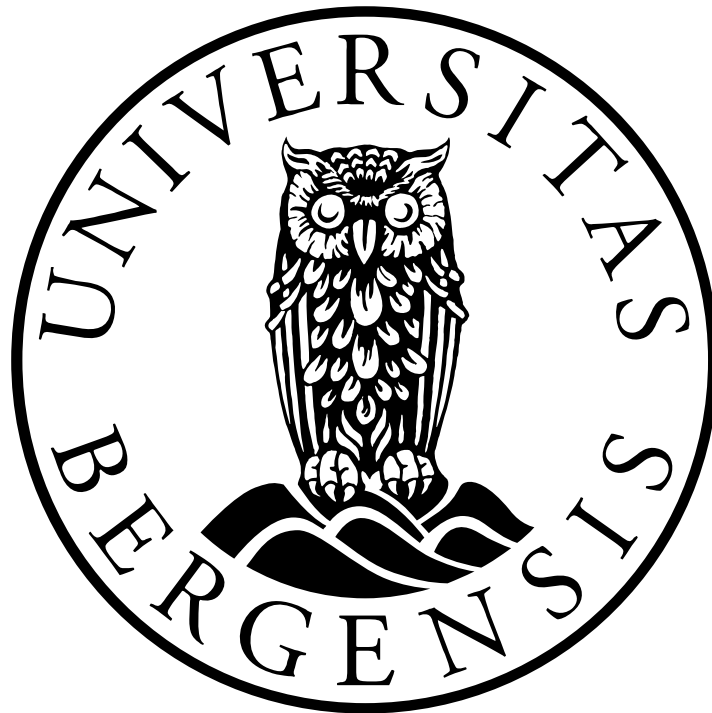


Nuancing the picture of Egypt

*A study of how Egypt was portrayed home by British military
personnel during the First World War*



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Sammendrag

Nyansere bildet av Egypt – En studie av hvordan Britisk militært personell fremstilte Egypt under første verdenskrig

Da gravkammeret til Tutankhamon ble åpnet i 1922 var det en enorm sensasjon. Med denne sensasjonen vokste det frem en enestående interesse for alt som hadde med Egypt å gjøre, og som fortsatt kan merkes den dag i dag. Men kom denne enorme interessen bare på grunn av dette ene gravkammeret, eller bygget den på noe som allerede var etablert fra før?

I denne oppgaven har jeg tenkt til å fokusere på det britiske militære personellet som var stasjonert i Egypt under første verdenskrig og hvordan de fremstilte Egypt. Jeg vil se på korrespondansen mellom det militære personellet og deres familie og venner hjemme i Storbritannia. Dette gjør jeg gjennom å analysere brev, postkort og bilder som militær personellet sendte hjem i løpet av krigen. For å kunne analysere disse fremstillingene, deler jeg oppgaven opp i fire kategorier som hver fokuserer på en fremstilling.

Mange av soldatene og sykepleierne som var stasjonert i Egypt hadde aldri hatt muligheten til å reise utenfor Storbritannia før, og fikk igjennom krigstjenesten en unik mulighet til å oppleve Egypt. Da krigen startet eksisterte det allerede en etablert turistindustri i Egypt som militær personellet måtte forholde seg til og kunne benytte seg av. I tillegg hadde reiseskildringer og guider fra opphold i Egypt blitt veldig populære før krigen, noe som kan ha påvirket måten britene så på Egypt.

Preface

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Anne Katrine Bang. Thank you for all the wonderful conversations we've had in your office, and for all the guidance and help you've given me these past years. Thank you for inspiring me, challenging me and helping me. I would also like to thank Professor Knut Vikør for his invaluable feedback and guidance through the seminaries, and I would like to thank the Middle Eastern seminary and everyone who has been a part of it for the last years. Thank you for creating a good environment where we can give constructive feedback and cheer each other on.

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In addition to this, I would like to thank all my friends and my bible group who have supported me these last few years. I couldn't have done this without you!

Chapter 1: Introduction and methodology

*“Never before in the history of archaeological inquiry has any event excited such immediate and world-wide interest as Mr Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb in November 1922. Very little is known as yet of the king himself, but twelve months hence no doubt his mummy will give up its secrets and perhaps the story of his life will be revealed. [...] Yet, in spite of the unimportance of Tutankhamen himself and the comparative lack of new historical data, the world-wide interest the discovery had evoked is amply warranted by the new appreciation of historical values it affords.”*¹ – G. Elliot Smith, *Tutankhamen and the Discovery of His Tomb* by the Late Earl of Carnarvon and Mr. Howard Carter.

When the news broke on November 30th 1922 that Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon had discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun, no one could have predicted the effects it would have on the world. At the time, Carter and Carnarvon were the last in a long line of archaeologists who had been excavating in the Valley of the kings.² However, their discovery became a huge sensation as it was the first time a nearly intact, royal tomb had been found. This sparked a massive wave of interest throughout the world, an interest which would continue for years to come as Carter continued his excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun.

While Egypt already had a place in the public conscious, with an established tourism industry, this discovery sparked an unprecedented interest in anything Egyptian. Everything from movies to luxury goods, music to fashion, even biscuit tins, became affected by this interest.³

¹ Elliot Smith, Grafton. *Tutankhamen and the Discovery of His Tomb by the Late Earl of Carnarvon and Mr. Howard Carter*. London, George Routledge & Sons, 1923. 15. Project Gutenberg.

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/59783/59783-h/59783-h.htm#Chapter_II

² In fact, Carter and Carnarvon had to wait for many years until they gained access to excavate in the area because of a man named Theodore Davis. He held the concession rights of the area between 1905 and 1914, sponsoring archaeologists and unearthing ten tombs, however none of them were royal. Elliot Smith. *Tutankhamen and the Discovery of His Tomb*. 25-30

³ Sooke, Alastair. “Tut-mania: why the world went wild for King Tutankhamun.” *The Telegraph*. 16.10.2020 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/tut-mania-world-went-wild-king-tutankhamun/>

This period was by some historians referred to as the “Egyptomania” of the 1920s and 1930s,⁴ and the results of this “mania” are still visible in the world to this day.⁵

Many historians argue that this resurgent fascination with Egypt directly affected the tourist industry. The tourist company Thomas Cook & Son had since the 1870s been an active part of the mass-tourism industry to Egypt and Palestine. However, following the discovery of Tutankhamun, there was an unprecedented interest in travelling to Egypt,⁶ with the New York Times calling it “... the greatest boom that Egypt has ever received.”⁷ To this day, Egypt remains one of the most popular tourist spots to visit, the pyramids being an iconic sight to for travellers. However, could something else other than the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb have contributed to this extraordinary tourist boom?

A few years prior to Carter’s discovery, the First World War came to an end. During the war, the Middle East was an important theatre with Egypt as the main base for the various military operations throughout the region. Therefore, military personnel from around the world were stationed or positioned in Egypt. Most of these military personnel were from or connected to the British Empire: Great Britain, India, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. While staying or travelling through Egypt at this time, many of these troops became what can be called “enforced tourists”.⁸ They took part in the local tourism industry by travelling the well-established tourist tracks in the area, visiting the famous sights and took part in the various leisure activities typically connected to tourists.

Travelogues like “Cook’s Handbook for Egypt and the Sudan” by E. A. Wallis Budge and “Egypt and the Sudan: handbook for travellers” by Karl Baedeker, which had been popular before the war, became popular with the military personnel as well. There were also

⁴ Hazbun, Waleed. “Travel to Egypt. From the Nineteenth Century to the Second World War: Thomas Cook, the Mechanization of Travel, and the Emergence of the American Era” in *Red Star Line: Cruises (1894-1934)*, Marie-Charlotte Le Bailly (ed.) (Luven: Davidsfonds/ Infodok, 2016).124; Lanoie, Nicholas *Inventing Egypt for the Emerging British Travel Class: Amelia Edwards’ A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 40:2, 2013, 151 DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2013.790291

⁵ The last couple of years, for instance, an exhibition of the excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun has been touring the world in honor of the opening of the tomb 100 years ago. Dawson, Thomas. “Tutankhamun: Treasures of the golden pharaoh 2019-2013” Archaeology Travel. 18.11.20 <https://archaeology-travel.com/exhibitions/tutankhamun-treasures-of-the-golden-pharaoh/>; Sooke, Alastair. “Tut-mania: why the world went wild for King Tutankhamun.” *The Telegraph*. 16.10.2020 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/tut-mania-world-went-wild-king-tutankhamun/>

⁶ Hunter, F. Robert. *Tourism and Empire: The Thomas Cook & Son Enterprise on the Nile, 1868-1914*, Middle Eastern Studies, 40:5. 2004 50 DOI: 10.1080/0026320042000265666

⁷ Hazbun, Waleed. *Travel to Egypt*. 124, 128-129

⁸ Nicholson, P.T & Mills, S. *Soldier tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine: the evidence of photography* Journal of Tourism History, 9:2-3 (2017): 205-222 DOI: 10.1080/1755182X.2017.1410582

travelogues and guides which were published specifically for the soldiers, like C. E. W. Bean's "What to know in Egypt: A guide for Australian soldiers" and Alexander R. Khoori's "Alexandria: How to see it."

Throughout the war, military personnel in Egypt sent a vast number of letters, pictures and postcards back home, either detailing their life at the front or describing the place they were stationed at the moment. While sending mail from the Middle Eastern theatre was just as easy as from the Western Front, these letters and pictures have rarely been the topic for discussion in literature about the First World War.⁹ Therefore, I want to look at the mail sent home from Egypt during the First World War and see how these military personnel, either consciously or subconsciously, depicted the country of Egypt to their family and friends back at home.

However, as mentioned above, there were people from all over the British Empire which took part in the war effort in Egypt. It is therefore necessary to narrow it down to restrict the number of sources. Consequently, I have chosen to narrow my research to only focus on the British military personnel which were stationed in Egypt, thus excluding letters from military personnel from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India. This choice was originally made with the intention to travel to the UK and examine source material there. However, due to the COVID-19, this was not possible. In addition to this, a large amount of the pre-war and post-war tourists to Egypt were British.

My research question is therefore: *What picture of Egypt was presented by the British military personnel stationed there during the First World War?*

In order to properly answer this question, I have chosen to divide the analysis into several parts. Each part is made up of one category, or way, in which Egypt is presented as the military personnel portrayed Egypt in different ways based on their various experiences. In some cases, a soldier or nurse presents Egypt in different ways in different letters. Therefore, it is more practical to discuss the various ways Egypt was presented by parting the analysis into categories which can then be compared and contrasted. Based on the sources and

⁹ There is some literature, and more is being written now because of the 100-year anniversary of the First World War. However, there is still a massive overweight in favour of the Western Front. Nicholson *Solider tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 205

research literature, I will base my analysis on four categories, which reflect four different images of Egypt.

The first category is Egypt as a tourist spot and antique land. This category will delve into all the different ways the military personnel presented Egypt in a typically touristic way. Examples of this are pictures of the military personnel posing in front of a sphinx or a pyramid, letters detailing tourist activities and guided tours or postcards showing Egypt as a beautiful and picturesque country. Since archaeology and archaeological places are closely connected to the tourism industry in Egypt, anything that has to do with Egypt as an archaeological site will also be included in this category.

The second category is Egypt as a horrible place to be living or stationed in. In this category, all the negative aspects of Egypt which is presented by the military personnel will be included. Partaking in a war in general was a difficult and dangerous ordeal. On top of that, the extreme heat and sun during the summer complicated life in Egypt, especially for those who weren't used to the local climate.¹⁰ Therefore, this section will look into every account sent home by the military personnel that in one way or another portrayed Egypt as an uncomfortable or difficult place to live in or visit.

The third category in this thesis is focused on Egypt as a free space for the military personnel. Unlike the other categories in this thesis, this category will be divided in two due to a difference between the genders. This is because the freedom which men and women experienced while stationed in Egypt differed, and thus, it is necessary to look at them separately before looking at this category as a whole. Therefore, the first part of the chapter looks more into the men's experiences, referred to as "fleshpots",¹¹ while the second part looks into the experiences of the women stationed in Egypt, referred to as "free spaces".

Everything that has to do with the luxuries that the military personnel experienced will be explored, as well as everything that has to do with or hints at anything morally promiscuous. The research literature suggests that a large number of men stationed in Egypt during the war

¹⁰ Hadaway, Stuart "Life in the EEF" *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* <https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#> (21.11.19)

¹¹ The term "fleshpot" was used throughout the war in reference to the experiences of the soldiers in Egypt and is defined as two different things; "bodily comfort: luxury" and "a place of lascivious entertainment" *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* s.v. "Fleshpot". 28.10.19. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fleshpot>

in one way or another fell under this category during their stay, however, that doesn't necessarily mean that they sent accounts of this type of freedom back home. The freedom which women experienced during their stay in Egypt was different to the men because of their different roles in society. All accounts that portray Egypt as a place of freedom, either a freedom to travel for the women or the freedom to associate more freely with the opposite sex will be included here.

The final category in this thesis deals with Egypt as a part of the British Empire. While Egypt was a protectorate and not an actual colony of the British Empire during the war, this section looks into instances where Egypt is portrayed as just another part of the British Empire. This can either be portrayed through the building of infrastructure and British administrative structures mentioned in Egypt. In this analysis I also include the attitudes of the military personnel displayed through their letters and post cards.

Methodology and sources

When working with the sources in this thesis, I have been looking for tropes¹² or stereotypical depictions¹³ which indicates a specific view of Egypt. An example is taking a picture in front of the pyramids which is a classic trope when it comes to Egypt as a tourist spot. When I see pictures that fit this trope, I can easily classify them as a part of the tourist view of Egypt and put them into that category. Tropes and stereotypical depictions often overlap as they both refer to an established idea or an image which recurs in the description of a place or an experience. They are often portrayed through literature, like travelogues and storybooks, and can affect a person either consciously or subconsciously. When corresponding with those at home, established tropes and stereotypes could be something which affected the military personnel and their portrayal of Egypt. To be clear, I do not intend to analyse how these tropes and stereotypes came into existence as that will not answer my research question. Instead, I will look for these already established tropes or stereotypes as I sort through the source material in order to point out how they further developed the image of Egypt after WWI.

¹² A trope is defined as "a recurrent or overused theme or device; a motif" *Oxford Dictionaries* s.v. "Trope". 27.11.20 <https://www.lexico.com/definition/trope>

¹³ A stereotype is defined as "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" *Oxford dictionaries* s.v. "Stereotype". 27.11.20 <https://www.lexico.com/definition/stereotype>

As mentioned, this thesis will analyse the various ways which the military personnel presented Egypt to those back at home. Therefore, the sources which will be used are letters, postcards and pictures which the military personnel sent home during the First World War. However, before we look at what sources will be used in this thesis, it is important to emphasize the impact the outbreak of COVID-19 had on this thesis. Originally, I was planning to visit various archives and libraries in England and Wales in order to gather a broad array of sources to write this thesis. However, because of the situation with COVID-19 and its impact on Europe, this research trip wasn't possible. Naturally, the source material that I could use to answer the research question was therefore limited and will impact this thesis.

Through the combination of what was available for me through online archives as well as examples used in the research literature, I did manage to gather enough material to answer my original research question. This does, however, mean that some of the sources that I will be using in this thesis are not presented first-hand, but rather second-hand through the research literature. Quoting source material from works published by other authors must be done with caution. First of all, I do not know the full extent of the source, beyond what the author has chosen to include. Secondly, there is the risk of being influenced by the author's interpretations.

The main archive used for this thesis is the Great War Archive. This archive was created by the University of Oxford and the non-profit company JISC in 2008. It was created as a community collection, which was a part of the First World War Poetry Digital Archive, launched on 11th November 2008. Through submissions by the general public between March and June 2008, the goal was to collect sources that had not previously been publicly available and upload them in an online archive for anyone to access.¹⁴ Most of the letters used in this thesis are from this archive, as are some of the postcards. In extension of this collective collection, the Great War Archive created a group on the American image and video hosting site Flickr. This group was created for anyone wishing to submit or share photographs from the First World War with the project after June 2008.¹⁵ Most of the photographs included in this thesis are from this Flickr group.

¹⁴ The First World War Poetry Digital Archive "The Great War Archive" 20.11.20 <http://www.1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa> ; The First World War Poetry Digital Archive "About" 20.11.20 <http://www.1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/about>

¹⁵ The original submission period of sources to this archive was between March and June 2008, after that the general public was invited to share their pictures and sources on the Flickr group instead. The First World War

Throughout the work with this thesis, there have been three military personnel who have been of specific interest. This is either due to the sheer number of letters they have written or the number of pictures they have taken. These three will be presented here as they all feature, at times heavily, in all of the analysis chapters as well.

The first of these people is Dr. W. Roy Blore. Blore was a British doctor who fought on both the Western and Middle Eastern front during the war. In the Middle East he took part in the fighting at Gallipoli as a Medical Officer for the military ambulance and was evacuated from Sulva Bay in 1916 to Egypt. In Egypt he was stationed in one of the camps just outside of Alexandria, often referred to as “Alex” in his letters. Blore frequented Alexandria and its clubs often and spent some time travelling around Egypt during the war. In addition to keeping a diary, Blore often wrote letters home to his mother, detailing his various wartime adventures. He also sent some postcards home during the war, and it is these postcards, along with several of his letters, that are included in this thesis. Blore travelled to the Western Front somewhere around the end of 1916 as when he wrote a letter home to his father in May 1917, it was implied that they had already been there for some time.¹⁶

The second person who is prominent in this thesis is Private Edwin T. Jones. Jones served in the First World War as part of the 3rd County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) which became a part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Jones himself became a part of the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade but was put out of action because of an accident with a camel in 1917. He is also believed to have contracted malaria during this time, and after recovering, he was declared unfit for active service. The remainder of the war Jones was stationed as part of the administration at a prisoner of war camp in Ras-el-Tin, Alexandria. The only sources I have from Jones are letters which he sent home to his wife, however, through his letters, it is clear that he also sent letters and sketches home to other family members. In his letters, Jones often sketched scenes from where he was or small drawings to illustrate his stories. While Jones didn't take any photographs, these sketches and drawings offer a unique way to see what Jones thought about and experienced in Egypt.

Poetry Digital Archive “The Great War Archive” 20.11.20 <http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/> ; Flickr “The Great War Archive Flickr Group” 20.11.20 <https://www.flickr.com/groups/greatwararchive/>

¹⁶ The First World War Poetry Digital Archive “Letter from Dr W.R. Blore M.C. RAMC” 20.11.20 <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/document/9303>

The third and final person is Edith Russell who worked as a trained nurse in the UK and served as a military nurse in Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve (QAIMNS(R)) during the First World War. She was stationed several places throughout the war, one of those places was Egypt, where she was from 1916 to 1917. In Egypt Russell worked in first Cairo and then Alexandria where she was stationed at the military hospital Ras-el-Tin. This hospital treated patients from all the Middle Eastern fronts.¹⁷ Through the war she took a lot of photographs which she later put into an album, and it is from this album most of the photographs in this thesis comes from. Russell was also an avid collector of postcards and these postcards were also included in her album. Her grandson, Stuart James, scanned and uploaded these pictures and postcards to Flickr and included them in the Great War Archive Flickr Group, which is how I found them. I have been in contact with Stuart James and he has given me his permission to use these photographs in my thesis, which I am very grateful for.

Letters

Sending and receiving letters have been a popular mode of communication for centuries. As society developed, letters became cheaper and easier to send, making it available for an increasing number of people.¹⁸ During the First World War, writing letters home to family and friends was a widespread activity with the military personnel as it was the easiest way to keep in touch. A distinct writing style developed with this as soldiers created their own slang

¹⁷ Away from the Western Front "From Edinburgh to Egypt: Nurse Elsie Russel's war as seen through the lens" 20.11.20 <https://awayfromthewesternfront.org/research/women-away-western-front/from-edinburgh-to-egypt/>

¹⁸ Johnson, Alan. "World War One: How did 12 million letters a week reach soldiers?" *BBC News*. 20.11.20 <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25934407> ; Hanna, Martha. "War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front" in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. 20.11.20 https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_letters_communication_between_front_and_home_front

with words like “taube”¹⁹ and “blighty”²⁰ to refer to what they experienced.²¹ This slang might have been developed partly to avoid the letter censorship which increased during the war.

All the letters written by military personnel had to be approved by censors before they could be dispatched onwards. This often affected the letters themselves, either because they were censored, some were never even sent, or because the soldiers imposed self-censorship.²² Some soldiers even wondered openly in the letters they wrote how their letter would be read by the censors.²³ The censorship is therefore something to be aware of as one works with the letters to analyse what the letters say, or maybe doesn't say, about Egypt.

Another thing that has to be taken into account is who the recipient was of the letters. A father writing home to his child would most likely write in a very different way and discuss very different topics than he would with for example his wife. There is also the possibility that the military personnel chose to write in such a way as not to worry the recipient of the letter and therefore not give as truthful an account as they might have given otherwise.

