), one of the centres of *Shīʿah* Islam. It houses

54 Ibid., p. 561 &p. 564
55 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 441.
56 Ibid., 447.
57 Said, *Orientalism*, 20.
58 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

the Imam Ali shrine and was immensely popular with travellers on the Great Desert Caravan Route. Though enticed by its reputation, Carmichael, who was near the city in 1751, was less adventurous than Abbott and tells us why he does not enter it:

> [I]t is in the tomb of Ali that the eastern magnificence is more particularly manifested; which, according to an account I have seen written by a gentleman who visited it, is of exquisite workmanship, and set with jewels of immense value, altogether making a most dazzling appearance. I would fain have gone for the sake of personally examining the truth of this description, but was dissuaded on account of the great risque I should have run of being murdered, or at least ill-treated, by the guardians of the prophet's tomb, who are reported to be the most abandoned miscreants on earth, and, like their master, declared inveterate enemies to the Christians, and from whom this country was conquered, under the conduct of Ali and his sons.[59]

In these lines, there is an unsettling dissociation between already existing textual constructions of Carmichael's route and Meshed Ali on the one hand, and the actual, practiced space and its inhabitants on the other, since his description is based not on personal experience but on an account he had read. This representational split evinces how discursive arrays, such as Orientalism, are more likely to revolve around internal consistency rather than referential quality, and testifies to the genesis and perpetuation of 'flexible positional superiority'[60] out of both textual and actual re-enactment. This strong judgment is deeply flawed and refuses to take into account geo-physical and ecological differences, which, as facts on the ground, engender differential social practices and cultural identities. In Carmichael's case, then, even pre-colonial Orientalisms run the risk of grossly misinterpreting their discursive objects.

Abbott, by contrast, who visited the city about three decades later, comes to very different conclusions and takes issue with Carmichael's grandiloquent, but unfounded, verdict. Conceding that '[t]he town itself has but a very poor appearance, and stands in great need of repair' (66), Abbott nevertheless differentiates between its architectural shortcomings and the friendly conduct of its inhabitants ('They behaved with great civility […]'), especially after 'finding that [he] could talk the Turkish language' [69]):

59 Carmichael, 'Narrative,' 167.

60 Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

> After some little conversation upon indifferent subjects, the Governor wished us a good night, desiring we would, on no account, make ourselves uneasy, for that he should answer for every thing that belonged to us, all the time we thought proper to remain within the limits of his jurisdiction; after many kind professions on his part, and thanks on ours, he rode back to town with all his retinue.
>
> I have mentioned this circumstance to shew what erroneous ideas some gentlemen hastily form, who are unacquainted with the disposition of these people. Mr. Carmichael in particular, represents the inhabitants of Mahshed Aly as the most barbarouos and inveterate enemies to the name of a Christian, though he owns at the same time that he never was near the town.
>
> Such uncharitable conclusion, drawn only from hearsay, should, I humbly conceive, be carefully avoided by a historian, as they can answer no other end, than wrongly to prejudice and lead into error travellers who know no better. (70-1)

Although Abbott's linguistic proficiency facilitates this encounter, the people's behaviour is nowhere near Carmichael's 'most abandoned miscreants on earth.'

The circulation of denigratory stereotypes notwithstanding, Abbott attempts to undo the solidified 'layers of previousness' and presents a balanced and dialogic account as corrective with the authority of an eyewitness. His openness in this passage underlines how the readiness to be 'favourably impressed'[61] on the traveller's part can prevent cross-cultural encounters from going awry and at the same time serves as successful instance of Enlightenment travel based on contemporary notions of improvement and the accumulation of knowledge. By interacting with the locals, European travellers could test received wisdom and, if necessary, re-evaluate it. Abbott's example thus transposes Kant's pointed definition of the age of reason – '*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity*'[62] – from the European onto the global stage and enables representatives of radically different cultures to question the discursive regularities that potentially preclude friendly interaction.

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61 Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Cesare Vecellio, Venetian Writer and Art-book Cosmopolitan,' in Jyotsna G. Singh, ed., *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion* (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2009), 305-322, here 320.

62 Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, transl., with introduction, by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 41-46, here 41.

In this respect, reenactive travel is more than mere 'slavish representation' or repetition – it can be a 'lively interaction with the model.'[63]