¹⁹ “Taube” was military slang for any German plane. Originally, it was the name of the German monoplanes which were withdrawn from the war effort in early 1915, but by that point it had become adopted as an expression by British soldiers for any German planes. *Wikipedia*, s.v. «Etrich Taube». 27.11.20

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etrich_Taube; Walker, Julian “Trench talk: a guide to first world war slang” *The Guardian*. 27.11.20 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jul/23/first-world-war-slang-glossary>

²⁰ The word “blighty” is of Urdu origin, referring to anything “foreign”, initially British soldiers in India. However, this was adapted by British soldiers to refer to both Great Britain in general and to a wound that was serious enough to allow the soldier to travel back home to Great Britain. *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “Blighty” 27.11.20

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/blighty>; Walker, Julian “Trench talk: a guide to first world war slang” *The Guardian*. 27.11.20 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jul/23/first-world-war-slang-glossary> ;

McAlpine, Fraser “Why do the Brits call the U.K. ‘Blighty’?” BBC America 03.10.20

<https://www.bbcamerica.com/anglophenia/2014/08/brits-call-u-k-blighty>

²¹ Walker, Julian “Trench talk: a guide to first world war slang” *The Guardian*. 27.11.20

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jul/23/first-world-war-slang-glossary>

²² “I am afraid one is obliged by the censor to write the dullest possible letters when there is so much one could say & would like to. I expect you will have realized from the official communiqués something of what we are doing. When we meet again, I shall have much to tell you of the real thing as we saw it.” Sir Randolph Baker to his mother, Woodward, David R., and Woodward, D.R. *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East*. University Press of Kentucky, 2006. 68 ; Hanna, Martha. “War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front” in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. 20.11.20 https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_letters_communication_between_front_and_home_front

²³ “Do my letters (fragment missing) get censored dear, they much think I am a love sick coon, but of course I never put any information in them to cause trouble & no doubt they fee sloppy(?) at times, reckon after reading one of my letters they themselves start cuddling one another.» - Private Jones to his wife, 06.06.17

Postcards

Postcards are a special case as while they differ from letters and pictures, they are also a mixture of both. On a postcard there is both text and picture which may convey various views of the place visited. Typically, postcards are mass-produced and part of a preproduced image that the manufacturers, or tourist industry, wish to convey of a place or country. The postcards usually contain a specific, picturesque motif which was chosen in order to convey an already established look of the site, regardless of whether it was true or not. The motifs on these cards are typically quite picturesque and interesting, even exotic, depending on what type of image the sellers wished to convey. The motifs might also be enhanced, either through the printing process or through hand-colouring the cards afterwards.²⁴ Postcards could also work as “standardizations” – fixing a certain building or site in time, which opens the possibility for disappointment when one finally saw the motif in real life.

Postcards were incredibly popular at the start of the 20th century. It was used as a way to communicate with friends and family, but also as a way to collect and exchange cards. Others stored these cards away into albums or boxes in order to record their and their community’s own history.²⁵ Around this time, a new way of creating postcards became available through the company Kodak launching the NO. 3A Folding Pocket camera. The negatives from this camera were the same size as a typical postcard and could therefore be printed directly onto postcard paper and sent off. These postcards were cheap and convenient to send, and anything from scenic landscapes to portraits to current events could be printed onto them because of the new cameras.²⁶ Contrasting to the typical, mass-produced postcards, the soldiers themselves created these postcards and chose what motif they wanted. Therefore, they could offer a unique look at present day Egypt at the time and showcase things that might not have been on a postcard otherwise. At the same time, the photographer chose their motif just as they chose the postcard they would send, portraying the selected reality of the photographer rather than reality itself.

²⁴ Metropostcard.com “Hand Coloring” 20.11.20 <http://www.metropostcard.com/print12-handcolor.html> ; University Libraries “Creating Postcards” 20.11.20 <https://www.lib.umd.edu/postcards/printing-technology> ; Bogdan, Robert and Weseloh, Todd. *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People’s Photography*. Syracuse University Press 2006 48

²⁵ Bogdan m.fl. *Real Photo Postcard Guide 2*

²⁶ World Postcard Day(150 years of postcards) “History of Postcards” 20.11.20 <https://150yearsofpostcards.com/history>

Photographs

Photographs are the last category of sources which will be discussed and has already been discussed to some extent regarding the postcards. However, it is important to differentiate between the pictures taken for postcard motifs and other photographs. Some pictures may have been taken intended for postcard motifs, and then been discarded. Other photos may have been taken in order to document an activity or journey, or simply in order to preserve a memory. At the start of the war, amateur photography was a popular phenomenon, and many soldiers brought their own cameras along to what they expected would be a great adventure. Some hoped to be able to “record their own part in history”, maybe already being accustomed to taking their cameras on holiday with them.²⁷ As the war started, many soldiers documented what happened at the Western Front and sent those photographs home to publish in newspapers and magazines, being handsomely paid in return. However, as these images were uncensored, they might be of interest to the enemy. Furthermore, some feared that the soldiers would prefer to photograph the war rather than take part in it themselves. Therefore, on 22nd of December 1914, an official ban by the War Office was issued against soldier photography. War photography was to be left to Official War Photographers.²⁸

This ban was not as strict on the Middle Eastern Front as it was on the Western Front, partly because most of the Official War Photographers concentrated on the Western Front. Therefore the military personnel on the Middle Eastern front had much better opportunities to take pictures.²⁹ For many of the British military personnel serving in the First World War, their service was the first time they were able to travel outside of Great Britain. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they would want to take as many photos as possible to document everything they saw and experienced. However, as with letters and postcards, it is possible that at least some of them, consciously or unconsciously, applied some sort of censorship as to what they photographed, based on who would be seeing the pictures when they were back home again.

²⁷ During the war, one of the cameras by the company Kodak became especially popular among the soldiers because of its small size and low price that it became known as “the Soldier’s Kodak” Shepherd, Sarah. “Soldiering in Egypt”. *Jorneys Erased by Time: The rediscovered footprints of travellers in Egypt and the Near East*. Neil Cooke (ed.) ASTENE and Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, Oxford 59

²⁸ Nicholson *Solider tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 205-207

²⁹ Nicholson *Solider tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 205

The soldiers could also be influenced by fellow soldiers like 'Medico', an anonymous soldier, who wrote an article in *Amateur Photographer* magazine about how to take the best pictures during the war. In his article he included suggestions about what one should and shouldn't photograph, the "seamy side of the war" being something to avoid.³⁰ In addition to this, we have to consider what can be called the "cultural censor" in Egypt. While the military personnel might have experienced more of daily life in Egypt compared to the tourists, how much they saw is still limited. Both because of their own position as part of a British war effort and because of the local culture which limited the onlookers view of especially the women and families.

³⁰ Nicholson *Solider tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 207

Chapter 2: Historical background

To properly look into the historic background for this thesis, this overview will be divided into several sections. The first part will focus on Egypt as a country up until the First World War. The second part will focus on the First World War and its campaigns, including the campaigns on both the Western and on the Middle Eastern Front. This is because many of the military personnel that were stationed in Egypt during the war were directly affected by the Western Front, and they were probably kept up to date regarding what was going on there. The third section will focus on the effects the war had on Egypt, while the fourth section will focus the soldiers and nurses who were a part of the war effort. The final part will focus on the creation of a travel destination in Egypt up until the First World War.

Egypt 1869-1914

The Suez Canal and British invasion

In 1869, the Suez Canal opened, which was of great interest to Great Britain and its empire. This was because it offered them a more direct access overseas to the jewel in their crown: India. While Great Britain became a large shareholder of the canal in 1875, they chose to invade Egypt some years later, in 1882, after a period of political unrest. This was in order to maintain their own interests and influence in the country, as well as to maintain direct access to the Suez Canal. Through their control, various reforms meant to improve the lives of the local population were introduced in Egypt. In addition to this, Great Britain also bought a lot of the Egyptian debt which had been building up through the past century, which in turn eased the taxes in Egypt. At the same time, Egyptian nationalism grew which led to animosity towards the British occupation despite the new reforms and ease of taxes. Due to several incidents and unrest, a new legislative assembly was appointed in order to regain control.³¹ Egypt became part of what was called “Cape to Cairo”, which referred to a series of countries which stretched from Cape Town in the south to Cairo in the north which were all controlled by the British Empire in one way or another.³²

³¹ Hadaway, Stuart. *Pyramids and Feshpots: The Egyptian, Senussi and Eastern Mediterranean Campaigns, 1914-16*. Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2014. 25-28; Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. “Dinshaway Incident” URL: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Dinshaway-Incident> read 04.10.19 ; Vatikiotis, P.J. *The history of Egypt* (2nd ed., [The Weidenfeld and Nicolson Asia-Africa series]). London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1980. 70-124, 244-246

³² The Heritage Portal “The Cape to Cairo Railway Dream” 30.11.20
<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/cape-cairo-railway-dream>

First World War

When the First World War started, Great Britain was in a difficult situation. Egypt was under British influence and control, however at the same time, it was still officially a part of the Ottoman Empire. The Suez Canal was of vital importance for Great Britain, even more so after the outbreak of a war as the canal connected them to Australia and New Zealand as well. Therefore, when Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire at the end of 1914, they enforced martial law in Egypt and shortly afterwards proclaimed it as a protectorate under British rule. While declaring Egypt a protectorate, the British also pledged to keep the local population out of the war.³³

This pledge was the result of the concerns the British had surrounding their Egyptian protectorate: unrest and mistrust had been prominent in Egypt before the war and the British feared that the war effort would complicate their position further. Specifically, the British feared the possibility that the Ottoman Empire would call for jihad against their enemies.³⁴ This fear would prove to be valid as the Ottoman Empire declared jihad shortly afterwards. The British Empire would themselves end up breaking their promise to the Egyptian population not that long afterwards as they needed assistance to guard the Suez Canal among other things, creating a breeding ground for further animosity towards the British presence in Egypt.³⁵

Before the war, there was only a peacetime garrison of about 5000 British soldiers stationed in Egypt. Thus, reinforcements were needed, leading Great Britain to call upon forces from her empire. On August 4th, 1914, when Great Britain declared war on Germany, so did Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These three dominions immediately started to mobilize soldiers to contribute to the British war effort. On the same day, Great Britain also called on the help of the Indian people in the British war effort and later, when the Ottoman Empire proclaimed jihad, the British Empire promised to keep the holy cities of Mecca and Medina safe, securing the continued support of the Muslim population.³⁶

³³ “Recognizing the respect and veneration with which the Sultan is regarded by the Mahomedans of Egypt, [Great Britain] takes upon herself the sole burden of the present war without calling upon the Egyptian people for aid therein.” Quote by General Sir John Maxwell, from Rogan, Eugene. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. New York, New York: Basic, 2015. 69

³⁴ According to Rogan, the British as they feared that “bonds of religion would almost certainly outweigh respect for the colonial authorities” Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 69

³⁵ Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 69

³⁶ Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 70-71

The War in Europe

When the Austrian-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia in July 1914, the conflict quickly escalated into a European war due to the various alliances that existed between the great powers. Germany was in alliance with Austria-Hungary³⁷ while Russia supported Serbia, and as Russia was in alliance with the British Empire and France,³⁸ they became involved as well. At the start of the war, both sides viewed themselves as superior, assumed that the war would be short-lived, and planned according to this view.³⁹ Germany, fearing a two-front war against Russia and France, created and enacted the Schlieffen plan.⁴⁰ However, this plan failed, culminating with the First Battle of Marne where both sides in the aftermath dug trenches, officially starting what would be several years of trench warfare.⁴¹

Trench warfare and the Battles of Verdun and Somme

The First and Second Battle of Ypres followed in the later part of 1914 and mid 1915, which in turn brought in a new type of war technology with gases, chemical weapons and heavy artillery, though it was more or less a standstill on both sides. Indian and Canadian troops, as well as ANZAC⁴² troops later on, played an important part in the Allied war effort on the Western front, a front where the battles would prove to be very tedious. In 1916, the Battle of Verdun and Battle of Somme took place. Late February 1916, Germany launched an attack against the French town Verdun and its fortresses, however this campaign was not intended to take ground. Instead, the German General Erich von Falkenhayn wanted to use this campaign to bleed the French army dry.⁴³

However, this tactic was quickly forgotten in the heat of the moment as German forces advanced on Verdun. In July, the German offensive was called off as the plan against the French had failed, and the tide of the campaign had turned. The Battle of Somme, an Allied

³⁷ Referred to as the Central Powers.

³⁸ Referred to as the Triple entente or Allies

³⁹ Both sides assumed that the war would be over by Christmas time 1914. Robson, Stuart *The First World War*. Seminar Studies in History. London: Longman, 1998 1-3

⁴⁰ German forces were to invade Belgium and France, launching a single, massive attack that would bring a quick and decisive victory. The German forces would then be able to focus all their attention and power on attacking Russia. Robson *The First World War* 4-5

⁴¹ Stevenson, David *1914-1918: The history of the First World War* London: Penguin Books 2012. 44-99

⁴² ANZAC referred to the combined forces of the Australian and New Zealand troops, known as the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, ANZAC for short.

⁴³ As three fourths of the French Western Front divisions ended up serving in this battle, the General's plan could have become reality.

offensive intended to break through the German lines started, however this campaign wasn't any more successful than the German plan. Both sides suffered large casualties in return for minor advances. By mid-November 1916, the weather had become so bad that the fighting had to come to a halt, ending the Battle of Somme after 141 days with enormous casualties.⁴⁴ When the Battle of Verdun ended shortly afterwards, in December 1916, the lines were almost in the same place as they had been before the Battle of Verdun started.

Standstill and final offensives

Trench warfare continued in 1917 with the Nivelle offensive and the Third Battle of Ypres. The Nivelle offensive was a disaster, ending with French mutiny and ultimately a change in command. The Third Battle of Ypres, while at first appearing to be promising, ended up as yet another Allied failure, leaving the fronts at a standstill. While the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, it took time until they were mobilized and could join their allies at the Western Front. In the spring of 1918, Germany gathered all their forces and launched a spring offensive in order to finally turn the tide in their favour. However, the combined effort of the French, American and British Imperial forces quickly proved too much for the Germans. In retaliation, the Allied forces launched their own counterattack, the Battle of Amiens, which would turn out to be the opening of the Hundred Days campaign. Through this campaign, the Allied forces drove the German forces into retreat and in November 1918, the warring parties agreed to an armistice.⁴⁵

The campaigns of the Middle Eastern Front

While some of the military personnel that were stationed in or travelled through Egypt during the war took part in the battles on the Western Front as well, they were mainly active in the Middle Eastern campaigns. Egypt was the main base from where all the military campaigns in the Middle East were launched, including the campaign at Gallipoli and the campaign in Mesopotamia. Even the military personnel that didn't take part in any of the campaigns outside of Egypt were affected by them.

⁴⁴ British forces suffered just over 57 000 casualties, with 19 000 soldiers killed on just the first day of the campaign. By the end, in November 1916, over 3 million soldiers on both sides had taken part in this battle, of them over 1 million had either been wounded or killed. Robson *The First World War* 41-54 ; Stevenson *1914-1918* 162-178

⁴⁵ Robson *The First World War* 55-86 ; Stevenson *1914-1918* 320-500 ; History.com "World War I" 20.11.20 <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>

The Battle of the Suez Canal

At the start of 1915, shortly after the Ottoman Empire had entered the war, they launched an attack on the Suez Canal. Their objective was to gain control of the canal and cut Great Britain off from important parts of their empire. The British expected that an attack like this would come and fortified the canal with the help of their imperial troops while at the same time making sure that the canal could be used for shipping. When the Ottomans attacked the defences were prepared, therefore the battle was over in a few days, with the British Imperial forces emerging victorious.⁴⁶

The Gallipoli Campaign

A few months later, Great Britain launched their own campaign against the Ottoman Empire, however this campaign turned out to be much less successful. Following the stalemate on the Western Front and with Russia, Great Britain decided to launch an attack on the Dardanelles Straits. The goal was to attack the Turkish capital of Constantinople from there and relieve pressure on Russia with the possibility of removing the Ottoman Empire from the war. The Dardanelles Straits were protected by minefield, fortresses and gun emplacements, which complicated the situation for the British Naval forces. An Allied landing was decided after the Naval forces failed to destroy the Ottoman defences, however the Ottoman Empire had by this been alerted to the Allied attack.

Both the ANZACs and the Indian troops played an important part in this campaign, both having recently come from the military station in Egypt. The invasion was poorly planned as most of the troops had little experience in that type of warfare. Through several failed landings where the Allies underestimated the Ottoman forces, the Allied troops ended up trapped at three beaches: Sulva Bay, Helles and ANZAC Cove. By November 1915, a withdrawal of the Allied troops was decided, and the evacuation took place on 9th January 1916. Of 500 000 troops which had taken part in the campaign, over 220 000 had been wounded or killed. Most of the troops were evacuated to Egypt, reinforcing the troops which were already stationed there.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ National Army Museum. "Egypt and the Palestine Campaign" 20.11.20 <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/egypt-and-palestine-campaign> ; Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 58-64

⁴⁷ Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 129-159, 185-217 ; History.com "World War 1" 20.11.20 <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>

The Mesopotamia campaign

At the start of the war, Britain strengthened its forces in Mesopotamia in order to protect their oil reserves there. In 1915, Britain started a campaign to strengthen their own position in Mesopotamia and help rally the Arabs against the Turks. An Indian division was sent up the River Tigris and captured the city of Amara in mid 1915. They pushed onwards to Kut-al-Amara, which they reached in September, and planned to capture Baghdad from there. However, a single division quickly proved to not be enough, especially as sickness and lack of reserves caught up to them on their way towards Baghdad. Mid-November, the division was blocked by Ottoman forces and retreated back to Kut-al-Amara. The Ottoman forces followed and in early December started a siege of Kut-al-Amara.

Several British divisions tried to fight their way to Kut-al-Amara and free their starving comrades, but they were stopped by Ottoman forces each time. The siege ended up lasting until the end of April 1916 when the division surrendered and went into Ottoman captivity. The relief forces which had tried to relieve the division at Kut-al-Amara regrouped under new leadership and in December 1916 started another advance up the River Tigris. By late February 1917, British troops retook Kut-al-Amara, and in mid-March they took Baghdad. The fighting came to a standstill as troops were needed at the Western Front, however the fighting resumed in late 1918 at the same time as the British also pushed into Syria.⁴⁸

The Senussi campaign

In late 1915, the Ottomans also stirred up a revolt among the Senussi tribe in Libya against the Allied forces in Egypt. At the time, most of the troops which had been stationed in Egypt were off fighting at Gallipoli, leaving a limited number of troops to fend off this threat. Therefore, the fighting lasted for longer than what might have happened without the Gallipoli campaign. The fighting against the Senussi lasted until late February 1916 when the British troops, reinforced with troops from the Gallipoli campaign, defeated the Senussi tribesmen.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 217-275 ; History.com “World War 1” 20.11.20

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>

⁴⁹ National Army Museum. “Egypt and the Palestine Campaign” 20.11.20 <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/egypt-and-palestine-campaign> ; Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 98-107 ; Rogan *The Fall of the Ottomans* 238-241

Sinai and Palestine campaign

After the failure at Gallipoli, the Allied forces looked for another way to attack the Ottomans as they wanted to keep the Suez Canal secure. The forces stationed in Egypt were regrouped into the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) with the objective of pushing the Ottoman forces out of the Sinai peninsula. The Arab Revolt, led by T. E. Lawrence and Faisal, son of the Sharif of Mecca, started during this time in Hejaz and was assisted by troops from the EEF. Through spring and summer 1916, the EEF fought against the Ottoman forces across the Sinai, occupying Romani and making the Ottomans retreat from the area. The EEF followed after them and pushed them back all the way to the border of Palestine. After several battles in the eastern part of the Sinai desert, the EEF managed to expel the Ottoman troops from the Sinai desert in January 1917.

Two failed attacks on Gaza followed during the spring and after a change in leadership, a third attack on Gaza was launched. This time, the attack was aided by the Arab revolt and proved to be successful. Early November, Beersheba was overtaken by the EEF and the Third Battle of Gaza had been won. The EEF pressed on, launching a successful offensive through Palestine and they entered Jerusalem on 11 December 1917. Because troops were needed at the Western Front, the campaign in Palestine didn't resume until September 1918 when the EEF pushed northwards and defeated the last Ottoman defences at the Battle of Megiddo, enabling them to push onwards into Syria. Damascus was taken on 1 October and Aleppo on 23 October, and combined with the defeat in Mesopotamia, the Ottoman Empire sued for peace.⁵⁰

The war effect on Egypt

During the war, Egypt was used as a military base and training ground for the troops of the Empire. It was both an administrative place used to plan and launch the various campaigns in the Middle East, and as a temporary stop for troops to train and recuperate on their way to the different fronts. At first, this presence was beneficial for the Egyptian economy as, although war had cut off some business opportunities overseas, the British army's presence created a new market. This market was both for the individual soldiers and their interest in Egyptian goods and services, as well as the army's use of the Egyptian workforce. However, as the war

⁵⁰ National Army Museum. "Egypt and the Palestine Campaign" 20.11.20 <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/egypt-and-palestine-campaign> ; Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 107-161 ; Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 33-207

went on and the Middle Eastern front was moved further away from Egyptian soil, the situation changed. As the Egyptian workers were expected to work further away from Egypt, discontentment arose once more. The massive amount of food and foodstuff needed eventually lead to food shortages and rising prices. Combined with the British focus on the war campaigns rather than governing the country, the situation further deteriorated.⁵¹

Demobilization

Despite the First World War officially ending in November 1918, demobilizing the entire army would naturally take time. British forces totalled about 3.8 million at the time of the Armistice which already would take a long time to demobilize. In addition, the Secretary of War, Alfred Milner, prioritized the industrial needs first, which in reality meant that many of those last mobilized were the first to be called back. In December 1918, Winston Churchill was elected new Secretary of War in the first post-war election. He changed the demobilization plans and instead emphasized the length of mobilization and number of wounds.⁵² Furthermore, the situation in Egypt was tense after the war, leading to troops having to stay on because of national unrest. In March 1919 the Egyptian Revolt broke out which further escalated the situation, and by May 1919 General Allenby wrote several letters to the War Office in order to “accelerate the demobilization of his men”.⁵³ Many of these men had been stationed in Egypt since 1914 or 1915, and there were also 10 000 men still on administrative duty.⁵⁴ The military personnel were eventually demobilized, however the British still maintained a firm influence on the country.

The soldiers

At the outbreak of the First World War, most of the British forces consisted of volunteers. In the early stages of the war, it was widely believed by both sides of the frontline that the war would only last a few months. This, however, would quickly prove to be wrong and in late 1915, Great Britain enforced conscription of all single men between 18 and 41 in order to keep up the flow of soldiers needed for the war effort. Conscription had to be further

⁵¹ Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 162-163

⁵² Barry, Gearóid “Demobilization” in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. 28.09.20 <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/demobilization>

⁵³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 209

⁵⁴ “He(General Allenby) pointed out that he had 26 000 1914 men and 30 000 1915 men in addition to 10 000 men in administrative service. Many of his soldiers consequently believed that the War Office was not playing fair with its reluctance to send out drafts and reinforcements to allow them to be demobilized.” Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 209

expanded by 1916 which then included all married men between 18 and 41 as well. By the end of the war, in 1918, the age limit for the conscripts had been raised to 51 years.

The QAIMNS and VADs⁵⁵

Being a trained nurse was a rather new profession by the outbreak of the First World War. Only around 60 years earlier, in the 1850s with the Crimean War, Nightingale and her trained nurses were acknowledged for the first time. They helped revolutionize the care of the sick and wounded, especially through their focus on sanitation, and in 1859 she wrote her first of several books called “Notes on Nursing”. By 1860 Nightingale had helped to establish an Army Training School for military nurses and in 1881, the Army Nursing Service was established, which was the forerunner for the QAIMNS. They took a part in the British invasion of Egypt and the Sudan in 1882 and served with the British Army during the Anglo-Boer War.

In 1902, Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service was established under the newly crowned British queen, Alexandra, who was also president of the organisation until her death. At the start of the war, QAIMNS had just under 300 nurses while at the end of the war, in 1918, the number of trained nurses in QAIMNS, including reservists, had risen to 10 404. These nurses served on all the fronts of the war and were a vital part of the British war effort. During the war, almost 200 nurses died and while they were well trained, the new technology of the warfare also brought new challenges for the military nurses.⁵⁶ In addition to this, thousands of British women volunteered alongside the QAIMNS as Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs). These women volunteered through the Red Cross and the Order of St. John where they were taught first aid, home nursing and hygiene and had to pass a final exam in order to be able to serve.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ QAIMNS is short for Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Nursing Service while VADs is short for Voluntary Aid Detachments.

⁵⁶ Museum of Military Medicine “History of Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps” 20.11.20 <https://museumofmilitarymedicine.org.uk/about/corps-history/history-of-queen-alexandras-royal-army-nursing-corps/> ; The British Army “Nursing QARANC” 20.11.20 <https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/army-medical-services/queen-alexandras-royal-army-nursing-corps/>

⁵⁷ British Red Cross “Volunteers during the First World War” 20.11.20 <https://vad.redcross.org.uk/Volunteers-during-WW1> ; Away from the Western Front “Women Away from the Western Front” 20.11.20 <https://awayfromthewesternfront.org/research/women-away-western-front/>

Destination Egypt

Egypt has always been of great interest and fascination in European minds because of its rich history and exotic sights. Ancient Egypt especially has been greatly featured in European pop culture, one example of this is Shakespeare's play "Antony and Cleopatra". Egypt was brought back into the Western imagination when Napoleon invaded the country in 1798. A team of scientists accompanied Napoleon to Egypt and catalogued and documented everything they saw. During this invasion, the Rosetta Stone was discovered, a stone which ultimately solved the mystery of the hieroglyphic script and advanced the interest in Egyptology.⁵⁸

In 1801, British forces defeated Napoleon's forces in Egypt, defending their own interests. And while the British forces withdrew from the country quickly afterwards, through this expedition, Egypt had re-emerged as a place of interest in the British imagination, leading the Brits to take the Rosetta stone with them. Throughout the 19th century, Egyptology as a science blossomed as more and more people travelled to Egypt. Along with the Rosetta Stone, a vast number of artefacts were taken from Egypt and installed in the British Museum. This furthered the interest and fascination with Egypt, inspiring frequent visitors of the British museum like authors Percy Bysshe Shelley and Horace Smith who each wrote a sonnet titled "Ozymandias".⁵⁹

Grand tours

Another part of society which was affected by this interest in Egypt was the travelling industry. At the turn of the 18th century a new phenomenon called "*Grand tours*" had developed. The trip was intended as educational, originally set to the European continent, and reserved for the young upper-class men of British society. The industrial revolution brought with it a transformation of transportation and technology, further advancing these tours. By the 19th century, an emerging middle class with time and resources, combined with the development of Egyptology played its part, developing the "*Grand tours*" to include women

⁵⁸ Reid, Donald Malcolm. *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*. Berkeley: U of California, 2002. 1 ; Lanoie *Inventing Egypt for the Emerging British Travel Class*

⁵⁹ Ozymandias was the Greek name for the pharaoh Rameses II in the antique times. Ancient history encyclopedia s.v. "Ramesses 2" by Joshua J. Mark https://www.ancient.eu/Ramesses_II/ 12.11.19

and families as well, with the journeys extending outside the European continent. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made it easier than ever before to travel to Egypt and the Middle East and Egypt gained increasingly more publicity as a travel destination.

Around this time, the company Thomas Cook & Son, a travelling company which had developed in Great Britain for the past decades, set up their first organized tour to Egypt. By the 1880s, these tours had gained wide popularity in Great Britain, offering the tourists to travel in what had by then become established tourist routes and tracks in Egypt and the Middle East. Alongside the establishment of these tours, the local Egyptian market developed in order to receive these groups. The hotels and resorts were established in order to meet the rising need for accommodation and entertainment. More and more Egyptians took jobs as dragomans or local guides, and Egypt developed to be one of the first modern tourist destinations in the worlds. ⁶⁰

A certain image or view of Egypt also developed around this time and influenced Egypt as a tourist destination as the travellers, after having read various travelogues, wanted to have the same experiences. Amelia Edwards was the author of one of these famous travelogues called “A thousand miles up the Nile.” Published in 1877, this book along with so many of its contemporaries helped produce a distinct image or view of Egypt in the British mind. This image was influenced by the science of Egyptology, which had a heavy focus on Ancient Egypt and all the new discoveries and excavations of the 19th century. Thomas Cook and his company mainly catered to and built their tours around this manufactured image of Egypt. ⁶¹

The creation of Egypt as a tourist destination was a development which happened over time, in part due to a lasting fascination with Egypt in the British and West European minds. This fascination with Egypt can be considered a paradox since the country was close enough to geographically and featured enough in pop culture and history to be familiar, but at the same time, it was exotic and different enough in Western imagination to retain a certain mystery about it. This combination of familiarity and mystery is what proved to be irresistible to so many European travellers, and it was this preproduced image of Egypt which the British

⁶⁰ Withey, Lynne. *Grand tours and Cook's tours: A history of leisure travel, 1750 to 1915*. New York: Morrow. 1997. 3-7, 58-60; Hunter *Tourism and Empire* 29

⁶¹ Hunter *Tourism and Empire* 45;

military personnel carried with them when they took part in the British war effort in Egypt during the First World War.

Chapter 3: Egypt as the tourist spot and antique land

*“For in simple truth we had drifted hither by accident, with no excuse of health, or business, or any serious object whatever; and had just taken refuge in Egypt as one might turn aside into the Burlington Arcade or the Passage des Panoramas – to get out of the rain... Here, then, without definite plans, outfit, or any kind of Oriental experience, behold us arrived in Cairo on the 29th of November 1873, literally and most prosaically in search of fine weather.”*⁶² – Amelia Edwards, *A thousand miles up the Nile*.

The military personnel who arrived in Egypt during the First World War were hardly searching for fine weather. However, there are similarities in the way Amelia Edwards and the British military personnel experienced Egypt. Neither these soldiers nor Edwards quite knew what to expect from Egypt, and in many cases, they might have gotten more than they bargained for. By the time the British troops arrived in Egypt, Amelia Edwards was a household name. Her travelogue was well-known in England, with a high probability that many of the troops had read it as well.⁶³ Although almost half a century separated Edwards and military personnel, their stay may have ended up more similar than they first expected.

Throughout the war, tourist operators that normally would have catered to British and Western tourists changed their tactics. After all, directly in relation to the war, a new flood of potential customers arrived.⁶⁴ Foreigners who might end up staying much longer than the typical Western tourists, and with money no less. At the same time, there was a clear difference between these customers. Sarah Shepherd, author of the article “Soldiering in Egypt”, wrote that there was a huge difference in the economic situation of the British soldiers contra the other soldiers from the commonwealth. She emphasized that the ANZAC in particular were paid up to six times more than to their British counterparts. This difference in economic situation would naturally affect how these soldiers came to experience Egypt,

⁶² This is from a travel narrative by Amelia Edwards, a famous British traveller, upon her first arrival in Egypt. Edwards, Amelia. *A thousand miles up the Nile*. Leipzig Bernhard Tauchnitz. 1878. 19

⁶³ Lanoie *Inventing Egypt for the Emerging British Travel Class* 161

⁶⁴ According to Sarah Shepherd, as many as 400,000 troops under imperial command were stationed in Egypt in 1918. Shepherd, Sarah. “Soldiering in Egypt”, *Journeys Erased by Time: The Rediscovered Footprints of Travellers in Egypt and the Near East*, Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2019. 59

especially as many of the tourist operators then chose to cater to the ANZAC over the British soldiers when this economic situation became known.⁶⁵

This chapter therefore seeks to explore how the WW1 British military personnel experienced Egypt as a touristic site. The definition for this category is as follows: all the descriptions – in text and photo – that show Egypt in a typically touristy way will be used. That includes pictures taken in front of the sphinx and pyramids as well as letters detailing Egypt as a beautiful and picturesque country. I will also include accounts that compare Egypt to another tourist destination and following tourist tracks established by pre-war tourists and travel agencies. This also includes Egypt as an archaeological site as archaeology and tourism is very much connected in creating this picture of Egypt.

Letters

Dr Blore's correspondence with his mother

As mentioned in chapter 1, Dr. W. Roy Blore was stationed in Egypt after evacuating from Sulva Bay in 1916. While there, he took at least one trip to Cairo and the surrounding areas, and he frequented Alexandria regularly. Based on Blore's letters, it seems that his stay in Egypt was marked less by active duty, and more by long periods of waiting, standing by in case there was a need for his medical expertise. This may be a reason why he frequented Alexandria and the clubs there often. The letters also indicate that he had more than enough time and resources to travel about as a tourist.

An interesting point in these letters is that Blore's writing style differed based on what he wrote about. An example is when he in a letter home to his mother dated March 15th 1916 wrote about when he went out fishing to pass the time:

“A few days ago I went fishing to relieve the monotony a bit, between tea + dinner we went out in a small row boat in the hope of being able to get a little fish, but although there were three of us, we did not have any success. But after dinner we went out again, & fastened up to a barge, and after about four hours strenuous work managed to land five fish, none of them very big, but still they helped to give us a bit of change of

⁶⁵ Shepherd *Soldiering in Egypt* 67-68

diet. There are any amount of fish, but they do not seem to be too anxious to be caught, for some reason or other.”⁶⁶

Fishing as a part of tourism is clearly displayed here as they didn't fish in order to eat, but rather as a recreational activity; something to do. Since Blore wrote that they “fastened up to a barge”, they were probably fishing on some sort of river or canal, yet he included very few descriptions. This might simply be because it wasn't as eventful as what he would continue to write about in his letter or simply not as relevant to detail to his mother. It appears that this might have been more an ironic remark of what they filled a boring day with as he referred to the fishing as “four hours of strenuous work” despite the fact that they had been freeloading on the back of a barge.

The rest of the letter focuses on Blore's stay in Cairo which lasted only a couple of days:

“I mentioned in my last letter that I hoped to get up to Cairo on leave soon, and since writing I have been up there for two days. It is a rather long journey, three or four hours, but still that does not worry us very much. I went up about mid-day, and arrived in time to get tea, had the next two days in Cairo, and left early the morning after, and we had a jolly good time of it. This is the first leave I have had since I was in London with you last June, so it was a pretty nice change. From what I had seen of Egypt, & of Alex especially, I had not been able to understand why people should want to winter in Egypt, apart from the weather, but a short stay at Cairo soon enlightened me, for it is a delightful place, altogether different to Alex. It is really quite a fine city, with good parks, fine streets & shops, & good buildings, and great big hotels.”⁶⁷

Blore quite clearly favoured Cairo over Alexandria. Though it is not explicitly stated, it can be reasoned that it was because Cairo was more “authentically Egyptian than Alexandria”. The latter which, at this time, resembled more a European city than an Egyptian one.⁶⁸ From this paragraph, there are several things that we're told, either explicitly or implicitly. Firstly, it wasn't typical for a soldier stationed in Egypt to actually get leave as Blore did. This letter was written in the spring of 1916, and as he wrote that he hasn't had a leave since last June

⁶⁶ 15.03.1916, Dr W.R. Blore to his mother

⁶⁷ 15.03.1916, Dr. W.R. Blore to his mother

⁶⁸ Fawaz, Leila Tarazi *A Land of Aching Hearts* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 2014 14-15

1915, it appears that obtaining a leave, even to explore the country, was not the norm. David R. Woodward writes about the difficulty of getting military leaves in his book “Hell in the Holy Land”. Woodward writes that when General Allenby visited Major General S. W. Hare and his brigade in 1917, Allenby commented that the men looked fit but tired. The following exchange was witnessed by Major Arthur Frederick Stanley Clarke of the same brigade:

“They have had no leave for over a year, Sir”, answered our General Hare.

Explosion “Why?”

“Not allowed by G.H.Q., Sir.”

“Oh!” Explosion finished.

A week later, Clarke and his men were sent to a holiday camp on the sea.⁶⁹

Woodward continues by writing that “many soldiers could not afford a visit to Cairo or other Egyptian cities, so holiday camps had been established on the coast where it was possible for men to have their clothes fumigated and cleaned. For the first time in weeks, many soldiers also enjoyed feeling really clean because of ready access to the sea.”⁷⁰ Thus, it is possible that because Blore was a doctor, he was able to go on leave at times when the regular soldier could not. This demonstrates that rank affected the stay of military personnel in Egypt, and to an extent, their view of Egypt as well.

Secondly, from Blore’s way of writing it is clear that he didn’t have any concerns over how he was to travel to Cairo. The only minor thing that he wrote about was the length of the journey, three or four hours, though he wrote that “still that does not worry us very much”. The way Blore chose to contrast Cairo with Alexandria and the rest of what he had seen of Egypt is also interesting. While he didn’t explicitly write anything about Alexandria in that paragraph, it is clear that he was not impressed when he visited. As the camp was on the outskirts of Alexandria, Blore visited the city quite a lot, yet it wasn’t until he arrived in Cairo that he was “enlightened” as to why many Britons chose to pass the winter in Egypt.

Blore was honest in his opinion, having clearly given some thought to the possibility of passing the winter in Egypt previously. It is not surprising that Blore reflected on spending the winter in Egypt as it had been a phenomenon among the upper class for about half a century

⁶⁹ Major Arthur Frederick Stanley Clarke quoted in Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 98

⁷⁰ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 98

at this point. Based on the quote it seems like he had certain expectations when he arrived in Egypt, and that these were different from what he would expect of a city in Great Britain. Then, as he visited Cairo, he was very impressed, remarking that “it is a delightful place” and that “it is really quite a fine city”. While his descriptions of the city were brief, his level of detail must be read as high praise, especially in contrast to his previous fishing experience outside Alexandria.

Because Blore and his companions were military personnel, they were able to stay “in the best hotels” according to Blore. He noted that the hotels had to charge what he called a “uniform price for military, that is to say they are not allowed to charge above a fixed sum”.⁷¹ He later continued that the price for their “jolly comfortable room”, all meals included, was “wonderfully cheap”, commenting that it would probably be twice as expensive in peacetime. He was able to stay at a hotel called the Grand Continental which was one of Egypt’s most renowned hotels. Blore wrote about the luxury of sleeping in a proper bedroom, taking a “real bath” and “dining in a fine dining room, with an orchestra to help you to digest your food instead of sand, also a pretty welcome change”. From this description it is clear that the military personnel in Egypt had a pretty simplistic lifestyle, which might, in turn, affect their opinion of the country. At the same time, the luxury which some of them, like Blore, experienced might have left them with a more positive view of Egypt than the personnel who were not able to travel or stay at such hotels.

Blore wrote that he and his companions spent some time exploring Cairo, mentioning briefly all the places he visited without much detail. The fact that he chose to be so brief in regard to all the buildings he visited, finishing the sentence with “& so forth” indicates that the person he was writing to, his mother, had some knowledge about Egypt as well. It is interesting that he chose to be so brief despite declaring Cairo earlier in the letter to be “a delightful place”. He did mention that they weren’t able to visit a museum. This probably refers to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo which opened in 1902 and was a major “tourist attraction” from the start.

What is clear, based on how he wrote, is that Blore intended to take another leave soon after to visit Cairo once more. Despite the fact that he had not been on leave for almost a year, he seemed to think that taking another leave in the near future was possible. This can either say

⁷¹ Taking their salary and his position into consideration, this price might still have been too expensive for privates.

something about Blore's high position in the military, or about the current situation in military Egypt at that time. When writing this letter, he could have believed that there was no need for him as a doctor anytime soon.

Blore's visit to the native bazaar was explained in more detail, though again Blore simply called the bazaar a "wonderful place", commenting that if you wanted to get everything you wanted, you'd need more money than the Bank of England. Blore and his companions visiting and exploring the bazaar was a very typical tourist thing to do. Especially as he then described them shopping around, looking for souvenirs for those back at home like typical tourists. His main focus was on the things he did and didn't buy to his mother, the recipient of the letter. He also remarked on the price of the various things found at the market, stating that

"Of course, one wants to know a bit about the value of the things there before one goes in for much buying, and none of us had any idea at all, so we left the more expensive things severely alone, such as a small silk rug we saw, for which they wanted a paltry £500, explaining that it had 530 stitches to the square inch, it was certainly a very pretty thing, but we didn't think we knew quite enough about it to buy it without some further advice on the subject. There was also some very fine metal work, but I didn't see how it could get home very well, so I left it for a future occasion".⁷²

Blore's comments could either be interpreted as him noticing the high prices, joking that a small silk rug cost "only" £500, or he could be serious in his comment, indicating that he himself either had a lot of money or came from a wealthy family. If Blore was joking about the "low" price, he might've been familiar with and hinting to the process of haggling which often happened in bazaars and still is a part of the bazaar experience to this day.⁷³ However, as Blore was most likely from a wealthy family, perhaps upper middle class or upper class, it naturally influenced the way he viewed and wrote about Egypt.

Just like the tourists visiting Egypt both before and after the war, Blore and his companions followed what seems to be a well-trodden tourist track. The last part of his letter contains his

⁷² 15.03.1916, Dr. W.R. Blore to his mother

⁷³ The process that the seller requests a very high price for something which the buyer then bargains over, until they finally agree on a lower price than the seller first requested. Some sellers might try to guess the buyer's nationality, and then offered a "special" price for them because of it.

experience as he and his companions travelled to see the pyramids and various tombs surrounding Cairo. The first thing of note is that Blore didn't at all mention any difficulties in taking this journey out into the desert. Even when he described their journey to the pyramids, his descriptions seem almost nonchalant: "The next day we went out to see the pyramids, tombs & other odds & ends that are lying about on the desert".

The closest to any difficulty that they encountered was when they had to "procure" camels, but even that was only briefly mentioned. Along with them they had a guide and several people from the hotel "carrying and putting out the lunch as well as two small boys running around and taking care of the camels". While Blore commented that their party was quite the impressive sight, he also seemed to take it for granted that so many people attended them. He portrayed their large party, as well as them being able to both rent a car and return by train, as the most natural thing in the world. Their visit to the pyramids and tombs appeared effortless, yet he didn't mention seeing any other people there taking the same trip.

Instead he spent quite some time describing how disappointed they were by the pyramids, writing that "they[the pyramids] did not impress us as much as we expected to be impressed". Blore then went into detail to explain why he didn't find the pyramids that impressive before reflecting over the fact that as they came further away from the pyramids, the more formidable they became. Being disappointed by the pyramids was not uncommon at the time and could be counted as a trope. Other examples of this trope came from famous women travellers like Florence Nightingale and Harriet Martineau who both described their disappointment when seeing the pyramids.⁷⁴

Blore spent a long time writing about these pyramids, contemplating over how long it must have taken the Egyptians to build the pyramids as well. Unlike people today, Blore didn't appear to entertain the thought that the pyramids could have been built by slaves. That is quite surprising considering that Blore lived in a Great Britain which, to some extent, was much more affected by Christianity and the stories of the Bible than Great Britain today. As they were accompanied by a local guide, Blore might have questioned him. However, if so, it is

⁷⁴ "But Harriet Martineau confessed herself 'disappointed in the Pyramids now ... as we approached, they became less and less wonderful,' and Florence Nightingale, perhaps the most apt comparison, found them 'vulgar' and concluded that their offensive 'come-look-at-me appearance' was only tempered by the fact that as ancient mausoleums they were softened 'by the shadow of death which reigned over the place, as moonlight makes everything look beautiful.'" *First World War Nursing Narratives in the Middle East* p. 177

odd that the guide didn't mention how long it took to build a pyramid, though it is possible that he didn't know either.