We have come a long way from Roberts's description of the desert as an all-too homogenous and seemingly empty space over the sea and desert routes to India to the palimpsestic character of Middle Eastern travel. Yet this palimpsest has influenced desert travel down to the present day by connecting the past 'as a historical repository' and 'its lingering persistence into the present.'[64] Indeed, to 'enter the East was, for many Europeans, a journey across time zones that most often felt like a journey into the past, to the way things used to be.'[65] Not only did this impression lead to the chronotopical fixation of the East as backward, it also added more layers to the East's complex historical texture, which, in turn, attracted curious travellers bent on exploring 'those parts so much renowned in ancient history' (6).[66] This seemingly transhistorical feature lead twentieth century writers to reflections comparable to Abbott's: 'One becomes intrigued by the story of desert travel as a whole, and by the experiences of previous desert travellers. There grows a desire to learn something about the ancient and medieval methods of transport.'[67] Whilst Christina Phelps Grant, author of *The Syrian Desert: Caravans, Travel and Exploration* (1937), seems to have been motivated by a historian's interest in the region and Abbott published his account to rectify 'erroneous conclusions' (3), both are nonetheless implicated in the layerings, cross references and entanglements of re-enactive travel in the Middle East. However, as the representations and re-presentations of Meshed Ali have shown, following in someone else's footsteps need not cut short intellectual efforts to discover and carefully contextualise 'layers of previousness'[68] and their historical as well as political valences. Only if we initiate a dialogue between the present and representations of the past – a process H.G. Gadamer has called 'fusion

63 Steiner, Uwe C., 'Der geschlagene Interpret: Nachahmung, Interpretation und Opfer bei Platon, Mozart und Ortheil,' in Otto Kolleritsch, ed., *Musikalische Produktion und Interpretation: Zur historischen Unaufhebbarkeit einer ästhetischen Konstellation* (Graz & Wien: Universaledition, 2003), 144-162, 157 [my translation].

64 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

65 Gerald MacLean, 'Strolling in Syria with William Biddulph,' *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 46: 3 (2004), 415-439, here 417.

66 Ibid., p. 416

67 Grant, *The Syrian Desert*, 2-3.

68 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

of horizons'[69] –, can we hope to unearth and understand the rich material hidden in the sands of the Syrian Desert:

> Greece, Rome and Byzantium have left their traces in this desert: temples and caravan cities as well as route-markings. Ruined palaces, castles and the remains of ancient fortifications in mid-desert testify, similarly, to the occupation of early Arab princes, Lakhmid and Ghassanid, and to the rule of medieval Saracens. Primitive Safaitic inscriptions furnish clues to the later Arabic scripts; and modern Arab nomads preserve ancient customs in their age-old surroundings. Thus the Syrian Desert has an inherent interest of its own, apart from the travel to which it has perennially given rise.[70]

Not only was the Syrian Desert one of 'the main channel[s] by which the riches of the East flowed to the West,'[71] it was also, as we can conclude from Phelps Grant's description, 'head-spinning in its temporal layerings'[72] – a fact that Abbott was surely aware of. This convergence of past and present, orality and literacy, imperial strongholds and nomadic lifeways, as well as numerous ruins on the way, provided a rich playground for the inquisitive traveller in an era in which 'every branch of knowledge is brought to such a height of perfection' (5).

Abbott, in particular, does not get tired of repeatedly describing his trip as 'almost a party of pleasure' (7; 99) and to emphasise how 'the inconveniences throughout this journey, to [him], have appeared so trifling, that [he] should at any time prefer it to a long sea voyage round the Cape' (17). But what is more, he was by no means the only one to find the historical dimension fascinating and attractive. Carmichael, with whom he takes issue over his portrayal of 'Mechad Ali,' also comments on some ruins along the way and grandiloquently philosophises about their origins: 'The magnificent appearance of these ruins almost persuaded me they were part of the antient Babylon.'[73] These passages show that eastern 'backwardness might not be tantamount to barbarism, or even "backward" in any denigratory way,'[74] since we can char-

69 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 3rd ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 2004), 337.
70 Grant, *The Syrian Desert*, 5.
71 Carruthers, 'Introduction,' xi.
72 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 449.
73 Carmichael, 'Narrative,' 161.
74 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

acterise the region as a 'museum'[75] which, if the traveller is willing to begin a dialogue with a rich mixture of human history, can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of civilisations – past and present, eastern and western – as a whole.[76]

4. Knowledge, Self-Preservation and European Contractual Traditions

Many travellers on Middle Eastern routes indeed assumed some knowledge of the civilisations they were about to encounter because [t]here was no "way" that had not been well trodden since ancient, and even prehistoric, times.'[77] However, the extreme environmental conditions prevailing in the desert necessitated the support of local residents and their knowledge, exposing Westerners to unknown cultural practices and forcing them to live, even if only temporarily, in close proximity to radically different people. Employing the polite rhetoric of his age, Abbott is sure that his openness to such experiences ensures mutual understanding and, most importantly, a safe journey through what is a potentially dangerous, and in some instances fatal, environment. Bartholomew Plaisted, who travelled from Basra to Aleppo in 1750, is quite sure, too, that 'if [the traveller] conforms a little to the customs of the country, as he ought in prudence to do, he will meet with great civility.'[78] But whilst Abbott is never tired of emphasising the pleasures of his journey, Paisted represents his experiences in the Syrian Desert in very different terms. Despite evoking civility at the outset, he soon regards the Arabs in general, and his caravan leader in particular, as untrustworthy creatures rather than as partners and guides. In his diary, the entry for '*June the 21st*' records how

> our Sheik, who now shewed himself to be a very dishonest scoundrel, instead of protecting the caravans, as his office should have obliged him to,

75 Ibid.

76 For contemporary descriptions of journeys back in time to 'antique lands' compare: Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840: 'From an Antique Land'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43-53.