Blore briefly mentioned that they had their lunch in the same house as “the man who has done all the excavating there,⁷⁵” though he didn't mention anything about who this man was or anything else about the excavation. Instead, he then continued to write about their journey and subsequent visit to Memphis where they “saw some statues of the various Ramases”. He wrote that the statues were cut out of solid stone and roughly estimated that they stood as tall as the Albert memorial. However, he admitted that the statues they saw were lying on the ground as the legs were missing, though it seems that the most important thing for Blore wasn't to be exact, but rather to help those at home envision the statues by comparing them to things they already knew.

Private Jones' letters to his wife

Private Edwin T. Jones served, as mentioned in chapter 1, in Egypt during the First World War. His first letter was sent May 26th, 1917 and was in part centred around the recreational art of fishing. It appears that, compared to Blore, Jones was more interested in fishing, at least by the way he described the excursion. Jones seemed to be quite excited by it and mentioned that they[the other soldiers] could “occasionally land a beauty” and that he “last night [...] was shown one just over 6 ½ lbs which had just been caught”. However, he didn't spend much ink writing about it, nor did he mention how they fished nor if they had any guide or even how they got a hold of fishing rods. While he did write that one could “get a nasty bite from them[the fish] if you're not careful”, it was otherwise framed as a relaxing way to pass the time.

The following is an excerpt from another letter by Private Jones, dated 7th of July 1917:

“The other day I was having a swim, with the usual amount of clothes on, which is nothing, & drying myself afterwards, who should come along unexpectedly but two girls, Europeans. (Of course I got in a terrible state & tried to hide my self behind a bootlace[sic]). It was a good job I was partially dressed, but I must be more cautious next time, they evidently must be nurses or ladies in charge of some institute having a

⁷⁵ In this instance, “there” is referring to Sakkarah Tombs which Blore and his companions just visited.

walk, & being a new place to me I thought I should not be disturbed. As I didn't know white women were living anywhere near here."⁷⁶



Figure 1: Drawing of and by Private Jones while he hid behind a rock from a couple of European women.

In this letter, Jones included a paragraph as well as a drawing of himself when he went out for a swim and had to hide from two European women out for a stroll. While both men and women at the time were expected to wear covering bathing suits when on the beach together, men might have been allowed to bathe in the nude if alone or on segregated beaches.⁷⁷ This is supported by the fact that Jones not only bathed nude, but also wrote home to his wife about it. Therefore, it is understandable that Jones displayed embarrassment when two European women suddenly walked by. What is interesting is that, based on the way he wrote, it seems that it was mainly the fact that these women were European which bothered Jones. That indicates that if it were European men or Egyptian women who had walked by, he wouldn't have reacted in the same way. Thus, it appears that Jones considered taking a nude bath in the ocean as something natural, even if it was in Egypt.

In the drawing that he made he not only included the women and a palm tree as well as himself hiding, but also what looks like a minaret and possibly a mosque in the direction the two ladies came from. Hence, he might have been at the outskirts of some town or city, which fit with the fact that he had to unexpectedly hide from a couple of European women. Jones openly wondered if the women might have been nurses or "ladies in charge of some institute"

⁷⁶ 07.07.17, Private Jones to his wife

⁷⁷ Kerley, Paul "How male and female bathing suits got smaller and smaller" *BBC News* 20.11.20
<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32817686>

nearby. He included a sunrise or sunset in the drawing, as well as his own clothes lying near him, the two women appearing quite elegant with umbrellas, hats and handbags. The way Jones portrayed the entire situation makes it rather comical while still conveying Egypt as a pretty tourist spot. In a later letter the same year he expressed his wish to get a hold of a sketchbook so that he could “jot down all the interesting things I come across here in Egypt”.⁷⁸

Driver Pashler's letters to his son Arnold

Harold Pashler was a driver for the Royal Horse Artillery in Egypt, and between 1916 and 1918 he sent several letters and postcards to his two sons Arnold and Ronald. It is implied that he might have sent letters to his wife as well, however as those haven't been digitalized I haven't been able to confirm that. When the following letter was sent, around 1917, Pashler's oldest son Arnold was ten years old.

“We are in xxxxx[word censored] on the desert, nothing to see for miles and miles but sand all hills & vales where it has drifted, the only things that grow here are palm trees, fig trees, & cactus, the first thing we did when we arrived here was to make some kind of shelter to shield us from the sun, so we went some little distance & cut some sticks off the fig trees & palm trees, stick these in the sand & spread a rug over the top, that is our house, three of us; well the figs are not what you imagine them to be, when growing they are like small green apples or walnuts, but when ripe they go black, inside are little red seeds, not very sweet, & not very nice, in fact I soon spit it out of my mouth. The cactus I don't know how to spell it, but you will know the kind of plant I mean, well this grows very thick & strong almost like our hedges in England, the palm trees grow in a valley & make a very nice shelter from the sun. [...] We are close by the sea, the breeze is lovely, most of the fellows bathe every day but it is very dangerous, there is such a strong under current, we also swim or wash the horses in the sea, although I have not as yet, & don't think I'm likely to either, sharkes have been very often seen come right up to the shore, & would soon eat a man up if once caught hold of him, so needless to say no one goes out very far. “⁷⁹

⁷⁸ 26.09.17, Private Jones to his wife

⁷⁹ 1917, Driver Pashler to his son

As this letter is written to a ten-year-old child, it is natural that Pashler would adopt a different writing style that he would to his wife or his brother. He might have selected what he wanted to write about based on the fact that it was his son at home who would be reading the letter. Pashler was both descriptive and brief in the way he wrote the letter. He mentioned a lot of different things all the while quickly moving on to the next. While he wasn't allowed to write where he was, he did write that they were close by the sea, and mentioned that "the breeze is lovely", adding that "most of the fellows bathe every day".

The letter relates a quite complex view of Egypt as it several places contains different views of the country all within one sentence. For instance, Pashler commented that most of the men bathed every day, and then immediately followed up with a comment about how he himself had no plans to swim because of the strong undercurrents and possibility of being eaten by a shark. It is possible that this last comment was added in order to make the experience sound more exciting for his son back at home. Especially since it contrasts with Jones who had no qualms with bathing and didn't even mention the possibility of sharks and undercurrents. Though, as Pashler wasn't able to write where he was, it is possible that he and Jones were in different parts of Egypt and therefore had different experiences.

Pashler's letter is rather explanatory in style, undoubtedly influenced by trying to explain his experiences to his young son, and as such, it might affect the way he portrayed Egypt to his reader. For example, living in a house made off sticks and a rug to hide from the sun might not seem as exciting to other readers as it would to a child. The way he wrote about the figs is also interesting as he went to great lengths to describe the experience, both with how the figs ripened and looked, but also how they tasted. He commented on how his son probably imagined the taste of figs contrary to how they actually tasted, and even said that he spit the fig out of his mouth because it tasted so bad. The other descriptions that he gave were either of how the palm trees gave nice shade against the sun, or how cactuses seemed similar to hedges in England. In writing like this, Pashler actualized the experience for the recipient that he was writing to by comparing things to everyday objects in England, similar to how Blore wrote to his mother. Thus, while Egypt appeared exotic, it all the same appeared homely and similar to England.

The following paragraph is from another letter by Pashler to his son Arnold, sent in October 1918:

“ My darling Arnold,

Well when riding out yesterday, I noticed the olive trees were full of berries similar to those of small damsons, the natives were gathering them to make olive oil. Also on the cactus hedges grows what we call a prickly pear, similar in shape to a pear, though quite a different flavour, but to gather them, one wants a thick pair of leather gloves on, on account of prickles, then peel them & eat them. Oranges are just getting ripe.”⁸⁰

This is a rather small section, but once again Harold Pashler was writing home to his son Arnold, using the same descriptive style as the previous letter. He compared olives to small damsons to explain what they looked like and why the Egyptians were gathering them. When mentioning the cactus, he referred to them as “cactus hedges” which might refer to actual cactus hedges, or it might relate back to his description of cactus in the previous letter where he compared the cactus to English hedges. The way he wrote about the prickly pears was also descriptive, and while he didn’t elaborate on the taste, the descriptions does leave a positive view of Egypt. Pashler didn’t mention any difficulty in obtaining these treats, and from the description of the prickly pear it is clear that he had already tried it. Even the small comment about the “Oranges are just getting ripe” might have been exciting to read. Both of these letters portray Egypt as an interesting and exciting place to visit, and while it was specifically written to keep the interest of a young boy, it presents Egypt in an overall favourable light to the reader.

Postcards

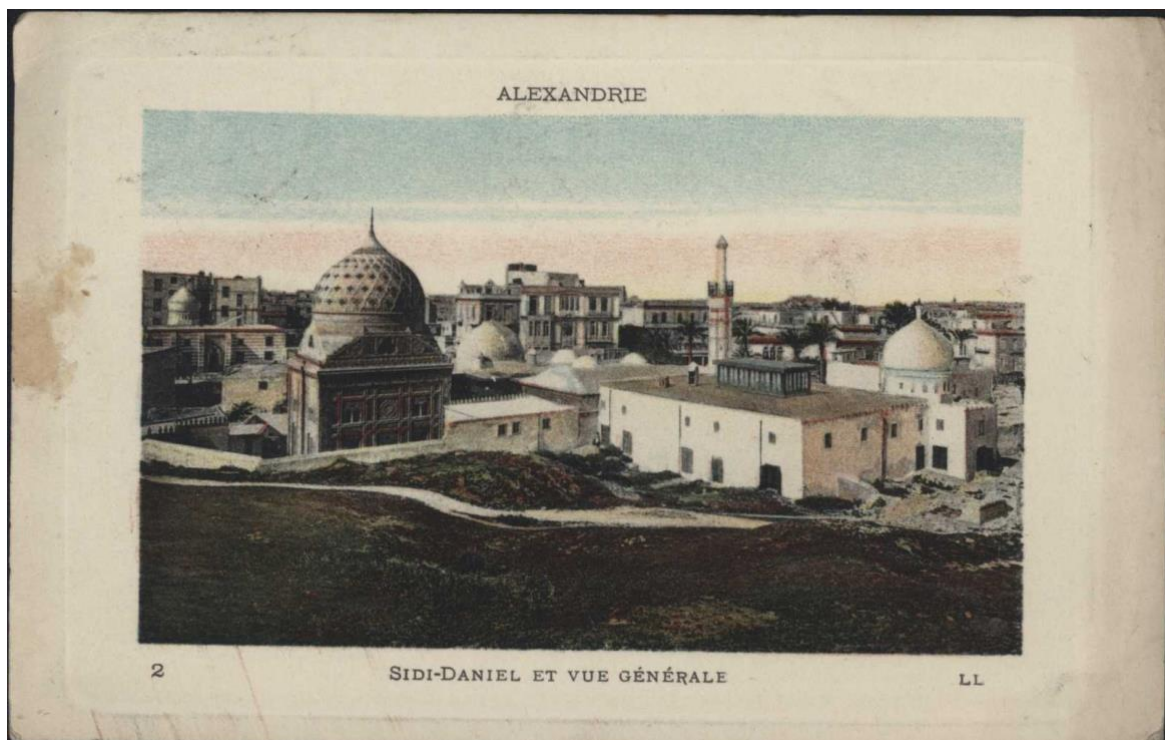
Postcards by Dr. Blore

The following sources are two postcards of Alexandria sent by Dr. Blore to his family in England. The cards were most likely sent after his evacuation from Gallipoli and subsequent arrival in Egypt in 1916.⁸¹ The first post card is of part of the city, and contains the following text on the front: “Alexandrie, Sidi-Daniel et vue Générale (Sidi-Daniel and general view)”. The picture on the front of the postcard looks to be taken on a small hilltop, looking down on the city of Alexandria. Several domes are visible throughout the picture, maybe mosques, as

⁸⁰ October 1918, Driver Pashler to his son

⁸¹ Part of a collection relating to the service of Dr W.R. Blore M.C. RAMC, including his letters home, his notebooks from his service as a doctor at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, and on the Western Front - as well as his sleeping bag and many other artefacts including a photo of Blore outside his dugout at Suvla Bay.

well as a minaret towering over the city. There are no people, but several palm trees surrounding the minaret. Because of the text at the bottom, it appears that this was a mass-produced postcard. The other side of the card contains no other text than the address of the recipient as well as the print of the mass production. The stamps are green with small pictures of a sphinx with a pyramid in the background. The postal stamp is very hard to read, making it hard to determine when it was sent.



As the postcard was mass-produced, it was probably made with the intention of being picturesque. The card displays Alexandria in a favourable view and reveals a preproduced image of Egypt which was present by the time the military personnel arrived. What is interesting is that the preproduced image displayed through this card is quite different from the typical, pharaonic image one might expect of an Egyptian postcard. Instead, the motif is of a mosque in Alexandria called the Sidi Daniel (Nabi Daniel). This mosque carries its own historical and religious importance as it was a possible burial place of both the Prophet Daniel and Alexander the Great.⁸² As the burial place of Alexander the Great is unknown, there is a possibility that this card was created in order to popularize the mosque and make it a tourist attraction. Some of the Islamic parts of the city had become tourist spots by this time, and it appears that this mosque, which contained a sacred Islamic shrine, was presented as an

⁸² Alexandria Portal "Nabi Daniel" 20.11.20 <http://www.alexandria.gov.eg/Alex/english/Nabi%20Daniel%20mosque.html> ; Wikiwand "Tomb of Alexander the Great" 20.11.20 https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Tomb_of_Alexander_the_Great

attraction to visit. Therefore, the postcard still displays the city as an interesting place to visit with some parts being modern and familiar to the reader while others appearing more mystical and exotic.

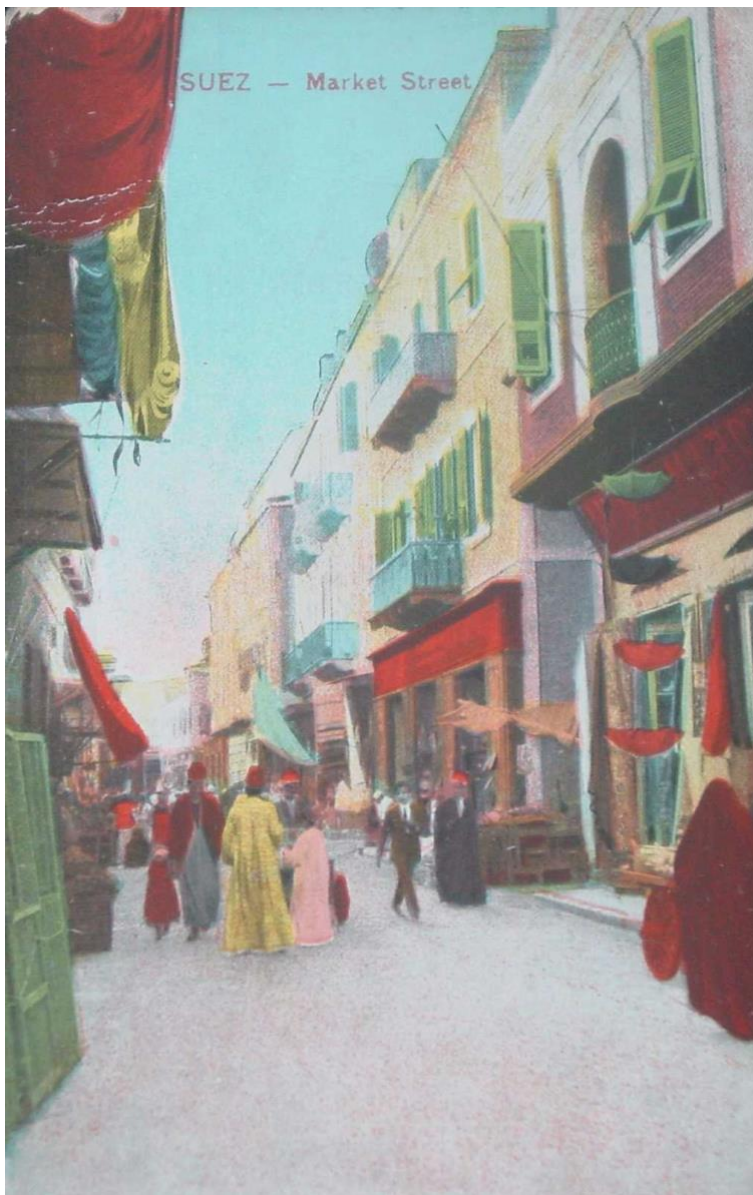


The second postcard pictures part of the harbour in Alexandria and contains the following text on the front: “Alexandrie, La Baie Quest (west bay)”. The picture portrays a harbour where several men sit together in a sailboat, perhaps on their way out to fish. They are all wearing colourful hats. Behind them are a lot of sailboats, stationed at the harbour as well as another sailboat already out on the water. That boat too seems to carry many men with them. In the background are a lot of different buildings along the shore. All in all, this is a peaceful picture, showing what one could imagine is the normal everyday life of a lot of Egyptians.

This card appears to be mass-produced as well, with the same stamp as the first card, and no message on the back. Therefore, there is a possibility that the cards were bought, and possibly sent, from the same place and maybe even at the same time. As with the previous postcard, this card doesn't contain any of the typically pharaonic tourist things either. Still, the motif is picturesque, projecting an image of tranquillity, a perfect place to go for a relaxing trip or vacation.

Postcards by John Inch Low

The following postcards were sent from John Inch Low and are a part of a collection of postcards from Low and Tommy Macartney sent while they were on active service during the First World War. Both postcards which will be discussed here were sent towards the end of the war, most likely at the same time, in October 1918. There isn't much information known about Low apart from the fact that he was still on active duty at the time, and that he was writing home to his family. The first card was addressed to his wife, Mrs. J.I. Low, while the second was addressed to one of his two daughters, Mary and Jessie Helen Low. Both cards were sent to the same address which means that his daughters were still living at home.



At the front of the first postcard the words “SUEZ – market street” are printed, corresponding to the hand-coloured photo which is of a busy street with white houses and colourful details.

There are people dressed in suits as well as thobes, some wearing red fezes while another person at the far right of the photo, possibly a woman, is clothed in a large, red veil. All the houses in the streets appear to have some kind of store at the ground floor where people are standing outside, most likely trying to sell things to the people walking by. There are a couple of children there as well, holding hands with some of the adults wearing fezes. On the back of the card the address of the recipient is written, as well as the following message:

“14th Oct. 18

Expect to see this Red Sea port tomorrow. Have bought it[the card] in advance. Colours look crude but every thing here blazes in the Sunlight.

Love J.”⁸³

This postcard was sent to Low’s wife and was sent before he even reached the port. This is quite interesting as there is the possibility for the recipient, and the readers, to get a rare glimpse of the expectations of the author beforehand. Instead of the image of Egypt being influenced by the experiences of the author, the readers are instead introduced to what the author expected to see and experience. We don’t know if these expectations were met, or if the author came away with a different view of this market afterwards. However, what we do know is that the picture on the postcard is quite picturesque and of a very typical place for tourists to visit. The only comment from the author being that “every thing here blazes in the sunlight” in relation to the “crude colours” on the card.

⁸³ 14.10.18, J.I. Low to his wife



The second postcard is a hand-coloured photo of Port Said and the text on the front reads as follows: “PORT-SAID – The Port”. The picture is of a busy harbour with a minaret in the distance and numerous boats, most likely feluccas,⁸⁴ moored to the dock. Some people are out in their boats on the lightly greenish blue sea while the harbour is crowded with people. There is a large city square connecting the docks to the city, colourful buildings several stories high lining the city square on one side. The picture is taken from such an angle that the city and the docks continue onwards at an angle out of the photograph. Between the city and the docks there is a small pathway along the shore with trees standing in a row, lining the pathway. There are what looks to be several flagpoles throughout the picture, however none of them are flying any flags. On the other side of the card, John Inch Low wrote the address of the recipient as well as the following message:

“14th Oct. 1918

Daddy’s first view in Africa: note the swarms of boats.

Love & kisses

⁸⁴ A felucca is a type of small boat which is easily recognizable by its large, triangular sail. It used to be more frequent in the Mediterranean region as a whole and is still to this day used on the Nile. In addition to the iconic sail, oars are also sometimes used when travelling by felucca. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/felucca> (12.10.20)

This postcard was written the same day as the previous one and based on the text at the back it seems as if Low might have come ashore in Port Said. He may even have bought both postcards in Port Said and sent them from there. As mentioned, this card was sent to one of his daughters, Mary Low, which might have affected how he chose to write to her. The port looks rather peaceful and tranquil in the picture. While there are some people walking around, there aren't too many, which makes it appealing to visit. Both the sea and the sky are clear, making the scene overall very inviting. This is his first view of Africa, Mr. Low writes, and it does not at all appear to be affected by the war, nor does it look too hot or dry. Instead by this picture, Egypt might not appear too different from a port city in England at the time. There is a difference in the buildings and boats of course, as well as the minaret and the clothing people are wearing. However, there are still things that would be familiar to the recipients, like the sea and the trees. Therefore, while it is a beautiful picture with a city from a different country, it doesn't appear too foreign either. It might convey a picture that Egypt wasn't too different to the United Kingdom after all, yet different enough to be an interesting place to visit.

Both of these cards were mass-produced, probably picturing part of the image that the tourist industry wanted to present of Egypt. This image appears more nuanced as, just like with the previous postcards, the focus is on the more modern-day parts of Egypt compared to the pharaonic postcards. The motifs display the beautiful everyday life and the people living there while at the same time being clearly enhanced to beautify the postcards. There is a possibility that these postcards were mass-produced for the military personnel specifically. At the time Low sent the cards home, the war was coming to an end and the tourist industry had had four years to learn about what interested the soldiers about Egypt and modify their products to fit this image. While we can't know if this was the reality or not, it is a definite possibility.

Postcards by Driver Pashler

The following two postcards were sent by Pashler to his sons spring 1917. The picture on the first postcard depicts three camels; two standing facing each other and one sitting down on the sand in the desert. There is a man there as well sitting beside the third camel in the sand,

⁸⁵ 14.10.18, J.I. Low to his wife

looking towards the photographer. Although the picture is unclear, there appears to be one or two people in the back as well, between the two camels standing, possibly holding on to the reigns of the camels. All three camels are carrying colourful saddles and gear.



There is text on the front which reads: “Cairo and Camels”. The message on the back of the card doesn’t mention anything about the picture on the front or anything about Cairo or Egypt. Instead, the author wrote to his son Ronald that he looked forward to coming home to play with him and eat some pudding.⁸⁶ The picture is quite touristic in that it was, and still is, a popular tourist activity to sit on and ride camels. Camels were a popular mode of transport, both for the tourists and for the military personnel. The British military in Egypt even had its own Imperial Camel Corps Brigade which was a camel-mounted infantry brigade.⁸⁷ However, there doesn’t seem to be anything militaristic over the photograph, instead there are just three camels and three men out in the desert having their photograph taken. As such, the postcard presents Egypt as a tourist spot with the possibility to see and even ride “exotic” animals like camels.

The second postcard has a picture of Cairo, with the Citadel of Cairo and the Mosque of Muhammad Ali clearly in the centre of the picture. The picture is in black and white;

⁸⁶ Spring 1917, Driver Pashler to his son.

⁸⁷ Hadaway *Fleshpots and Pyramids* 77

however, it is still possible to see the clouds off in the horizon, and the image is overall quite picturesque. The Citadel was built by Saladdin to fend off crusaders and dates back to the 12th century. Through the centuries, the Citadel was expanded by later rulers, and in the 1830s, Muhammad Ali started the construction of a mosque in the middle which came to be known as the Great Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha. By the time of WWI, the Great Mosque had become famous to tourist and a known landmark, and as such, a frequently reproduced image of Cairo.⁸⁸ Though it differs from the typical pyramids and camels, it still conveys a clearly touristic sight of Egypt with reference to its Islamic history.



Like the previous postcard, Pashler didn't write anything about the motif of the postcard or even anything about his situation in Egypt.⁸⁹ The only thing on the back of the postcard which relates to the picture is the printed text on the bottom which reads: "The Citadelle of Cairo". As such, we don't know if Pashler actually visited the mosque and citadel on the picture or knew anything about them at all. Due to lack of comments regarding the motif, it is more likely that Pashler picked this postcard out from a shop rather than that he had visited the

⁸⁸ Dun, Jimmy "The Citadel of Cairo", *Tour Egypt* 20.11.20 <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/citadel.htm> ; Lonely Planet "Citadel" 20.11.20 <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt/cairo/attractions/citadel/a/poi-sig/406186/355225> ; Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities "Cairo Citadel". 20.11.20 <https://egy monuments.gov.eg/archaeological-sites/cairo-citadel/> ; Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities "Muhammad Ali Mosque" <https://egy monuments.gov.eg/en/monuments/muhammad-ali-mosque> ; Baedeker, Karl *Egypt and the Sudan: Handbook for Travellers*. 7th Remodelled ed. Leipzig: K. Baedeker, 1914 68-72

⁸⁹ Possibly spring 1917, Pashler to his son.

place himself. From the two postcards it seems like Pashler was in Cairo around this time, so it is curious that Pashler didn't write anything about what was on the postcards, especially when compared to how descriptive he was in his letters. By sending a postcard and commenting about the picture on the back of it, he could have easily showed his sons what he saw and experienced. However, Pashler might have deemed the picture enough to relate his experience, especially since there isn't much space on the back of a postcard.

Postcard by Officer Dugdall

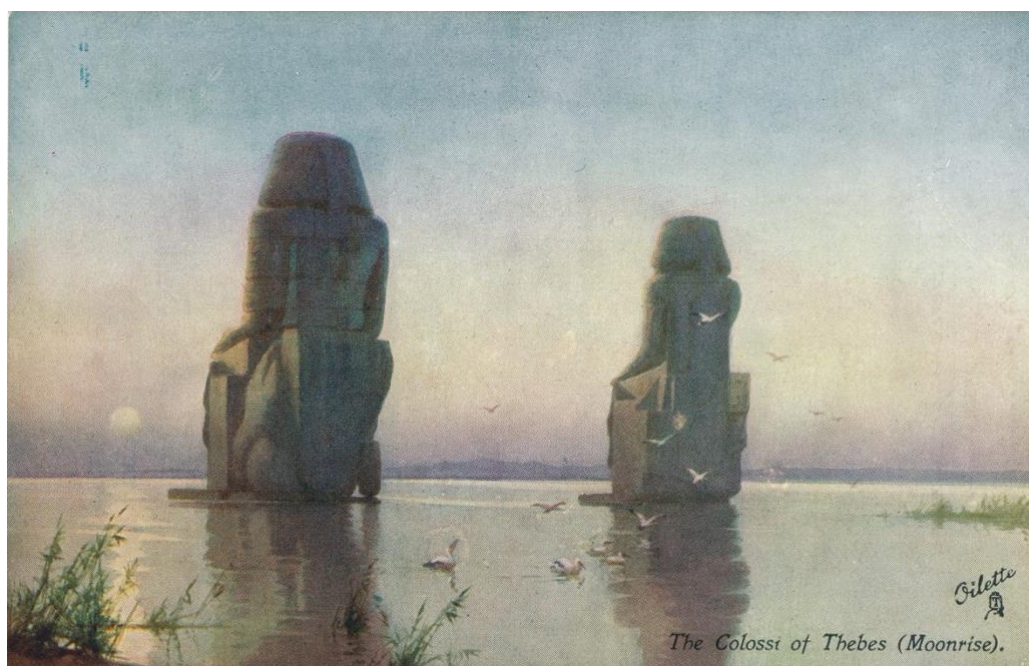
This postcard is a pink Christmas card sent by William George Dugdall of the Royal Navy, Victualling Officer on board HMS Hannibal, to his parents. The postcard displays a peaceful picture of some sailboats on a river or on the sea, the sky and water is clear, and to the side is what looks like a little hut. It is quite probable that this picture is of the Nile as feluccas sailing down the Nile by the early 1900s had become quite iconic. The text on the front reads "Greetings from Egypt" next to a small, green flag with three half-moons with stars in the middle.⁹⁰ The inside of the card contains what looks like a standardized message, as well as the soldier's and their parents' names: "Oh be thou blest with all heaven can send, long health, long life, long pleasure, and a friend. Pope.", "All kind thoughts and best wishes for a happy Christmas and a bright and glad new year from 'Will to Mother & Dad, Xmas 1917'" From the card, it appears that this might have been a standardized card that the soldiers sent home to their parents and families for Christmas. It might have been the standard for several years in a row as there is no official date, rather the soldier himself scribbled it on. The picture on the front, while bad quality, is both serene and mysterious at the same time, probably not the typical British Christmas card at the time. The Nile with its sailboats appears quite idyllic, the blue sky continuing to promise good weather to the sailors as they continue on their journey.

⁹⁰ The interesting thing with this flag is that it wasn't actually green at the time this card was created, but red. It was first with the Kingdom of Egypt, established in 1922, that the flag turned green. There is a possibility that this was the Egyptian coat of arms at the time or simply a hand-coloured card where the colourist used the wrong colour.



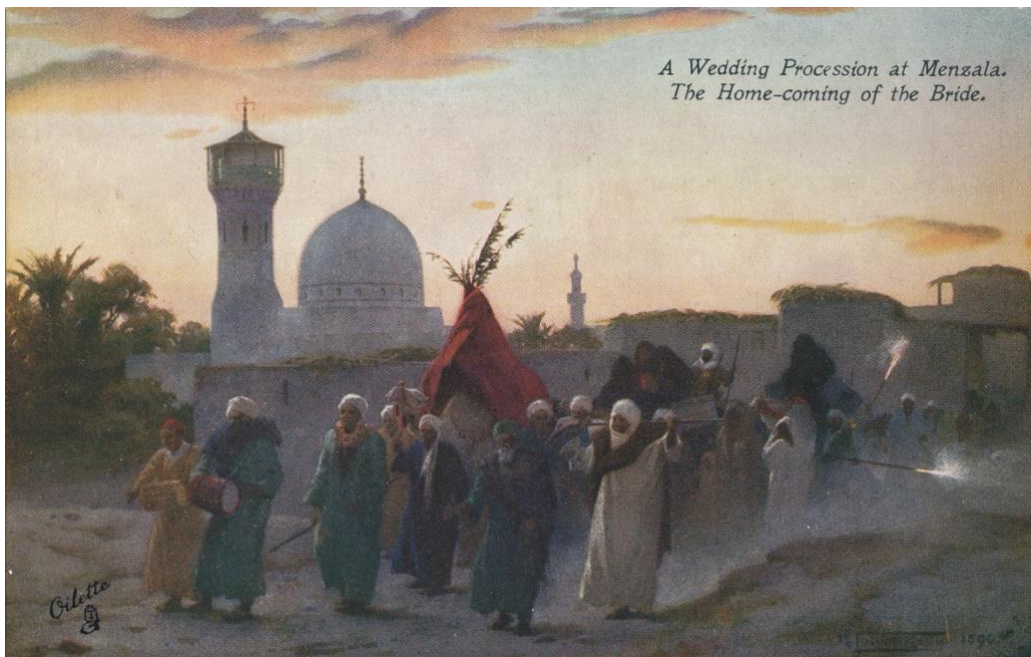
Postcards collected by Nurse Russell

The following postcards are different to the previous postcards in that they were never actually sent, but rather collected by a young nurse named Elsie Russell. Postcard collecting was a very popular hobby during the first decade of the 1900s, and probably continued into the 1910s.⁹¹ Of the three postcards included here, two are part of a series of postcards called “Tucks Postcards of Picturesque Egypt”. The final postcard appears to be mass-produced as well, but probably by a different company. All three postcards picture beautiful motifs from Egypt with text at the bottom to describe the different places. As these postcards were collected and kept in an album, the line between pictures and postcards appear more fleeting and will affect the discussion of these postcards in particular as it will be natural to compare them to the photographs Russell took herself.



⁹¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. “postcard” 29.06.20 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postcard>

The first postcard is of the back of the Colossi of Thebes. It is taken from the back and picture two gigantic, sitting statues of pharaoh Amenhotep III looking out at the sun in the distance over what appears to be water. It is as if the statues are watching over and still protecting the land which Amenhotep III once ruled. There are several birds behind the statues bathing and taking flight, and the picture is rather peaceful. Russell has taken a photograph of the Colossi as well, and she might have chosen this card on purpose to make sure she got a good photograph of the Colossi. Or simply because postcards are typically prettier than the pictures one manages to take.



The second postcard is of an Egyptian village close to Port Said, with what looks like a mosque with a minaret in the background. There is a large procession of people walking out from the village carrying torches and playing drums, with some of the people travelling on camels. The first camel appears to be carrying the bride wrapped up in a large, red cape with nothing visible apart from some palm branches sticking out from an opening at the top. The other women in the background travelling on camels are clad in black, none of their faces are visible either apart from a man clad in green and white carrying a spear. The picture appears to have been taken at dusk and the text in the corner of the card reads: "A Wedding Procession at Menzala. The Home-coming of the Bride."

Like the previous postcard, it is as if the photographer has stumbled upon something secret and chosen to capture the moment before it disappeared. While it isn't the typical touristic

motif, it at the same time showcases a festive moment in an “exotic” culture, tempting the viewer to partake in the celebration. It conveys to the viewer an exotic and fascinating image of a local, Egyptian village. As with this postcard as well, Russell herself was actually a part of at least one wedding in the time she was stationed in Egypt. While she doesn’t have any photographs of the actual wedding ceremony, she has captured the moment they set off to the wedding. Therefore, it is possible that she chose this postcard to remember the wedding she took part in.

The third and final postcard is the only one not part of the “Tucks Postcards” and yet it appears just as picturesque as the other two. The picture is of the harbour in Port Said and is a picture with a lot of contrast. At sea we can see at least eight, possibly more, large steamships docked, either a part of the British navy or belonging to the tourist industry. Around these large ships are several smaller ships and boats sailing around, as well as a lot of small rowboats or possibly feluccas docked to the harbour. The harbour is lined with trees, separating the docks from the road and the numerous buildings along the harbour. From the angle the picture is taken, it is not possible to see how many buildings there are, and if they are stores or private houses. However, based on previous postcards of Port Said, we can imagine that several of them are stores and cafes as the street by the harbour is probably one of the busier streets.



While it isn't clear from her photographs if Russell actually visited Port Said, she travelled around a lot. She might have visited and bought the postcard as a memory or she might have bought the postcard because she didn't have the opportunity to visit Port Said and still wanted to know what it looked like. The fact that the picture displays ships like she herself probably sailed onboard to Egypt might have been another reason why she acquired the postcard. Though as she collected postcards instead of sending them, it might have just been another postcard to add to her collection. All the postcards she collected either give a different, more casual view of famous sights or display everyday life in Egypt. The "Tucks Postcards" are explicitly meant to depict "Picturesque Egypt", meaning that, while the postcards appear to not have been staged, they probably were. This in turn takes us back to what picture of Egypt these cards portray, and in turn if this was a picture of Egypt which Russell herself wanted to portray.

Since most of these postcards came from the same postcard series, it is reasonable to conclude that this was done on purpose. There are no signs of the war which was raging at the time. All the pictures are tranquil, appearing to give the viewers a taste of everyday life in Egypt. At the same time there is no time or any specifics dating the postcards in time, which might mean that these postcards have been sold for a long time, presenting the same picture of Egypt to the military personnel as they did to the tourists before them and the tourists coming after them. It might even be a picture of Egypt which the buyers collected, like Russell collecting her postcards, fabricating the image of Egypt which they would show their family when they came home again. This takes us over into the last category: photographs.

Photographs

Nurse Russell

All the photographs included here were taken in 1916 either by Elsie Russell or for Russell with her being a subject in the pictures.



The first picture portrays four women clothed in bathing suits on a beach with a lighthouse in the background. The women are either sitting in the water, sitting on the rocks by the water or standing. Their hair is covered by either hats or cloth, and several of them are smiling and looking into the camera. The caption underneath the picture simply reads: "Some legs!!" This is one of several pictures in Russell's album of these nurses bathing in the Mediterranean Ocean outside of Alexandria. The description by Russell's grandson Stuart James reads: "Off duty British nurses having some fun in the Mediterranean. Ras-el-Tin lighthouse to the right. This photograph was taken by my grandmother during the First World War when she was serving as a nurse with the QAIMNS, treating casualties from the war in Palestine and the Middle East."



The second photograph pictures Russell as well as another nurse and some soldiers out in a boat with an Egyptian man at the back of the boat, controlling the sail. From the photo and the sail in the corner, it looks like they might be out in a felucca. In the background of the photograph there appears to be a city, possibly Alexandria, as well as a castle of some kind. Stuart has added the following caption: “Boat trip on the Med at Alexandria, Egypt. Ras el Tin palace can be seen in the background. My grandmother bottom right.” From his description, we understand that the boat trip is on the Mediterranean Ocean, which is an interesting contrast as most pictures of people on boat trips are from the Nile. There are at least nine other pictures similar to this in the album, taken of various trips on the Mediterranean as well as at least two of them taken on the Nile.

Both of these pictures convey a clearly touristic view of Egypt. The picture from the beach was only one of several pictures from their bathing adventures, indicating that having fun on the beach was something the nurses were able to do fairly often, if only to relax after a long shift. It was also an easy way to get cleaned up, and the nurses might be following in the soldier’s footsteps in that regard. Similarly, boat trips were, and still is, a classical tourist activity, and it appears that taking trips like these was quite easy to do, even during the war. Russell even included a photograph of the smiling Egyptian boatmen who ferried them.

Russell also took several photographs from her time in and visits to Cairo and the surrounding areas. One of these pictures are of a large mosque, possibly even two mosques; one in the foreground and one in the back. Another photograph is of the promenade at Heliopolis with Palace Hotel to one side. Like Blore, Russell appears to have taken the same tour of the Giza pyramids and the Saqqara tombs as she has taken a lot of photographs of the Giza pyramids, several Sphinx and the large statue of Rameses the Second which Blore mentioned in his letter home. Furthermore, she also visited various temples in Memphis and Kharga as well as the ruins of Memphis. This further shows that there existed a well-trodden tourist track before the War, maybe even several tourist tracks depending on the amount of time and money the tourists possessed. Several photographs include an Egyptian guide travelling along with them like Blore and his group had. Guides and dragomans were easily available in the large cities, whether they just wanted to look around Cairo or go for a longer trip like Blore.⁹²

From her various photographs and postcards, Russell showcases quite a complex view of Egypt as a tourist site. On the one hand, she has travelled to and documented many of the famous tourist spots like the pyramids of Giza and the river Nile. At the same time, her photographs also include the contemporary city of Cairo which is also painted in a favourable light. It is important to remember that photographs like these were clearly selective, a photographer didn't necessarily photograph everything they saw. Typically, they only took pictures of the prettiest motifs they saw, however, that doesn't mean that the images portrayed were necessarily false. The country appears to be always sunny, no matter where they travelled, with local people offering to give them a guided tour or take them out on a boat trip. There doesn't appear to be any difficulties in regard to taking these trips, not to the economic aspects of them, and they all seem like they are having a great time wherever they are.

All in all, Egypt appears in these photos to be a peaceful country rich with history and greatly facilitated for tourism. Russell did go on to put all of these photographs into an album so there is, of course, a risk that she has already censored the pictures herself and selected out the ones she wanted to display and discard the rest. At the same time, there is Elsie Russell the collector who collected postcards and made little distinction between "successful" shots and those that were heavily under- or over-exposed. Perhaps she, because of her collecting habits, presented a much truer picture of Egypt than many of the others.

⁹² Nicholson *Solider tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 214

Private Williams

This photograph was taken of Private Rowland Williams of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and some of his companions out in the desert. They are all seated on a camel lined up in front of a pyramid, probably the Great pyramid of Giza, with the sphinx immediately behind them. There is a small child standing in front of the camel on the right, carrying what looks to be a stoneware jar probably carrying water. In the corner of the picture, the number “136” seems to have been written on, probably by the photographer. The motif for this picture, sitting on camels in front of a sphinx and/or a pyramid was, and still is, a very popular tourist activity.



Through the collection of the source material that I have gathered, there are several photographs like this, Elsie Russell and her fellow nurses are featured in some of them. Sometimes this type of photo is one of the few or the only picture the military personnel actually have from Egypt, or at least the only picture that is in their collection. This represents Egypt in a very clear touristic light as a site where one can ride camels and look at pyramids and sphinxes. And if this was the only picture the soldier took or was able to obtain, then the only understanding of Egypt that the ones seeing the picture received would be that Egypt was a peaceful country where tourist activities were always available, even during wartime.

Concluding remarks

Through this chapter, we have seen that there existed a well-trodden tourist track in Egypt at the time the military personnel arrived. This tourist track influenced the image of Egypt that was portrayed to the military personnel and which they, in turn, portrayed home. The tourist industry was blooming and easily adapted to include the new influx of customers that arrived with the war. At the same time, the industry clearly favoured the military personnel who had money. People like Dr. Blore was able to travel the Egyptian countryside and trod this tourist track because he had the time and means necessary to pay for it. He was able to enjoy the preproduced image of Egypt that existed and portrayed this home in his letters. At the same time, his postcards nuanced this preproduced image as they showed the more modern parts of Egypt which wasn't described in his letters.

Other military personnel, like Private Jones and Driver Pashler, experienced Egypt as just as much of a tourist spot as Blore. However, their experiences did not include bazaars or pyramids. Instead, their picture of Egypt as a tourist destination was revealed through accounts of bathing and enjoying the sun and everything Egypt had to offer foodwise. They described Egypt as having a beautiful landscape, not focusing on the typical tourist attractions of tourist tracks. It is not clear if this was a conscious choice or not as they, like so many other British soldiers, might not have had the means to experience them. Through their letters, they still managed to convey Egypt as an attractive and beautiful place to visit, and if the recipients already had a pharaonic view of Egypt, this could just help them expand their view and interest in Egypt further.

Nurse Russell's account of her experiences in Egypt combine the two views presented here as she was able to both visit the important tourist attractions like the pyramids and Memphis while at the same time enjoying time on the beach and taking a boat out on the Mediterranean. All the accounts in this chapter fits into the view of Egypt as a tourist spot and antique land. It is interesting to see how their experiences varied from person to person, and yet they still presented Egypt in the same view. However, Egypt wasn't always as sunny or wonderful as was portrayed through this chapter, something the next chapter will delve into.