77 Ibid., 447.

78 Plaisted, 'Narrative,' 63.

> attempted to plunder it, especially us who were strangers and some few merchants, whom he designed should pay the whole demand.[79]

Travelling 34 years before Abbott, Plaisted seems to have had some very bad experiences with the desert Arabs and does not refrain from both generalising his subjective, and indeed derogatory, impressions and further lashing out verbally from a usurped position of discursive authority. It may very well have been the case that the 'Sheik' in question was a spineless profiteer, but Plaisted himself neither seeks a rational explanation nor reflects on 'the lower order of the *civilized Englishmen*' (12) in order to draw cross-cultural comparisons. Instead, he goes on at great length:

> We encamped [...] near a standing pool of water, which was so muddy it was not fit to drink; for which reason three wells were dug pretty near it, wherein they met with water which was very good. If this method was put in practice oftener, especially where the situation of the ground gave some hopes of success, I am persuaded the scarcity of water so much complained of would be greatly lessened; and perhaps in the most improbable places it would not be wanting if they were to dig deep enough. But it is no wonder that there are no persons have public spirit enough for these performances, since they have no other care but to serve themselves, without endeavouring to render travelling over the desert more commodious to others.
>
> I have before observed that it is owing to the laziness of the Arabs that water is not to be had more frequently, for there is little room to doubt that, where the shrubs were green, this necessary fluid may be found, especially since where they are already dug the soil is much less promising.
>
> [...] I conclude that there can be no want of [water] in the plains and valleys throughout the desert, if the Arabs would be at the pains of opening the ground to a proper depth.[80]

Plaisted begins this passage with the first person plural, which implies that one member of a group describes a common activity. Soon, however, he seamlessly uses the third person plural, which is the standpoint of an extraneous

79 Ibid., 70/71

80 Ibid., 77, 91 & 92.

observer. Travelling and 'encamping,' though laborious, are shared and conceived of as common lot, whereas work on top of that is presupposed to be the duty of the Arabs. Even though my argument here only rests on two personal pronouns, it is significant how 'the strategies of representation'[81] change as soon as an activity is perceived to be below one's dignity. But what is more, Plaisted here is one of those 'European bourgeois subjects [who] seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.'[82] It seems self-evident to him that *they* are selfish and that it is *their* duty 'to render travelling over the desert more commodious to others.' However, the explicit characterisation of the Arabs as lazy is inextricably bound up with an implicit self-characterisation: his ostensible discursive authority is usurped, since he travels in someone else's territory and depends on their knowledge, guidance and goodwill. It is, accordingly, not simply the Sheik's fault that no cross-cultural cooperation ensues but also attributable to Plaisted's stubborn refusal to see anything but servants in the Arabs of his caravan.

I choose to call his mindset stubborn refusal because there are some hints in these passages that Plaisted could very well have behaved differently: phrases such as 'especially where the situation of the ground gave some hopes of success' or 'for there is little room to doubt that, where the shrubs were green, this necessary fluid may be found' indicate a basic familiarity with the desert's 'intricate ecosystems.'[83] However, his grandiloquent vilification of the sheik as 'dishonest scoundrel' and the depiction of the Arabs as innately lazy not only register his refusal to interact with this very ecosystem and its inhabitants, they also let him emerge as the 'inheritor of a long tradition of European thought which associated a temperate climate with a liberal society and excessive heat with oriental despotism.'[84] And indeed,

> prior to the nineteenth century there was no need for a word to describe the influence of physical conditions on persons and communities because it was self-evident that personal and communal identity were intimately related to

81 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

82 Ibid.

83 Landry, 'Rewriting the Sea from the Desert Shore,' 253.

84 Jonathan Bate, 'Culture and Environment: From Austen to Hardy,' *New Literary History* 30: 3 (1999), 541-560, here: 545.

> physical setting. The influence of, for instance, the climate and the soil was taken for granted.[85]

Unreceptive to the subtleties of his surroundings, Plaisted uncritically subscribes to this school of thought. But had he followed his own recommendation to 'confor[m] a little to the customs of the country,' he might have had a very different, much more enriching, experience on the Great Desert Caravan Route.