Chapter 4: Egypt the Sandy Hellhole

“ In France, with its incessant shelling, pouring rain, and waterlogged trenches, the soldier envied and in fact felt intensely hostile to his opposite number in Egypt, who in his opinion, was having a ‘cushy’ time basking in the warm sunshine and being fanned to sleep by lovely houris. ” – Major C. S. Jarvis.⁹³

Many Britons believed that the military personnel serving in the Middle East had it easy, including Britons serving in other parts of the military. Like Major Jarvis wrote in his memoirs, those stationed at the Western Front looked with envy to the men stationed in Egypt. They believed, like the sources in the previous chapter suggests, that the soldiers and nurses stationed in Egypt travelled around all the time. That they watched the sights and bathed whenever they wanted to. And that they lived a life of sunshine and luxury, their military service being closer to a vacation than actual war service. Major Lord Hampton who served as a squadron commander in Egypt during World War 1 noted sarcastically in his memoirs that “I have been told that it was at one time the vogue in England to consider the soldiers, whom fate and the War Office had condemned to serve in Egypt, only one degree better than a conscientious objector”.⁹⁴

This view, however, is quite far from the truth as the theatre in the Middle East was, despite its having been subject to less historical scrutiny, very important. And the life that met the military personnel in Egypt was far from what many of them had imagined. The book “Hell in the Holy Land” by David R. Woodward is one indication of that. Woodward wrote this book with the intention of bringing attention to the ordinary British soldier’s life in the Egypt and Palestine campaign. He mentions how the only things people think about nowadays when they think of the Middle Eastern theatre is the expeditions of T.E. Lawrence and the heroic efforts of the ANZAC. While these were important parts of the campaign, he reminds us that we mustn’t forget the thousands of ordinary Britons who served and died there as well.⁹⁵ In addition to meeting the “tourist life” of Egypt which was explored in the previous chapter, the soldiers were also exposed to not only an antique land, but the trials and tribulations of

⁹³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* x, Major Claude Jarvis was stationed in Egypt and Palestine during the First World War and went on to become a colonial governor in Egypt after the war. *Wikipedia* s.v. “Claude Scudamore Jarvis” 21.09.20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Scudamore_Jarvis

⁹⁴ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* x

⁹⁵ Woodward mentions how during the battles of Gaza and Jerusalem, the British Territorials suffered over 90 percent of the casualties. Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* x

everyday life in Egypt. Where tourist guides tended to focus on monuments and glorious kings of the past, the soldiers were likewise faced with mundane problems.

Unlike in the previous chapter, this chapter will solely focus on the letters sent home to friends and family by the British military personnel. This is because the focus will be on all the negative aspects of serving in Egypt and, naturally, there aren't any postcards or pictures sent home that display this side of Egypt.⁹⁶ As discussed previously, many people sent home pictures and postcards to let their family and friends know that they were doing alright, or for the explicit purpose of using them to recount their journey once they came home. Therefore, the pictures and postcards were probably carefully picked according to what picture they wanted to represent.

In addition to this, there is just something about the written word which allows you to let your frustration and feelings out. Postcards and pictures are frozen in time, and even if you did write something on the back, it would be much more limited compared to writing a letter. Complaint by writing was easiest, especially since the recipients were most often either parents or spouses. Therefore, there was probably a close enough relationship that the writer felt they could complain without having to explain themselves or reassure the recipient, though they did sometimes do both.

The letters could have had many functions. Service in the war might have been a matter of honour for many men. At the same time, longing for home or wanting to get away from the front was quite common. Therefore, describing how horrible things were might "justify" their longing for home as not just some "sap" but as a man who saw the brutality and longed for the safe haven of "Blighty".⁹⁷ Male ideals of endurance, toughness and strength could only allow complaint against a backdrop of real hardship.

⁹⁶ In "Soldier tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine" Nicholson and someone even mentions how a soldier named "Medico" wrote an article for the soldiers about how to take pictures during the war. In it, he came with examples of what to photograph, as well as what not to photograph, suggestion to avoid what he called "the seamy side" of war. Basically, to not take pictures of anything unattractive, unpleasant or sordid. Nicholson *Soldier tourism in First World War Egypt and Palestine* 207; *The Free Dictionary by Farles* s.v. "Seamy side of life" 03.10.20 <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/seamy+side+of+life>

⁹⁷ "Blighty" is British slang and used as a nickname for England by soldiers stationed outside the UK during several wars. First used in the Second Boer War (1899-1902), it became popular at the front during the First and Second World War. "Blighty" could also be a reference to a wound that was bad enough that the soldier had to be sent home to England or, in some cases, it was used to reference a military leave, most likely home to England. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* s.v. "blighty" 03.10.20 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Blighty>; *Dictionary.com* s.v. "blighty" 03.10.20

For others, writing out their frustrations was a way for them to cope. Many of the personnel, like Dr. Blore, might have written private diaries. However, as these do not communicate a picture of Egypt, they will not be used. Letters, on the other hand, do convey a picture of Egypt for an intended audience. And we can imagine that during wartime one might not have had enough time or resources to write both a diary and a letter. Thus, letters could have worked as diaries for some of the military personnel. Like Woodward writes: “[the soldiers] speaking for themselves through their own accounts, most of which have the rigor and directness that comes from being written at the time, by men coping as best as they could with the harsh conditions of what proved to be one of the most strenuous and demanding campaigns of World War 1.”⁹⁸

When writing about the negative views of a place which was a part of a war theatre, it is important to distinguish between what was a negative view of Egypt, and what was simply everyday army life at the time. However, given the perception of the Egyptian war theatre as more or less a leisure holiday, it is also important to point out that soldier life in Egypt met the same hardships as elsewhere. There were a lot of things which were negative, and certainly not easy for the soldiers, but it wasn't special to just that particular country or theatre. That includes everything from cabin fever and mosquitoes to dysentery and illnesses. This does affect the picture of Egypt they presented, however, and is a reason for including it in this chapter. In contrast to the touristy image presented in the previous chapter, this chapter will nuance the picture by delving into the more “real life” aspects not included in the tourist descriptions which the soldiers communicated. We have to note that there can easily be two ways to view the soldier's hardships of Egypt. The first, viewing their difficulties as the same as anywhere else during the war. The second, viewing their hardships as separate and specific to their stay in Egypt. However, I choose to present these two views together as they combined present one picture of Egypt which was communicated home.

An example is from a letter by Private Jones written the 6th of June 1917 where he detailed and talked about a toothache. He wasn't sure at the time if he actually had a cavity in his tooth

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/blighty> (03.10.20); McAlpine, Fraser “Why do the Brits call the U.K. ‘Blighty’?” BBC America 03.10.20 <https://www.bbcamerica.com/anglophenia/2014/08/brits-call-u-k-blighty>
⁹⁸ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* xi

or not, but it was so bad that he ended up drawing a little sketch of himself which can be seen below.

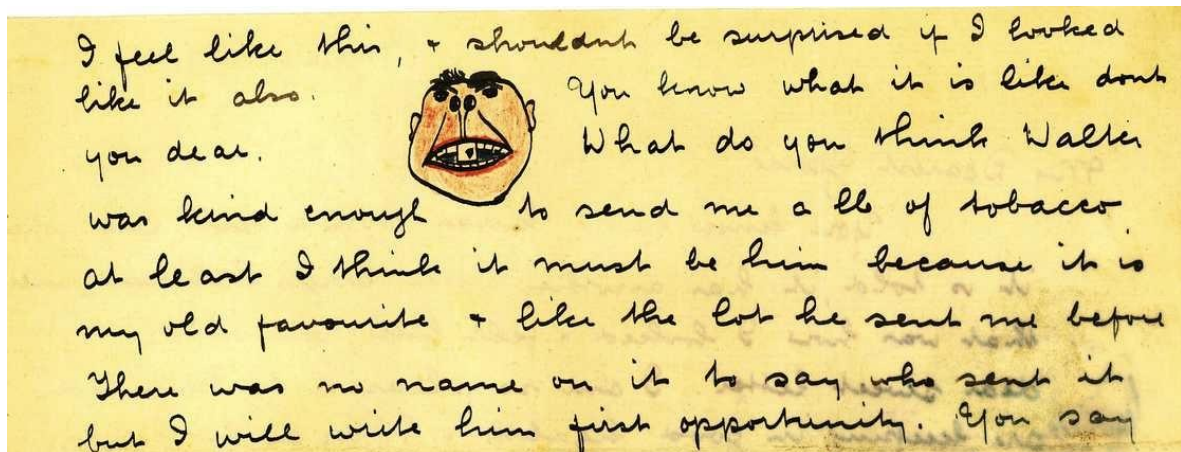


Figure 2: A drawing by Private Jones of his aching tooth

Taking care of the dental hygiene of the soldiers was a very new concept, something Dr. Blore mentioned in his letter dated 11.02.1916: "I don't know if I ever told you that we have a dentist attached to us now. He joined us at Imbros, & has been kept pretty busy since. I think this is the first war that it has occurred to them to have dentists so near the front – there was one at Sulva – but there is no doubts it is a jolly good thing for everyone."⁹⁹ However new it was, it would prove an incredibly vital part of taking care of the soldiers and keeping their fighting morale up.¹⁰⁰

Dr. Blore to his mother

This first source is from one of the many letters Dr. Blore sent home to his mother during the First World War. It was written while Blore was stationed in Egypt, and apart from other sources included in this chapter, it only alludes to his bad experiences in Egypt. What is interesting with this example is that it includes a more or less neutral picture. The letter was written March 15th 1916:

⁹⁹ 11.02.1916, Dr. Blore to his mother

¹⁰⁰ The Australian Army "Pull the Other One! Dentistry in the 1st AIF" 25.09.20 <https://www.army.gov.au/our-heritage/history/history-focus/pull-other-one-dentistry-1st-aif>; Gray, F. The first dentists sent to the Western Front during the First World War. *Br Dent J* **222**, 893–897 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.bdj.2017.503> <https://www.nature.com/articles/sj.bdj.2017.503> (25.09.20); Hussey, K. British dental surgery and the First World War: the treatment of facial and jaw injuries from the battlefield to the home front. *Br Dent J* **217**, 597–600 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.bdj.2014.1001> <https://www.nature.com/articles/sj.bdj.2014.1001> (25.09.20)

“From what I had seen of Egypt, & of Alex especially, I had not been able to understand why people should want to winter in Egypt, apart from the weather, but a short stay at Cairo soon enlightened me, for it is a delightful place, altogether different to Alex [...] Three nights in a proper bedroom, with a real bath just opposite, is rather a wonderful luxury in these times, and dining in a fine dining room, with an orchestra to help you to digest your food instead of sand, was also a pretty welcome change.”¹⁰¹

As already discussed in the previous chapter, Blore was not impressed with Alexandria and favoured Cairo. He was also in a position where he was able to enjoy the various luxuries of staying at a good hotel in Cairo. His comments of “a proper bedroom, with a real bath just opposite, is a rather wonderful luxury”, while indicative to a tourist experience, also implies that the conditions the military personnel lived under in Egypt were poor. The way Blore wrote it almost makes it come off as if he was suffering from first world problems. He lamented over not having “proper bedrooms” in the middle of a war, though he does seem to be aware of it based on the way he wrote. Especially with the comment that having an orchestra instead of sand to digest the food was a “welcome change”. This quote alludes just as much to the life of an everyday soldier, however, the mention of sand singles the source out.

While Blore didn't elaborate on his comments about the sand, we can imagine what he actually dealt with at the time. As most people have experienced when visiting a sandy beach for instance, sand gets everywhere. This was the same for the military personnel stationed in Egypt since most of them lived in camps outside of the large cities. The sand coated the clothes and uniforms to such a degree that they became stiff and coarse. As time went on, the clothes got quite unhygienic due to the lack of water and difficulty in replacing them. This effectively worsened the sanitation at camp as the soldiers could easily get sores and scrapes from various things, including the friction of their stiff, sandy uniforms, which in turn would lead to infection.¹⁰²

One way to clean their clothes was through what became known as “Serbian barrels”. This was a sterilization device developed by Lieutenant-Colonel Stammers during the typhus

¹⁰¹ 15.03.16, Dr. Blore to his mother

¹⁰² Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* <https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#> (26.09.20)

epidemic in Serbia in 1915.¹⁰³ The barrel was contrived in order to battle lice-borne diseases like typhus and relapsing fevers and was first introduced in Cairo October 1915 to great success.¹⁰⁴ However, because of number of fleas and lice, they would have to use the Serbian barrels frequently to keep them at bay. Dr. Blore wrote in a later letter that he put his sleeping bag in a Serbian barrel in order to keep what he referred to as the “live stock[sic]” under control.

As Blore mentioned, sand got into the food as well, which in itself would be quite unpleasant. Digesting sand could also lead to problems with their stomach and intestines.¹⁰⁵ Dysentery and diarrhoea were constant problems for the soldiers, and as the hospitals could only treat the worst cases, the men simply had to deal with it.¹⁰⁶ As a doctor stationed in Alexandria, Blore probably had a lot to deal with on a regular basis, and while he wrote letters home, he also had a diary in which he expressed his thoughts and concerns in. Therefore, he might not have written home about all the negative experiences and views that he had as some of the other soldiers included here. While it is difficult to discern how much Blore’s mother knew about medicine and Egypt as a whole, it does seem like she would have known about wintering in Egypt as well. Based on Blore’s explanations, despite his descriptions of the wonderful hotels, it appears that Egypt isn’t as agreeable as he might have expected. Therefore, while it isn’t a wholly negative picture conveyed, Egypt does appear in a less advantageous light than before.

Private Jones to his wife

Private Jones wrote many letters home to his wife and in them he recorded his day-to-day observations and experiences. He inquired after her and the rest of the family at home and kept her up to date on whatever was happening in Egypt. As mentioned in chapter 1, Jones was involved with an accident on a camel and was believed to have contracted malaria around the same time. According to historian Stuart Hadaway, only around 10% of the British

¹⁰³ Lieutenant-Colonel Stammers was part of the Medical Mission in Serbia headed by the British physician William Hunter. Hunter, William *The Serbian Epidemics of Typhus and Relapsing Fever in 1915: Their Origin, Course, and Preventive Measures employed for their Arrest*. 06.10.20. 53

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2152681/pdf/procrsmed01432-0032.pdf> ; Royal College of Physicians “William Hunter” 06.10.20 <https://history.replondon.ac.uk/inspiring-physicians/william-hunter-0>

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, William. “New Methods of Disinfection For The Prevention And Arrest Of Lice-Borne Diseases (Thypus, Relapsing, And Trench Fevers)” *The British Medical Journal* Vol. 2, No. 3008 (Aug 24, 1918), pp. 198-20106.10.20 https://www.jstor.org/stable/20310811?sid=primo&seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents

¹⁰⁵ Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* 26.09.20 <https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eef.html#>

¹⁰⁶ Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* 26.09.20 <https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eef.html#> ;

casualties in Egypt and Palestine were due to actual warfare. 1917 and 1918 were especially difficult years as malaria ran rampant among the military personnel, Jones being only one of the many soldiers who was affected by this. The military used mosquito netting in order to keep the mosquitoes at bay. However, due to the fact that so many soldiers were affected, only the worst cases were treated in hospitals. The rest were helped as much as possible by the Field Ambulances and Aid stations and then just had to tough it out.¹⁰⁷

In his letter to his wife dated April 14th 1917, Jones wrote about how the mosquitos were “about again, & very busy”. Jones often drew small pictures and sketches which he included in his letters. These were fit to what he wrote about and showed his wife and family the different things that happened in Egypt. In this letter he drew his own arms which were covered in red mosquito bites[figure 2]. Jones commented that: “my arms look quite pretty, like a sultana pudding trod on, something like this”, referring to his sketch below. He stated that his situation was “nothing at all sweet is it darling”.

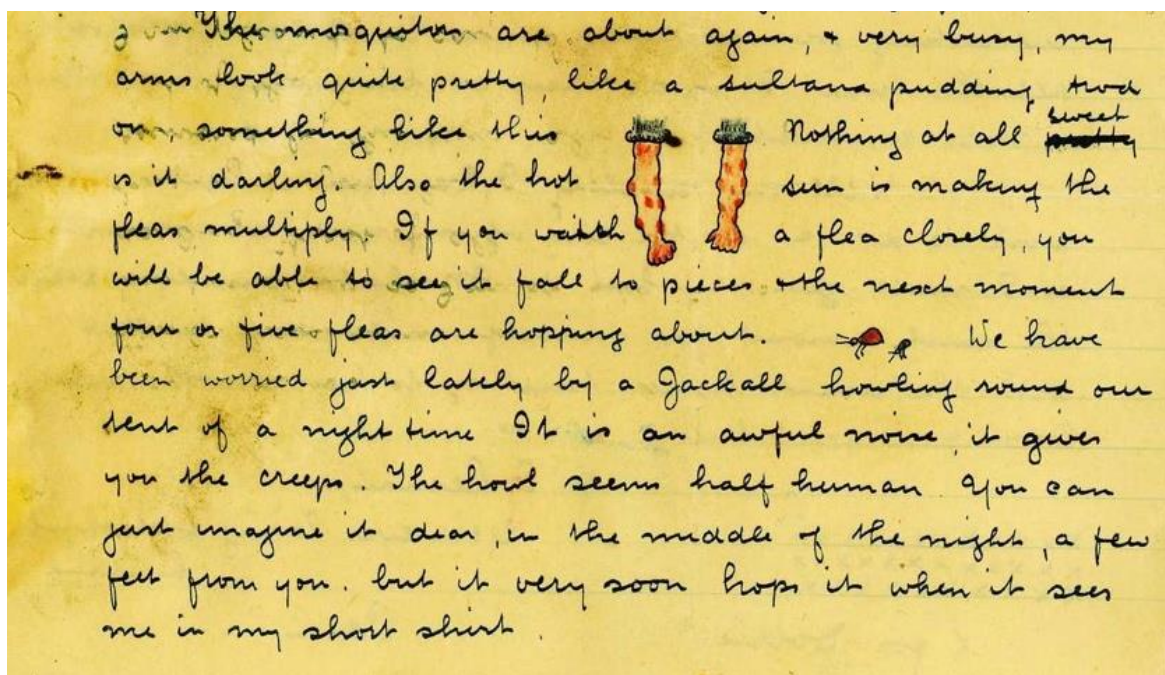


Figure 3: A part of the scanned letter from Private Jones dated 14th of April 1917. Jones has sketched his arms which are full of mosquito bites. Further down he has also sketched a couple of fleas.

Private Jones also drew a couple of red fleas on the same page which he then wrote about:

¹⁰⁷ Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WW1* 26.09.20 <https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

“[...] the hot sun is making the fleas multiply. If you watch a flea closely, you will be able to see it fall to pieces & the next moment four or five fleas are hopping about. We have been worried just lately by a Jackall[sic] howling round our tent of a night time[sic]. It is an awful noise, it gives you the creeps. The howl seems half human. You can just imagine it dear, in the middle of the night, a few feet from you, but it very soon hops[sic] it when it sees me in my short shirt.”¹⁰⁸

Jones had a light, almost playful style of writing, which is most likely because he addressed his wife. He sketched his own arms and joked that the jackal stopped howling as soon as it saw him in a short shirt. At times, Jones was almost offhanded in the way that he described things, as if it wasn't really that big of a deal. However, the things that he depicted in that quote don't really put Egypt in a positive light for the reader.

Firstly, his descriptions of the mosquitoes. While his words were playful and light-hearted, they show the unpleasant reality of incredibly bothersome mosquitoes. Not only had the mosquitoes heavily attacked him, as proved by his bruised arms, but he wrote that they were “about again, & very busy”. This indicates that it wasn't the first time that he had been attacked so heavily by mosquitoes and probably not the last either. We can conclude that he wasn't the only one with arms like that as mosquitoes were a very common problem on many of the war fronts. As mosquitoes are especially active during dusk and dawn, as well as during the night, we can assume that it would affect the sleep of the soldiers too.

From the drawing we can see that his arms were covered in large, red bumps from where the mosquitoes have bitten him. Despite the fact that he jokingly compared himself to a sultana pudding, one has to imagine that those arms stung and hurt a lot. We may also wonder how the rest of his body looked like, including his legs, as they probably walked around in shorts a lot of the time due to the heat. Another aspect to this is the possibility of infection and diseases. Mosquito bites in themselves are very itchy and can easily be scratched into bleeding wounds which can be easily infected. In hot and sandy places where you sweat a lot it can be especially hard to keep the wounds clean. On top of that, mosquitoes can transmit a lot of diseases, malaria being one of the most prominent and dangerous ones. As mentioned, Jones most likely had malaria either during this time or shortly after this letter was written.

¹⁰⁸ 14.04.17 Private Jones to his wife

While he also was in an accident around this time, contracting malaria wouldn't have helped his situation and might have affected his condition to the point where he was no longer fit for active service.

Secondly, there were the fleas which Jones so delicately described were killed by the hot sun and yet multiplied at the same time. He didn't mention how much they were affected by the fleas, but since he wrote about them hopping around, there were probably a lot of them. During the campaigns in the Middle East, the army had both camels and horses as well as dogs accompanying them, and these probably have carried the fleas with them. While the small drawings of the fleas are quite simple, it appears that the author had studied them in order to draw them, which indicates a large number of fleas in camp. While most fleas attack animals rather than humans, there are fleas who attack humans as well and these can be found all over the world. They would probably have been as annoying as the mosquitoes jumping around and could transmit illnesses just as easily.