However, as Plaisted's remarks on water indicate, both the climate and the desert's ecological idiosyncrasies figure crucially in the accounts of European travellers. In late 1783, Abbott decided to leave Syria because of the 'fluctuating situation of [his] line' (18). But the usual 'spring and autumn' caravans were delayed by 'the disturbances occasioned by a war between two tribes of Arabs called Montificks and Benehaleds, and the uncommon scarcity of Europe goods at Aleppo' (18). His initial plan was to cross the desert on his own:

> My anxiety was such, that I often thought of hazarding myself with a single messenger; which had I done, would perhaps have been attended with fatal consequences; the heat of the sun being excessive, to which I must inevitably have been exposed; but the unexpected arrival of Captain Rochfort from England, put a stop to the execution of this rash design.
>
> Captain Rochfort, in a hurry to proceed to India by the way of Bussora, thought of forming a private caravan, and very politely consulted me on the occasion; hinting at the same time, that as I was also bent on the same route, my company would be perfectly agreeable, in case I chose to engage in his plan. This was an offer not to be rejected, so I readily accepted of his proposal, and our intentions being made public, we shortly had a number of Arab Sheiks, (or commanders of caravans) offering their services. (19-20)

Abbott was clearly aware of the fact that the desert is too extreme an environment to be crossed on one's own, especially if warring factions increase the already high risk of death. Travellers unacquainted with its environmental parameters thus had to gain access to local knowledge either by joining one of the regular merchant caravans or by forming a private one. In this way, they were close to the desert's inhabitants and could experience first-hand the depth 'of the embeddedness of a community's history in its environment:'[86]

85 Ibid., 551.

86 Ibid., 554.

'This view privileges local experience over the abstract information contained in maps and suggests the necessity of grounding spatial knowledge in the direct acquaintance with regional topography.'[87] Abbott's favourable representation of his hosts, then, stems from both his cross-cultural openness and his proximity to people intimately linked to, and inextricably intertwined with, the environment in which they live. Unlike Plaisted, it seems, Abbott and Rochfort knew what they were in for when they formed their caravan.

Yet their choice to form a private caravan is bound up with a barely noticeable, but nonetheless far-reaching, reconfiguration of both knowledge and power in unknown territory. In order to be able to brave the desert's vast expanses, the two Englishmen initiate a two-tiered process of cooperation and exchange, in the course of which they transpose European contractual traditions to the Middle East. Firstly, in an instance of *intra*-cultural cooperation, Abbott and Rochfort join forces on their way to India. Secondly, as an instance of *inter*-cultural cooperation, they decide on hiring 'Sheik Mohammed el Fehairy,' who was recommended 'by a Jew Merchant, Sig. Raphael Picciotto' (20). The Sheik will receive money for providing his knowledge of the desert, a process which not only renders the two Englishmen entirely reliant upon the caravan leader and his men, but also exposes them to a potentially life-threatening environment. As a result, those who have frequently been described as Europe's 'others' in often denigratory terms, now occupy a strong position on the discursive knowledge-power axis and have the opportunity of demonstrating that 'symptoms of backwardness might also be ecologically sustainable ways of living in a climate and landscape unsuited to the kinds of development dear to those who are enamored of progress.'[88]

But what is more, this exchange challenges the solidified boundaries – ontological, epistemological and geographical – between East and West by demonstrating that interaction between European travellers and Middle Eastern camel drivers could be mutually improving and fruitful. Despite often serving as the onset of modern Orientalism, the late eighteenth century emerges as a global, multi-lingual and cosmopolitan time from Abbott's *Trip* and demonstrates how complex and varied cross-cultural relationships in pre-colonial times defy reductive notions of European agency. Abbott and Rochfort are clearly aware that without the locals' support they do not have

87 Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 9.

88 MacLean, 'Strolling in Syria,' 416.

a chance of crossing the desert so that 'the instinctive duty of self-preservation'[89] prompts them into signing the agreement with the Sheik. Though this is an involuntary renunciation of agency making them dependent on perfect strangers, the two Englishmen know that such a written contract can both reconcile divergent interests and keep potential risks in check. As representatives of an emerging market economy, Abbott and Rochfort transpose their knowledge as well as their propensities, among them 'the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another,'[90] onto an increasingly global stage. In this perspective, the agreement, which 'was immediately drawn up, in the Arabic language' (21), is not merely indicative of Adam Smith's 'faculties of reason and speech,'[91] it demonstrates that self-preservation, cross-cultural cooperation and the circulation of Enlightenment formations could give rise to global civility in a wide variety of settings.

The contract, an English translation of which is provided by Abbott (21-5), may appear as an inconspicuous part of his preparations before setting out. However, it is the interactional centrepiece around which the encounter revolves, since it connects European contractual traditions with Islamic customs at the same time as it provides the framework for Abbott and Rochfort's collectively organised self-preservation in ways comparable to Captain Wilson and his men on the Palauan beach. The 'common desire for a guarantee of security'[92] thus ties together the English and Arabic sides in Abbott's *Trip* and enables them to play out cultural differences in a dialogic manner. If we follow in Abbott's footsteps, we become witnesses to the ways in which both parties respect each other's customs, habits and knowledge, for example when Abbbott's curiosity is curbed by the Sheik's precaution on '*Tuesday, the 20th*' of July:

> [We] pitched our tent on a plain called Gusser-ul-Coen; which takes its name from a deserted town; bearing S.W. by W. of us, about four miles; it appeared to us at this distance to be an ancient building, and as if it had once been fortified; but our Sheik would not allow us to approach it, for the night coming

89 Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 18.

90 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 Vols., ed. by A. S. Skinner, R. H. Campbell & W.B. Todd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), Vol. I, 25.

91 Ibid.

92 Lamb, *Preserving the* Self, 25.

> on, he said it would be very unsafe; wild robbers often taking shelter there. (45)

Ruins were among the chief attractions for Europeans in the Syrian Desert and frequently invited further investigation. But the Sheik's intimate familiarity with the surroundings lends authority to his order in this situation, demonstrating that the agreement between himself and the two Englishmen is a mutual obligation rather than a mere commercial transaction. Just as the sea, the desert seems to be a 'horizontal' space, in which 'vertical' social structures are suspended, even if only temporarily, by situational contingencies, such as the caravan leader's ability to identify potential dangers lurking along the way.[93] Accordingly, the traveller's propensities and the common good need not be antithetical and can be reconciled by the guide and his customers in an all-encompassing framework of global civility if the exigencies of both extreme travel and collective self-preservation take precedence over individual idiosyncrasies.

When Abbott describes a nearby village a few days later, he represents the Sheik as similarly concerned about his caravan. Carefully avoiding the robbers' lair was thus not a one-off event but emerges as part of a larger pattern of considerations aimed at achieving a maximum degree of security in adverse environmental conditions. As the following passage demonstrates, the caravan's social fabric is extremely volatile and can be jeopardised by the recalcitrance of heedless individuals:

> At the distance of some miles, to the eastward of our camp, was a village called Cobeise, which we could just perceive; but Sheik Mohammed seemed studiously to avoid approaching it; indeed, he issued positive orders against any person's going there; for he said, it was a place where robbers generally supplied themselves with necessaries, and should they hear of our small party being so near, the consequences might prove fatal. All the Arabs seemed submissive to this reasonable injunction, except one man, who said he had some business to transact there, and therefore would go in spite of the order. – This being reported to the Herculean chief, threw him into such a violent passion, that grasping a heavy club, he laid about the back and shoulders of the delinquent with a fury that soon convinced him of his error, swearing he would kill him on the spot, and he would very likely have been as good as his word, had not the rest interfered to appease the Sheik, and

93 Landry, 'Rewriting the Sea from the Desert Shore,' 253.

> save the man. – Thus the unruly Arab was brought to reason, and we passed the night very quietly. (60-62)

This passage, too, centres on the importance of local knowledge, since the Sheik not only tries 'to avoid approaching' the notorious village, but also anticipates erratic behaviour among the rank and file of his party. By issuing orders against approaching the village he takes precautionary measures in order both to maintain security and to avert harm on the basis of personal experiences, which portends an 'intimate awareness of the particularities of [his] immediate surroundings.'[94] In this respect, the caravan leader's behaviour unites local knowledge on the one hand, and both 'fellow-feeling[95] and rationality on the other, which places him right at the centre of eighteenth century Enlightenment discourses and concerns. These discursive formations acquire global significance in the contexts represented by Abbott, illustrating how considerations for the common good can engender civility across cultural divides at the same time as they allow for sanctions against unruly individuals.

Whilst the caravan leader occupies a position of authority by virtue of both his social status and expertise, knowledge and power are neither fixed nor tied to specific social constellations. In Abbott's *Trip*, they bend to specific exigencies and often emerge as situationally contingent, emphasising the inclusive and civil nature of interaction prevalent on this journey. The kind of cross-cultural interaction experienced and represented by Abbott has little in common with putative Oriental despotisms and shows that encounters of the European self with its extra-European other were often mutually enriching, even-handed and thought-provoking. When he relates the Sheik's fury over the unruly Arab, for example, Abbott does not decry his behaviour, but instead soberly relates the incident at the same time as subordinating himself. In the following passage, his narrative voice is equally matter-of-factly; this time, however, there is a twist:

> Although on our arrival the Arabs (who are very cautious) observed on several spots fresh camels dung, and places where fires had lately been lighted – signs not quite pleasing to our small party; yet the fresh water was too alluring to be so easily forsaken; besides, we argued thus: "the party who left these tokens behind them, must have departed hence but very lately; ergo,

94 Bate, 'Culture and Environment,' 551.

95 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 13.