The last thing Jones mentioned were the jackals which appeared to be howling outside their camps at night. While Jones joked about scaring it off by appearing outside in his "short shirt", he also mentioned that they have been worried by it ever since it started appearing. Based on the description of the jackal and its screams, their worry isn't surprising. Hearing a scream from an animal which sounds like a human is frightening enough, but to hear it outside at night as well would probably be enough to creep out most people. At this time, the soldiers at the camp were probably seasoned fighters, and yet they were worried by the howling in the night. This in turn could indicate that the soldiers, because of the jackal, weren't getting enough sleep as sleeping with someone screaming outside, especially when it sounded like a human, would be a huge struggle.

All of these three things by themselves would probably be enough to portray Egypt in an unfavourable, even negative, light. The sheer amounts of bites Jones received from the mosquitoes for instance could've been enough to discourage his readers from wanting to travel to Egypt. The fact that they weren't only tormented by mosquitoes, but at the same time had to deal with massively multiplying fleas which probably had infested their entire camp as well as being terrorized by jackals at night, would most likely discourage anyone from travelling there. Egypt appears to be very unpleasant and unfriendly place to visit and a place which one would probably be happy to get away from as soon as possible.

In a letter dated November 20th 1917 Jones again wrote about the many creatures bugging him in Egypt. This time he wrote about both the fleas and the flies that he was tormented by. In a letter where he appears homesick and longing to come home, he wrote “fancy sleeping between white sheets without the fear to[sic] being bitten to death with fleas and flies etc, [...]”¹⁰⁹ While this is only a short sentence, it still shows the reality of what Jones was living with in Egypt. The flies he was referring to were most likely sandflies as those were able to come through the mosquito netting. This was a common problem which the army struggled with: “They[sandflies] are almost too small to see and they find their way into everything, clothes, bedding and through mosquito netting. Wherever they bite they set up the most violent irritation, and as they attack in hundreds all over the body life becomes a light form of hell. To scratch oneself is useless.”¹¹⁰

The female flies bite in order to suck blood and reproduce, leaving red bumps and itchy rashes in their wake. These can be easily infected by other bacteria and viruses, and there is also the possibility of the sandfly transmitting illnesses just as mosquitos.¹¹¹ There is even an influenza-like disease called sandfly fever which can be transmitted by a sandfly bite.¹¹² Sandflies are most active during dusk and dawn as well as during the night, and they operate in swarms. It is uncertain if the readers actually knew this information, however since Jones wrote that he was “being bitten to death”, they would understand enough.

This letter also has a markedly shift in tone, with Jones being nowhere near as playful as he normally was. He does appear to be truly homesick and weary, which influenced the way he wrote. Like the previous letter, the insects in Egypt seems to have greatly affected his life and, in this letter, he was brutally honest and fed up with it. Living in a country where one was constantly bitten by mosquitoes and flies each night doesn’t sound appealing to anyone.

¹⁰⁹ 20.10.17, Private Jones to his wife

¹¹⁰ Lieutenant Goodsall quoted in Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 183. Woodward noted that “Sand flies not only extract blood, they also lay eggs in human skin. The resulting parasite may remain in the body for long periods, damaging the organs of the affected. American soldiers in Iraq called these festering sores the Baghdad Boil”.

¹¹¹ Flies Only “How to Get Rid Of Flies in the House or Outdoors – Steps to Control a Fly Infestation” 15.09.20 <https://www.fliesonly.com/how-to-get-rid-of-sand-flies/>; Wikipedia, “Sandfly”, 15.09.20

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandfly>; Orkin “Sand flies” 15.09.20 <https://www.orkin.com/flies/sand-flies>

¹¹² Ozkale, Yasemin; Ozkale, Murat; Kiper, Pinar, Cetinkaya, Bilin; Erol, Ilknur “Sandfly fever: two case reports” *Turk Pediatri arsivi*, 51(2), 110-113. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4959739/>; Flies Only “How to Get Rid Of Flies in the House or Outdoors – Steps to Control a Fly Infestation” 15.09.20 <https://www.fliesonly.com/how-to-get-rid-of-sand-flies/>

Affecting Jones' life to such an extent, it portrays Egypt in a very negative and unpleasant light.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the demobilization situation in Egypt after the war was slow and unsteady because of the March 1919 Egyptian Revolt. Private Jones was at this time a part of the administration in Egypt. He stayed in Egypt until at least February 1919 which was when he sent his last letter home. In the letter, Jones wrote that he had to teach another sergeant to take over his position before he could be sent home. Therefore, he was probably in Egypt when the revolt started and as an effect might have had to stay in Egypt even longer. In his letter dated 14th of February 1919 he wrote:

“I dine & sleep with the sergeants & other big boys now. The sergeant I share the tent with, is a great lover of dogs like I am, but he has encouraged them in the tent & the consequence is the fleas are so numerous they absolutely throw you out of the tent. For two days running I have had to hunt my shirt for them. Yesterday I found six & the day before 10 of the darlings. Today after my swim I am going searching again.”¹¹³

¹¹³ 14.02.19, Private Jones to his wife

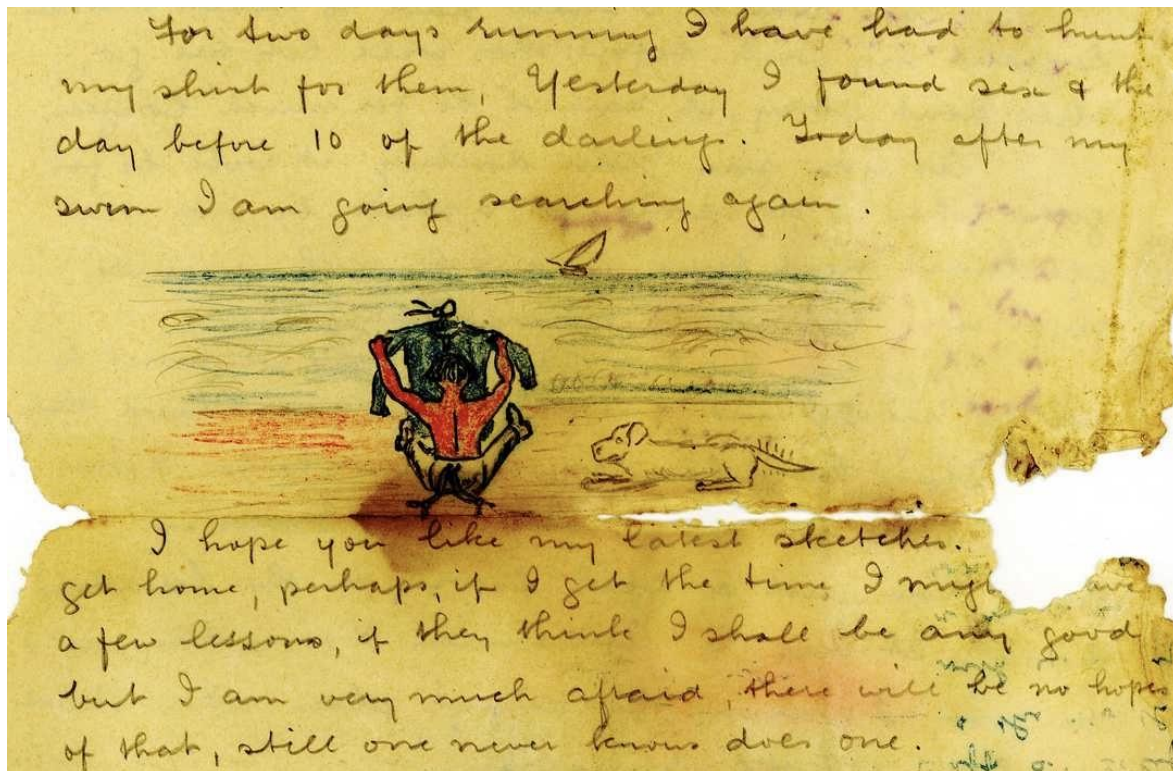


Figure 4: Part of a letter from Private Jones dated February 14th 1919. He had drawn himself on the beach looking through his shirt for fleas. The sketch is quite artistic, especially since he has used what appears to be coloured pencils.

As in previous letters, Jones wrote about the struggle of living with such pests as fleas. However, despite the fact that Jones hadn't been able to go home yet, he was back to writing in a playful tone, commenting that the fleas "throw you out of the tent". While that might sound amusing, it indicates that the fleas, like other insects, affected the amount of sleep the soldiers were able to get. Jones also drew a sketch of himself where he looked through his clothes in search of the fleas. The sketch is very colourful and fun, picturing him kneeling on the beach holding up his shirt to search it. Overall, it appears as somewhat of a fun activity. However, it couldn't have been easy to live like that, constantly having to check their clothes in fear of being bitten. These fleas came from the dogs which had been let into the tent, and while it's not certain if the dogs were Egyptian or British, it is certain that they were full of fleas. Egypt once again appears in a negative light as shabby and unhygienic and a place where your sleep is often interrupted by something.

Driver Pashler to his son Arnold

Another soldier who was heavily affected by the flies was Harold Pashler. In one of his letters to his son Arnold Pashler he wrote:

“The flies are a nuisance, one cannot sleep in the day time for them unless they cover their faces up, we generally have bread & jam midday, sometimes rice pudding as well, but what I want to say is, when spreading the jam, one has to get it into the mouth quickly before the flies settle on it. [...] I have at present one of my arms bandaged up through a sun blister, my knees are also very red & tender & tend to skin off, we wear short kickers like boy scouts, except when riding, then breeches, puttees & spurs, some of the fellows go about without their shirts on & are as brown as a nut. [...] The difficulty is to keep free from disease [sic] though I can look after myself in that respect. Well Arnold dear I don't think I can write any more this time as I want to write to Mother, no doubt your Mother will read this to you, I am writing under difficulties on my knee, we have no tables & chairs as you may guess.”¹¹⁴

Despite the fact that Pashler was writing home to his young son, he was very honest when he described his surroundings. Like many other soldiers, Pashler was tormented by the flies, and even mentioned that it was nearly impossible to sleep during the daytime because of this. While it might not seem significant to the reader, the soldiers stationed in Egypt had to change their circadian rhythm during the war, adopting to the Bedouin style of life. This was because of the extreme heat, which in turn meant that it was necessary for the soldiers to sleep during parts of the day. Although Pashler didn't write this explicitly, we can assume that the flies weren't a mere irritation but actually had an impact on the amount of sleep the soldiers got.

Furthermore, Pashler wrote that the flies got into the food, writing that “[...] one has to get it [bread and jam] into the mouth quickly before the flies settle on it”. This appears to be a very common problem, and it is something Woodward writes about as well: “some soldiers tried to brush them away before eating, others, in resignation, simply ate the flies as well.”¹¹⁵ It appears that eating in general becomes a nuisance because of this. And, although Pashler didn't explicitly write that he ended up eating flies, he might have and chosen not to write it directly.

¹¹⁴ The letter was written somewhere between 1917 and 1918

¹¹⁵ Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* 26.09.20
<https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

In addition to this, there was the danger of contracting diseases which the flies might carry. Diseases could be transmitted when the fly either had contact with humans or with their food. And as the sanitation in the military camps in Egypt was already poor due to general lack of water, transmission could easily happen. Flies feed on everything from human food to garbage and excrements, and as they were constantly buzzing around, spreading illnesses would be easy. Some of the diseases the flies could spread were typhoid, dysentery and diarrhoea, as well as eye and skin infections.¹¹⁶ While infection wasn't only because of the flies, the fact that there was such a magnitude of flies didn't help the contamination situation, especially since they liked to settle on open sores.¹¹⁷

In his letter Pashler also wrote about his overall health condition. He mentioned that he had a sun blister on one of his arms and that "my knees are also very red & tender & tend to skin off". The sun blister had had to be bandaged, something the soldiers often did in order to help the wound heal properly and avoid infections from sand and flying creatures. Infections, diseases and sores were so common that only the worst cases were hospitalized, which meant that most men only got some basic disinfecting treatment and then lived with their sores covered in bandages, hoping they would heal quickly.¹¹⁸

Though Pashler didn't mention what happened to his knees, it is likely that they too had been badly sunburnt and as a result kept "skinning off". Especially since he described their uniforms, which had "short knickers". At this time, sunscreen hadn't been invented yet,¹¹⁹ and because of the extreme heat many of the soldiers chose to wear as little clothes as possible. Sunburns were therefore easily contracted, and in combination with coarse clothes and continues sun exposure, they could very easily become sores.

Despite all these problems, Pashler wrote to his son that "the difficulty is to keep free from decease[sic]". He claimed that he could look after himself in that respect, however the

¹¹⁶ WHO "Houseflies" 28.09.20 https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/resources/vector302to323.pdf

¹¹⁷ «The swarms of flies settling on the sore did not improve matters, so we had to use bandages for self-preservation.» Hadaway, Stuart "Life in the EEF" *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WW1* 26.09.20 <https://eeffinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

¹¹⁸ "Trooper Victor Godrich recalled: 'Every man in the fighting forces was covered in septic sores on their hands, faces and legs – all in bandages. My own hands did not properly heal until the cold weather in December.'» Hadaway, Stuart "Life in the EEF" *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WW1* 26.09.20 <https://eeffinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

¹¹⁹ NY Times «Sunscreen: A History" 28.09.20 <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/24/fashion/24skinside.html>

literature shows that the casualty rates¹²⁰ were at times over 100% per year as some soldiers were hospitalized for various ailments during the same year.¹²¹ By his descriptions of Egypt included here, Egypt is portrayed in a very negative light. The flies appear to be a constant pest which made just about every situation worse because of their presence. And as there wasn't a proper way to protect oneself from the sun, this led to sunburns and blisters which could get infected and might not be healed until several months later. It definitely does not appear as an appealing place to visit as one might end up being more exhausted by the time one comes home again.

Jack Tait to his mother

The following letter was written by Jack Tait who was a driver for the Desert Mounted Corps. The letter was sent home to his mother from Palestine after Tait had fought in the Third Battle of Gaza. At this time Tait was not in Egypt, but had just arrived in Palestine. However, in many parts of the letter Tait described various ways of how Palestine was superior to Egypt, which is why the letter has been included here.

“I am still keeping fit and well except for a few septics but that is very common out here. This country is far before Egypt I can tell you. I was very pleased when we got off the desert. Our last day in the desert was a “teaser”, it blew a terrific sandstorm and as we were wanted at a certain place we had to go through with it and get there at all costs. You could not see the sun at all, your eyes got swollen up, and your mouth and nose full of sand. I got lost about six times and it was pure guesswork to find the track, I will never forget that run but Alls well that ends well and I am in the Promised Land at last. It was a big relief to get out of the desert and see some green stuff again. [...] It is a very rough life but healthy, and I am picking up again after being stuck in Egypt as the climate is ideal here.”¹²²

Tait immediately started to compare Egypt to Palestine in his letter. However, note the “septics” that he off-handedly mentioned in the first sentence. These “septics” probably referred to septic sores, especially since Tait commented that it was “very common out here”.

¹²⁰ In this instance, casualty rates referred to the number of wounded patients. *Dictionary.com* “casualty” 03.10.20 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/casualty> (03.10.20)

¹²¹ Hadaway, Stuart “Life in the EEF” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WW1* 26.09.20 <https://eeffinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

¹²² November 1917, Jack Tait to his mother

He might have written it in such a casual way so as not to worry the recipient, which was his mother, or he had simply gotten so used to it. After all, apparently almost everyone had them. It doesn't seem very appealing to have gotten used to living with septic sores. Sores in general are bad enough, and septic sores could seriously affect the wounded if they weren't properly treated. It is surprising that Tait didn't use the "septics" to give another argument for how Egypt was beneath Palestine. Tait also wrote further down in the letter that he was "picking up again after being stuck in Egypt". While he didn't write how his health was affected apart from the septics, it appears that something in the Egyptian climate affected him quite badly. This indicates that despite what he wrote at the start of the letter, his health had taken a toll after being stationed in Egypt.

There is no room for the reader to wonder what Tait thought of Egypt as he directly stated that "this country[*Palestine*] is far before Egypt". Not even the cattle were spared from this as he wrote that the cattle in Palestine was "nicer looking beasts" than the Egyptian ones which looked rather like buffalos. He is clearly not impressed by Egypt and didn't even try to hide it. We can wonder what kind of image Tait had of Egypt before he came, especially since he was such a fan of "the Promise Land". He followed this up by describing one of the last days in the Egyptian desert where they experienced what he called a "teaser": a "terrific sandstorm". Sandstorms are common during springtime, and the soldiers stationed in Egypt lived in fear of what was known as a khamsin¹²³ which could last for several days at a time.¹²⁴ Tait and his unit might have ended up in one of these khamsins. And, as they were wanted "a certain place" they had to go through the sandstorm, no matter the costs.

Tait chose to describe the sandstorm as if the reader themselves experienced it: "You could not see the sun at all, your eyes got swollen up, and your mouth and nose full of sand". He wrote that he got lost six times during the storm, noting that it was "pure guesswork to find the track". Despite Tait trying his best to explain what he went through it is impossible for a reader who has never experienced a sandstorm to understand. Reading about it, it seems like a terrifying ordeal and it is very understandable that soldiers lived in fear of such storms. Tait remarked that it was something he would never forget, ending his explanation of the experience in an upbeat note that "alls well that ends well".

¹²³ "The extremely hot and dust-laden wind that blows from March to April in Egypt" Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 23

¹²⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica* "Khamsin" 29.09.20 <https://www.britannica.com/science/khamsin>

As stated, it is clear to see what opinion Tait had of Egypt, which naturally would affect the way he experienced Egypt. That, in turn, would affect the picture the readers would be left with after reading his letter. Reading about a loved one fighting through sandstorms with septic sores being a normal part of life couldn't have been easy for anyone. It depicts Egypt as a dangerous country which shuns those who come to visit it, a place where you might as easily lose your way as your life in a sandstorm. With a climate which, contrary to what the tourist guides claimed, actually worsened your health than bettered it.

The rest of the chapter will focus on some of the sources Woodward used in his book "Hell in the Holy Land".¹²⁵ However, these aren't the full letters as Woodward picked out certain parts of the letters from the soldiers in order to fit his arguments. The sources each show different difficulties the soldiers experienced in Egypt during the First World War, and as a result only the part where this is recounted is included in Woodward's book. At the same time, these parts were written by the soldiers themselves, so we have to assume that Woodward portrayed them fairly. The excerpts which I have selected are the ones where Woodward let the sources speak for themselves and almost solely contain quotes from their letters as well as some comments from Woodward.

Sergeant William Barron to his family

The first source is a quote from Sergeant William Barron of the Northhamshire Regiment who, in a letter to his family, detailed the life of a soldier stationed at camp in Egypt. He wrote that the camp was roused already at 3.45 in the morning and from 4 o'clock until 8 o'clock they were hard at work save for half an hour break for tea and bully beef stew.¹²⁶ At eight o'clock they had their breakfast as it then was "too hot to be outside ones tent let alone working". Barron remarked to his recipient at home that they usually finished half a day's work before breakfast: "... then we had our breakfast, just fancy finished a days work before breakfast, at least finished until 4 o'clock in the afternoon when we went and done another hours work..."

¹²⁵ This is because these sources are originally from the Imperial War Museum which I wasn't able to visit due to COVID-19.

¹²⁶ Bully beef, known today as corned beef, is tinned meat which was an essential part of the soldier's diet.

At this time, Barron was stationed in the first section which protected the Suez Canal. Along with two Indian brigades he and the 54th division were stationed quite far south and into the country, between the Great Bitter Lake and the Little Bitter Lake south of Ismailia as seen on the map below. Where he was stationed naturally affected what Barron saw, though a description of Egypt from this part of the country is just as truthful as a description from Alexandria.

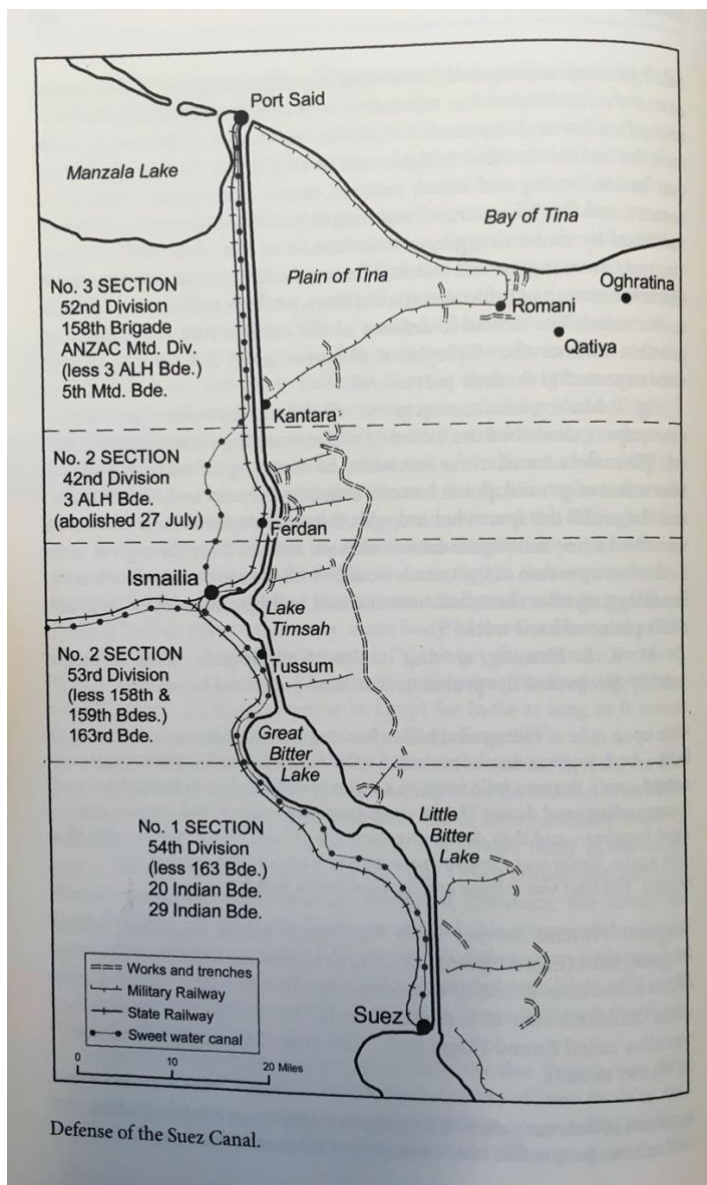


Figure 5: Overview of the Defense of the Suez Canal from “Hell in the Holy Land” by David R. Woodward

By the way he wrote, it appears that Barron had become accustomed to the new circadian rhythm, even marvelling over the fact that they were able to finish a day’s work before breakfast. As this letter was written in April 1916, he had already been a part of the army for

some time and might have chosen to write about their routines only when he was used to them. While this excerpt was mostly a description of army life at the time, Barron reveals small details about Egypt through the routine.