> it was not probable they should return soon; all that we have to fear is the arrival of some other body, which is a danger we run, at every watering place; let us therefore spend the night here, and take as much good water as our vessels will hold, and for the rest trust to Providence."
>
> This plan was found very reasonable, and accordingly adopted; and having made a hearty supper upon some cold roasted camel's flesh, we lay down, and had a comfortable night's rest. (55-6)

Abbott here presents his readers with a finely tuned delineation of local knowledge esteeming the Arabs not simply for their ability to read several kinds of traces – their utility value, we might say–, but for who and what they are (they 'are very cautious'), a piece of information that powerfully reiterates his insistence on the illegitimacy of many Western representations of them. Yet in this moment the party adopt a plan which seems to run counter to local knowledge, since both the camel dung and the fire places hint at the close proximity of another, potentially hostile, group of travellers. But after 'exactly twelve hours on a stretch, through the scorching heat of the sun' (54) the travellers are exhausted, express their wish to camp where they are and substantiate their argument with logical reasoning: this place is just as good or bad as any other in the case of an attack ('a danger we run, at every watering place'). Accordingly, authority in this passage shifts from the Arabic to the English side, emphasising the flexible, but nonetheless complex, relationship between knowledge, power and logical reasoning in Abbott's account. Despite being contractually framed and fixed, the flexible dynamics of this encounter allow for inclusiveness, reciprocity and mutual respect without going awry. On the contrary, the Syrian Desert as represented by Abbott is a contact zone in which the (local) knowledge-power nexus can be played out in a dialogic manner and eventually lead to mutually improving relations from which both parties can benefit. Not only do discursive regimes seem to be extremely adaptable in this context, they also differ decisively from the strictly defined hierarchies and power differentials of nineteenth century imperialism.

5. Animals in the Enlightenment: Camels and Horses

When our party last broke for the day, they prepared a dinner made from 'cold roasted camel's flesh' (56). Apart from Europeans being unfamiliar with

this specific kind of meat, such a dish raises questions as to what camels in particular, and animals in general, actually represented for the desert Arabs: were they a source of food or an essential means of transport? The little travelled, but well-read, Immanuel Kant calls the camel 'the *ship* of the desert,'[96] thus favouring the transport function over the nutritional one. However, just as global civility depends on a multifactorial set of conditions – for example, curiosity, the readiness to be favourably impressed and an interest in cultural difference –, the interaction between humans and non-humans is a complex and multi-layered affair, with camels fulfilling various, and often seemingly contradictory, functions. Indeed, they were sources of food, a means of transport, commodities and objects of prestige in Islamic lands. For Europeans, by contrast, they were a literary project, variously described and frequently textualised by travellers for their metropolitan audiences. As such, they tells us something about the preoccupation of Europeans with ideas 'of what is human and what is beastly,' and address 'the sometimes leaky distinctions that were involved'[97] when travellers crossed and mapped the liminal spaces of extreme travel.

The categories on which European identities relied were at stake in the age of European exploration and expansion,[98] since 'knowledge of the world brought familiar and local normativities to crisis.'[99] With travel accounts and eye-witness reports having a monopoly of information in this context, strange and exotic animals were, of course, frequently described rarities and European travellers, explorers and scientists were at pains to integrate them into already existing bodies of knowledge. When they were abroad, some European travellers discovered the social, cultural and historical relativity of their own positions; however, others were unsusceptible to their surroundings and did not experience a comprehensive process of 'self-criticism and unlearn-

96 Immanuel Kant, 'To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, transl., with introduction, by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 107-143, here 118.

97 Maclean, *Looking East*, 145.

98 Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals: Fuer eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 21: Sloterdijk interprets the period 1492-1945 as 'terrestrial globalisation,' a period in which the 'current world system acquired its contours.' [my translation].

99 Maclean, *Looking East*, 171.

ing.'[100] The class-conscious Bartholomew Plaisted, for example, is unresponsive to both man and beast during his time in the Syrian Desert:

> The bulk of the caravan is made up of Arabs of the desert, who are an ignorant, brutish, low-lived set of people; which is no wonder, considering their manner of life, and the meanness of their education, in a place where they can have little or no knowledge of the rest of the world. They have no acquaintance with politeness or social virtue, and consequently have little regard for the distinctions among mankind, or the difference which is due from inferiors to their superiors. There is very little difference, wither in dress or behaviour, between the lowest camel-driver and the Sheik himself [...] When you are upon the road the Caravan Bashi makes a signal in the morning to load the camels, and then every one goes to work with all possible speed. However, this business belongs to the camel-men and their assistants; so that you yourself have not the least trouble about it.[101]

Phrases such as 'politeness or social virtue' are evocative of the culture of sensibility, the sentimental novel and its 'polite and literate audience.'[102] But Plasisted's distinction between himself and the desert Arabs is surprisingly sharp and clear-cut, since rhetorical exclusions from what was primarily a metropolitan European culture were neither anchored in the discourse nor to be found to an equal extent in other travel accounts of the period. Running counter to the emancipatory impulses of contemporary aesthetic formations, his representation of the camel drivers is based on their habitual environment, ostensibly engendering both low standards of education and insular attitudes ('they can have little or no knowledge of the rest of the world'). Plaisted's is thus a remarkable conclusion for an observer of a people who created ecologically sustainable lifeways in adverse conditions and managed to preserve their culture for centuries.

But Plaisted is not alone in this regard. William Beawes, who travelled from Aleppo to Basra in August 1745, goes further in that he does not merely suggest a class, cultural or power differential between himself and the Arabs;

100 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 443.

101 Plaisted, 'Narrative,' 94.

102 Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38.

he readily and immediately 'consign[s] those living in Ottoman and Islamic lands to backward primitive and beastly levels of existence:'[103]

> 21st. Set out this morning about four, and baiting an hour at noon proceeded till five, when encamped by a stagnated water, that stunk abominably but seemed not the least offensive to the camels or their masters, who it is certain have the best stomachs and least delicacy, both one and the other, of any men or beast in the universe.
>
> Sept. 2nd. [...] We proceed again this evening till midnight, which manner of travelling we find very fatiguing, and am surprised that the Arabs themselves can endure it; but they are certainly in many respects so very like their camels, that Providence seems to have equally designed them for the desart. I have observed them to walk and work all day, watch at night, and repeat their labour next day without any sign of fatigue, and have likewise remarked that, like unto their beast, when food and water have been plenty their chops were never still, but can in proportion to their strength go as long without either.[104]

In Beawes's world view, the desert Arabs belong to the realm of natural rather than civil history by virtue of their striking resemblance of their beasts of burden. But in addition to the camels and their drivers, both the mode of travelling and the varying quality of the water found along the way are reasons to complain. Whilst Abbott, too, frequently comments on wells and water qualities, he does not complain in similar fashion and instead enjoys what the journey has to offer to curious minds. Despite travelling in an extreme, and for him largely unknown, space, Abbott's perspective on desert travel allows for cultural difference to exist independently and in its own right without being assimilated, textually or otherwise. Following Jonathan Bate's description of 'the influence of physical conditions on persons and communities' and the crucial role of 'the climate and the soil'[105] played in this process, we can see that Abbott accepts the climatic as well as the social differences of the desert as an objective given, whilst Beawes's comments fail to embrace, even if only

103 MacLean, *Looking East*, 146.

104 William Beawes, 'Remarks and Occurrences in a Journey from Aleppo to Bassora, by the Way of the Desert,' in Carruthers, ed., 1-40, here 20 & 30-1.

105 Bate, 'Culture and Environment,' 551.

temporarily, his guides and thus 'commit a disservice to local epistemologies.'[106]

Oblivious to local knowledge and its representatives, Beawes fails to recognise 'the great affection with which [Islamic peoples] treated camels'[107] at the same time as his vilifications preclude any attempts at empathising with those whose 'horizons'[108] he does not share. It is, again, Abbott who provides a contrastive perspective:

> A quarter before three in the morning was the hour that, our camels being ready, we pursued our journey; course S.E. by E. and halted at ten minutes before eight, on a dry plain, called Hoeshe; because one of our camels had hurt his foot, and the alternative was either to kill, or cure him immediately, for he could not march in that condition. This being a favorite camel, the Sheik took great pains to effect the latter, and, it must be owned, displayed his skill in surgery, to no small advantage; for in a couple of hours, his patient was able enough to keep pace with the rest of the party; and we marched again at eleven o'clock. (78-9)

This passage depicts human-animal interaction as essential to the party's success, from getting the camels ready in the morning over the cooperation between man and injured beast to setting forth again. What is more, Abbott's portrayal of the Sheik and his camel does not conjure up bestial, brutish or barbarous behaviour, terms that 'slide into one another in the language of confident English observers'[109] such as Beawes and Plaisted. Instead it is indicative of the observer's awareness of the spatial and cultural rootedness of knowledge, and demonstrates the ways in which differential practices and local epistemologies enrich what Europeans know, or think they know. But the Sheik does more than merely mending a problem, since his personal involvement is crucial to success ('took great pains'), a success readily admired by Abbott as European observer. Thus, the Sheik Mohammed el Fehairy emerges as knowledgeable and enlightened subject implicated in a process of mutual enculturation, in which locally specific kinds of knowledge circulate on a global scale.

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106 Felicity A. Nussbaum, 'Introduction,' in Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1-18, here 7.

107 MacLean, *Looking East*, 161.

108 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 337.

109 MacLean, *Looking East*, 162.

But camels were not the only beasts of burden that featured prominently on the Great Desert Route. Horses, too, occupied a central position in the cultural and commercial transactions between East and West and contributed greatly to both English identity formation and horsemanship in the British Isles.[110] Although Abbott's readers encounter *equus ferus caballus* in the desert only through multiple layers of oral and written mediation, he includes a story in his *Trip* that sheds light on English equestrian obsessions as well as cross-cultural interaction in the long eighteenth century. On '*Monday, the 12th*' of July, Abbott espies 'a small building in the form of a dome' on top of a hill and asked one of 'the Arabs, what it could be' (40):

> "Many years ago," said he, "there was a famous Turkman robber, having a mare whose swiftness could only be equalled by that of an arrow discharged from a bow, by the most dexterous archer; which made it impossible for any one to seize him. Rambling one day at a small distance from Aleppo, in search of plunder, he unluckily fell in with a large body of the Pashaw's troops, who had often before endeavoured to seize him, and would now have certainly cut him to pieces had he not recourse to flight. – They pursued him for a long time, but finding that a vain attempt, they fired at him; when, - his ill star having decreed that a ball should strike one of the legs of his mare, - it did so, and broke it in two. Notwithstanding this mishap, such was her goodness and mettle, that without halting in the least, she outran the enemy's horse, nor would she stop till she reached this hill, where she fell dead, after saving the life of her owner, who to her memory erected this dome over her grave." (41-2)

'Ruins,' and, for that matter, buildings in general, 'were the primary stimulus to reflection'[111] on Middle Eastern history and culture for Western desert travellers.

But in the story of the Arab of Abbott's party there are also some puzzling, and for Western mindsets potentially unsettling, imbrications of the human and non-human spheres. As Beawes's remarks demonstrate, 'tampering with the borders between human and animal' and '[s]hifting the line between cul-

110 For a comprehensive cultural history of the role of horses in East-West relations see: Donna Landry, *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (Baltimore, Md. & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

111 Landry, 'Saddle Time,' 448.

ture and nature'[112] could be an effective way of asserting one's superiority over the peoples living in Islamic lands. For metropolitan readers and armchair travellers, the close-knit unity between the '*Turkman* robber' and his faithful 'mare' might thus indicate illegitimate intimacy between representatives of the human realm and their beastly counterparts. Exploring and inquisitive minds, on the other hand, were surprised by the results of Ottoman and Arabic kindness to beasts of burden in cultural contexts 'whose practices could appear arbitrary or cruel'[113] when it came to the treatment of human beings. Yet the 'willing obedience [of Eastern horses], which never ceased to amaze Westerners,'[114] challenges all too rigid occidental epistemologies at the same time as it indicates a cultural memory based on oral transmission rather than one preserved in writing, since the Arabs 'all agreed in the narration, and no doubt believe every circumstance of it' (42). Accordingly, reflecting on this story along dichotomous Western lines yields contorted results and reveals the positionality of knowledge, social practices and the conceptual frameworks in which they occur.

What, then, do we make of this story? European travellers frequently appropriated and evaluated encounters with what is unfamiliar, foreign or exotic through the nature-culture paradigm. Central to Western thought, this pair carries with it a range of other semantic oppositions, such as self-other, human-animal and orality-literacy, which render possible textual representations of the various fields of tension to which travellers were exposed during their time abroad.[115] Such rhetorical inventories came in handy when Europeans were confronted with a plethora of novelties, but they did not necessarily reflect realities. For example, the accounts of Plaisted and Beawes reveal a lot about their prejudices but tell us comparatively little about human-animal interaction in the Syrian Desert. Indeed, descriptions of bestiality are often reflexive, disclosing the preoccupations of the author rather than the intricacies behind his objects of scrutiny. Whilst Abbott does not buy the story either, he nonetheless includes it in the *Trip*. In so doing, he contributes to a dialogic and even-handed exchange across cultural divides and injects parts

112 MacLean, *Lookin* East, 172.

113 Landry, *Noble Brutes*, 8.

114 Ibid.

115 Meinhard Winkgens, 'Vorwort' in Konrad Gross & Meinhard Winkgens, eds., *Das Natur-Kultur-Paradigma in der englischsprachigen Erzaehlliteratur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Tuebingen: Narr, 1994), ix-xi, here ix-x & x.

of the Arab cultural memory into a global cultural flow. The following passage indicates the extent to which he was fascinated by what he had just heard:

> [B]ut though the thing to me appeared so improbable, yet there was that of gratitude in the story of the mare, that I could not help being pleased with; nor did I once endeavour to point out to them the impossibility that a mare, or any other creature, should run ninety miles on a stretch after the loss of a leg; nay, I would willingly have sacrificed something to be able to give the same degree of credit to it that they did. (42-3)

Abbott knows that the likelihood of the Arab's story is not what is at issue here. It is the unity of, and cooperation between, man and beast that fascinates him, since it mirrors the peaceful, mutually enriching and dialogic relationship between the two Englishmen on the one hand, and the Arabs on the other. His strong wish to be able to sympathise with the feeling of the representatives of his host culture strongly suggests such a reading based on mutuality and respect. But what is more, he is not alone in this regard. 'Gallantry, toughness, and apparent friendship or affection: this combination of qualities impressed early modern European horsemen who traveled east.' [116] Accordingly, in Islamic lands humans and animals, Europeans and Arabs, and literate and oral cultures could still converse freely in Abbott's age, a time in which the rationality so central to Enlightenment thought grew more Eurocentric and tightened its epistemological grip. This process made increasingly unlikely the possibility of synthesising entities that have come to be thought of as incommensurate today. When we return to the South Pacific in the next chapter, we can see how Enlightenment cosmopolitanism unravels and global civility starts to change under the influences of both the transportation of excess convicts and the cultural uncertainties in the age of revolution.

116 Landry, *Noble Brutes*, 8.