For instance, it appears that Barron wasn't used to the heat in Egypt by this time. The way he described the heat is quite detailed. He allowed his reader to envision the heat alongside him with comments like "too hot to be outside one's tent" and "almost too hot to breathe". He described that they tried to deal with the heat as best as they could, yet despite this, they sweated heavily and got blisters on their skin. This could not be easy to deal with, especially since water shortage was common among the soldiers.¹²⁷ And it wasn't as if they could simply escape to another place either since they were stationed there for a reason. As a final example of the extreme heat, Barron described how even the native birds were affected by it: "yes it was hot, enough for fowls to lay hard boiled eggs all day long."

By these descriptions, Egypt is presented as an extremely hot and uncomfortable place to be, maybe even hellish. After all, a typical picture of hell throughout history has been of a place of extreme heat and suffering. It appears to be a harsh, almost uninhabitable country to be stationed in, let alone living in. The reader might have been quite impressed by the British Army as they adapted to how the locals lived in order to be able to do their work. Like the Bedouins who also lived in the desert and had a similar rhythm to the one Barron describes.

Another thing that wasn't explicitly mentioned, but which the reader can pick up, is that Egypt probably didn't smell very nice. By the amount of sweat which Barron described, one can very quickly conclude that the camps, and maybe even Egypt as a whole, were quite smelly. That also puts hygiene into question as to how often the soldiers were able to clean themselves and how much sweat they went around with on a daily basis. Though this wasn't something new in regard to warfare or anything special for Egypt, it doesn't put Egypt in a better light. All in all, Egypt isn't portrayed in an especially positive way, even with the knowledge of war as it wasn't the war that made things hard for them, but simply the fact that Egypt was so incredibly hot all the time.

¹²⁷ Hadaway, Stuart "Life in the EEF" *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* 29.09.20
<https://eefinww1.weebly.com/life-in-the-eeef.html#>

Although the description is short, it certainly makes an impact, portraying Egypt as a sweaty, hot and possibly very smelly country. Certainly not an appealing place to visit or spend the vacation, especially if one has to adapt to such a circadian rhythm just to be able to function and do the things one wants to do. A point can be made to the fact that this was a small part of the country that they were stationed in, and in the desert at that. However, the desert was just as much a part of Egypt as any other place or city. And, if this was the only letter sent home with descriptions about Egypt, this would be the kind of image one would retain: a sweaty and hot hellhole.

Bertram George to his family

As an example of how flies brought misery to the soldiers, Woodward introduced Bertram George, a soldier who served with the Dorset Yeomanry during the war. In a letter home, George wrote that “there are three sounds in Egypt which never cease – the creaking of the waterwheels, the sound of the frogs, and the buzz of flies ... Letter writing is an impossibility in the evening for as soon as the sun goes down, if a lamp is lighted, the air all around is thick with little grey sand-flies which bite disgustingly”.¹²⁸

Bertram George was a part of the 1/1st Queen’s Own Dorset Yeomanry which, after retreating from Gallipoli, became a part of the 6th Mounted Brigade and took a part in the Senussi campaign. While this is once again a rather short excerpt, it does reveal a lot about Egypt and put it in a certain light for the reader. Firstly, there is the fact that silence didn’t seem to exist in Egypt. The fact that they always heard frogs, water wheels and flies showcase that there was never any true peace to be had, even away from the battlefield. It seems like there was always something there which could irritate or annoy. This, in turn, might have made resting and maybe just life in general more of a hassle.

Constant sound can weary a person out, soldier or not, especially if the sounds didn’t stop even at night. This could also have made the days blend more together. Of course, the light in the morning and the darkness in the evening would help the soldiers in this regard. However, if they too adapted to the Bedouin rhythm of life, sounds could have been a helpful indicator in distinguishing between different times of day. It is also quite clear by the way George

¹²⁸ Bertram George quoted in Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 24

wrote that he himself was fed up with the constant noise all around him despite the fact that they were in the middle of a war.

The second thing was the flies in themselves. Based on the few sentences about them in this letter, it is clear that these were sandflies like Jones wrote about. They invaded the life and privacy of the soldier, especially at night when the sun went down. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the sandfly bite was quite similar to a mosquito bite, and yet they also had their own dangers with them and might have been even worse than the mosquitoes. George noted that the air was “thick with little grey sand-flies” as soon as one lighted a light in the evening, and it appears as if it was a daily occurrence. He also wrote that the flies “bite disgustingly”. This indicates that he, like Jones, had been bitten before, and probably more than once based on the way he wrote.

It appears that George was very fed up with the noise and flies which constantly surrounded him. While he didn't write about how and when he was bitten, one can imagine that the flies didn't make only letter writing, but also sleeping as well as any activity during the evening and night quite irritating. By this description, Egypt appears in a disadvantageous and negative light as one would run the risk of being swarmed by flies and possibly getting infected with various diseases. It doesn't appear that one would be able to get any peace and rest while visiting Egypt either as the sound of frogs, waterwheels and flies would be a constant irritant.

[Lieutenant General Sir Randolph Baker to his sister](#)

The third point Woodward makes about living in Egypt is the boredom which many soldiers experienced. Previously, we've talked about how some nurses and other military personnel chose to travel about on their free time, but not everyone in the military personnel had the opportunity or means to do so. Woodward writes that “preparing defenses with nothing but empty desert within sight produced boredom”.¹²⁹ Sir Randolph Baker, at the time a cavalry officer, was, like Bertram George, stationed with the Dorset Yeomanry in Egypt during the Senussi campaign. He wrote home to his sister in March 1916 that “Egypt seems likely to be extremely dull all the summer, as far as one can judge, & I am very keen to try & get to France, or elsewhere.”

¹²⁹ Lieutenant General Sir Randolph Baker Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 24

Like George, Baker had most recently arrived in Egypt after the Gallipoli campaign and a part of the defence against the Senussi. Despite becoming second in command of his regiment in Egypt, it seems that Baker was bored and longed back to the action of the battlefield in Gallipoli.

Baker most certainly would have had the opportunity and the means to travel around in Egypt and visit the famous places. Instead, he wrote home to his sister about his boredom and wish to transfer to another country. It is difficult to establish just how much of Egypt he would have seen at the time, though the Dorset yeomanry was stationed in Cairo for some months in training before the Senussi campaign. This, in turn, indicates that he at this time would have had the opportunity to actually travel about if he had wished so. It might've simply been that as they were stationed in the desert, there was nothing to do and boredom took hold. However, Baker still chose to write "Egypt" and not just "the desert" or "the camp". That would then clearly convey to the reader that Egypt was, in fact, a place of boredom and dullness, not at all the interesting place the travelogues said it was.

It seems that Baker wasn't all that impressed with Egypt and, as he wrote, wished to transfer to another place as quickly as possible. Based on the source, we can't actually tell what it is that Baker was displeased with except for maybe the lack of action compared to Gallipoli. Nevertheless, it doesn't put Egypt in a positive light if you're bored and would rather travel to the Western Front and the trenches there than to stay put in Egypt. Especially since he was so high ranking and probably knew a lot about what happened in the other campaigns as well as the Western Front.

[E. N. Buxton to one of his sisters](#)

The last thing that Woodward notes in his chapter about Egypt was the combination of military activity in the midst of scorching sun and heat. He writes that "Constant drills and fatigue duty in the oppressive heat also demoralized many."¹³⁰ He explains that many of the soldiers took their frustration out on the local Egyptians, the example here being E.N. Buxton who wrote a letter home to one of his sisters while hospitalized for "a touch of the sun".¹³¹

¹³⁰ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 24

¹³¹ Woodward does not write where Buxton was stationed or which unit he belonged to.

Buxton wrote: “I now look upon the Arabs no longer as picturesque, but as loathsome scum. There is still a certain amount to admire in the sunsets which are very fine but otherwise this is a land of filth, garbage, flies and dust.”¹³²

The most interesting part about this quote is everything it implies. From the way Buxton wrote, we can gather that he has written home to his sister about Egypt before. Not only that, but when he did, he wrote in a much more favourable light than he did here. In other words, it appears that Buxton’s opinion had changed as time went on and he experienced more of Egypt. At first, he appreciated all the beautiful things like the picturesque landscape and the sunsets which, he writes, he still admires. However, as he stayed on, his opinion has changed drastically. And he didn’t only partly change his opinion, but it almost seems like a 180-degree change. And he doesn’t stop with the country but has even taken a huge dislike to the locals in the way he calls them “loathsome scum”. Either something must have happened which involved the locals and drastically changed his view, or, like Woodward claims, he might just be taking his frustration out on the locals as well, though it is difficult to discern from this small paragraph.

An immediate question is how and when did Buxton come to view the locals as “picturesque”? Numerous travelogues about Egypt had been published by this time, and it appears that Buxton had been pretty interested in Egypt at one point. We can therefore assume that Buxton had read and been influenced by the romantic picture many of these travelogues portrayed. He might have read stories like those in “One Thousand and One Nights” as well, which also would’ve affected his view of the Egyptians. Then, when Buxton arrived in Egypt, it might have appeared everything he dreamed of at first, but over time the illusion appears to have shattered.

In this instance, his health condition might have affected what he wrote home to his sister as he was in the hospital because of “a touch of sun”. Though it is doubtful that a heatstroke would affect him to such a degree as to make him change his entire impression of Egypt as a whole. Nevertheless, it is very clear based on the bitter way wrote that something happened which led him to see Egypt like he sees it here. This, in turn, indicates that he has travelled around to several parts of Egypt already as he doesn’t appear to be the type of person to

¹³² Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 24

change his opinion easily. So, as he at first viewed Egypt as picturesque and beautiful, he has now come to view it as “a land of filth, garbage, flies and dust”. He isn’t only writing that part of Egypt is like this, or that one of the cities, or even the desert, but that Egypt in its entirety is like this. That is quite curious as it is a very strong opinion as well as a very drastic change to his previous views which are implied. It also appears as if Buxton might have wanted to like Egypt as well since he still holds on to the fact that there are “certain parts to admire in the sunsets”, but it also implies that even the picturesque sunsets, a classic for postcards, aren’t as beautiful anymore.

The picture of Egypt that is portrayed here is therefore dual. Firstly, it is of a country of deceit. That one at first glance would appreciate and see all the good things that one expects, like the pyramids and the beautiful landscapes. Then, as one gets underneath the surface, one would realize that it was actually a dirty country filled with flies. A deceit which was fed by and continued by the travelogues and tourists that continually visited. The inhabitants might be portrayed as “loathsome scum” partly because they were a part of maintaining this false picture. Secondly, it is of a country which is dirty and unsanitary, possibly smelly, and filled with flies and dust. Buxton didn’t write that only parts of Egypt was like this, rather he claimed that the entire country is filled with filth and garbage, which naturally attracts the flies he mentions. On top of this, Egypt is also showcased as a country where the heat is too much, and the sun is dangerous as Buxton himself had ended up in the hospital because of a heatstroke.

Concluding remarks

The picture of Egypt which the reader of a letter would be left with is naturally affected by the experiences of the author. In some instances, like the previous chapter, the reader obtained a positive view of Egypt because of the positive experiences of the author. Romantic accounts with beautiful details of visiting the sphinx and pyramids as well as marvelling over the sunset on a cruise down the Nile join the travelogues’ accounts. They present Egypt as a wonderful tourist spot to visit and fit with the accusations from other soldiers that war service in Egypt was akin to taking a vacation.

In this chapter, we have taken a step away from this image of Egypt which was presented in the previous chapter. Instead, we have delved into the everyday experiences of the soldiers

and in turn obtained a more nuanced view of what it meant to be a soldier in Egypt. In contrast to what many believed, including fellow soldiers, service in Egypt wasn't a holiday. In fact, we have seen that it was quite the opposite as the soldiers stationed in Egypt battled just as many hardships as the soldiers stationed at other fronts. Many of the hardships were the same as those faced at other fronts, like dental problems, mosquitoes and dysentery. War service in general is revealed as gritty and hard, and war service in Egypt was no exception.

At the same time, we have also seen that some of the experiences were specific to the Middle Eastern theatre or even specific to Egypt. The soldiers lived with sand everywhere, often battling sandflies and malaria away, trying to heal their septic sores while a general lack of water worsened the situation. Some of the soldiers lived in fear of sandstorms while others came to realize that Egypt wasn't as delightful as they had thought it would be, ending up bitter and frustrated. Together, all these hardships portray a picture of Egypt which stands in stark contrast to the wonderful tourist destination of chapter 3. Consequently, the readers, based on these letters alone, could come to view Egypt as a "sandy hellhole", completely different from everything else they had heard.

Interestingly enough, the letters written home often conveyed more than one of these pictures. Therefore, if we put these two quite opposite views together, they can give a more nuanced view. A view that staying in Egypt wasn't all sunshine and roses, but neither was it completely miserable. This is something we should keep in mind as we look into the third picture the soldiers conveyed home: Egypt as a free space and fleshpot.

Chapter 5: Egypt – a fleshpot and free space

«The great difficulty in Egypt has been to produce an atmosphere of war. Up to the time of our arrival the whole idea in Egypt appeared to be amusement and having a good time, and the state of Cairo and Alexandria was a positive scandal, thousands of officers hanging around the hotels... We have taken this matter in hand, and have now issued orders that all officers are to join their units forthwith.» – Lynden-Bell to Sir Frederick Maurice, January 16, 1916¹³³

During the First World War, there existed a freedom from social structures for the military personnel, especially those who served far from home. While this freedom existed for both soldiers and nurses, it manifested itself differently for men and women. For young British men, the experience in Egypt could be an introduction into the “adult world” in more ways than one with the potential of being morally corrupting. For the women their experience was liberating in a different way. They experienced more freedom to travel and less of the social structures that they were subjected to back home. Their experiences might be especially liberating since many of these women had never “experienced much beyond domestic life in relatively sheltered middle- or upper-class homes.”¹³⁴

Because of these different experiences, this chapter will be parted in two in order to look into the two different views of Egypt as a free space. The first part will look into the view of Egypt as a “fleshpot”. “Fleshpot” is understood as either a place of “bodily comfort: luxury” or as a place of “lascivious entertainment”.¹³⁵ The second part will look into the view of Egypt as a women’s free space from social expectations and limitations.

Fleshpot

The term “fleshpot” is, as mentioned, defined as a place of bodily comfort and entertainment, however the definition originates from a popularly misquoted Bible verse. This Bible verse referred to the Israelites longing back to the fires and fleshpots of Egypt after the Exodus. The Israelites longed back to the actual meat they ate in Egypt whereas the word later came to

¹³³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 33

¹³⁴ Nadia Atia *Big Ideas: The women’s war in the Middle East – Women’s First World War Service in Egypt, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia and Palestine* Lecture published at The National Archives 10.06.15, 20.20 to 20.32, 27.10.20. <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/big-ideas-womens-war-middle-east/>

¹³⁵ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary s.v. “Fleshpot”. 20.10.20. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fleshpot>

refer to sensual misconduct and luxury.¹³⁶ In the book “Pyramids and fleshpots” Stuart Hadaway makes the argument that the military war theatre in Egypt was more than just a “fleshpot”. However, this argument indicates that there exists a view of Egypt as some kind of “fleshpot”. This category will mostly focus on and include the British soldiers as those are the ones most often associated with the “fleshpot” experience. This chapter will therefore look at both how the soldiers had freedom to run around and visit brothels, and how they had the freedom to enjoy a good meal.

Freedom to immorality

According to the research literature, many of the soldiers took part in a variety of pleasures during their stay in Egypt. Some of them had not even been outside their own country before the war, which made the prospect of Egypt all the more enticing. On top of that, many were very young and inexperienced, which in turn worried the higher ups. Woodward noted in “Hell in the Holy Land” that despite the fact that red-light districts could be found in London just as easily as in Egypt, “the War Office feared that young and unsophisticated British lads sent abroad would be corrupted”.¹³⁷

Lord Kitchener, who was Secretary of State for War, warned the soldiers that “In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations and while treating women with perfect curtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.”¹³⁸ This warning was issued to the soldiers serving in France. However, Woodward mentions that Kitchener was even more worried about the soldiers serving in Egypt because of Egypt’s “reputation for vice and sensuality”.¹³⁹ When talking about various experiences in Cairo, Woodward writes that “Cairo had attractions for your warriors of more earthly instincts.”¹⁴⁰ In some instances, Cairo was viewed as “a city blessed with grandeur unequalled in the world yet packed with all the lust and vice conceivable.”¹⁴¹

When writing about the fleshpot in Egypt and specifically Cairo, Hadaway and Woodward take somewhat differing views on the situation. Hadaway argues that drunkenness was a

¹³⁶ *Crossrefit-it.info* s.v. “Fleshpots of Egypt” 27.10.20 <https://crossref-it.info/repository/sayings/Fleshpots-of-Egypt>

¹³⁷ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26

¹³⁸ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26

¹³⁹ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26

¹⁴⁰ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26

¹⁴¹ A. W. Fletcher quoted in Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26

major problem for the army because of the availability of cheap drinks as well as the fact that a lot of the alcohol, even the “branded” alcohol, had been either spiked or simply brewed locally. This meant that the alcohol was much stronger and even potentially had “dangerous impurities” in it. Combined with a “flourishing red-light district”, Hadaway argues that it was easy for soldiers to go awry: “In these vibrant slums, where prostitutes would line the balconies over clubs and music halls in which drink flowed and exotic dancers performed, it was extremely easy to go astray and succumb to temptation, regardless of nationality. Few of these young men would have ever seen such flagrant displays of freely [or at least cheaply] available drink and sex, and it was only human nature that many would give in to their baser desires.”¹⁴²

Woodward takes a different approach to the situation. Like Hadaway, he acknowledges that alcohol was “readily available”, writing that Port Said had a bar on every corner.” However, he argues that the problem was created by the military presence, not by anything inherent to Egyptian society. For Woodward, it was “the presence of tens or thousands of boisterous young men, many of whom were away from home for the first time” who “fostered a booming trade in alcohol, drugs such as cocaine and hashish, and prostitution in Egypt’s cities.”¹⁴³ Despite their differences in opinions, we may assume that Egypt during WWI to many of the soldiers appeared as a fleshpot, both as an image and in reality.

A soldier sending a letter home to his mother or wife that he had visited a brothel is very unlikely to come across. It could be similar to how the soldiers in the previous chapter sometimes refrained from writing about how bad their situation was in order to spare those at home. Maybe the soldiers also refrained from describing the more scandalous things they experienced to shield themselves or those at home. At the same time, the military personnel may have wished to pose as “better” than other soldiers, alternatively as better than the country in which they were stationed. An example is how British soldiers might have had cause to write about the ANZAC riots in 1915 and 1916. A group of ANZAC troops rioted, attacked and set aflame a brothel on the street of Haret Al Wassir.¹⁴⁴ While there are various

¹⁴² Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 47

¹⁴³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26-27

¹⁴⁴ Or ‘Haret el Wasser’ depending on the spelling. Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 49

accounts as to why the ANZAC set parts of the red-light district aflame,¹⁴⁵ the fire eventually spread to nearby buildings, attracting many people and escalated the situation.

Another possibility for lack of representation of “Egypt as a fleshpot” is economics. ANZAC, who were frequent visitors to the many bars and Cairo’s red-light district, earned a much larger sum than their fellow British soldiers. This, in turn, might have meant that while the British had to choose between either visiting touristy sites or fleshpot sites, ANZAC personnel could do both. On top of that, censorship was, as previously mentioned, a very real factor in the communication between the soldiers and their families. If the soldiers did, in fact, write home about their various experiences in the red-light district, it would most likely be cut to avoid placing the British Army in a bad light.

Letter from James Ryan to his parents

During the First World War, many of the soldiers who frequented these bars and brothels were ANZAC in the lack of something better to do.¹⁴⁶ While organizations such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army eventually established themselves and offered more varied forms of recreational activities, the red-light district continued to be a problem for the army. The situation escalated into the ANZAC riots on the 2nd of April 1915 with what is now known as the ‘First Battle of Wazzir’.¹⁴⁷ The British Military Police(MP) was mobilized to defuse the situation as the fire brigade had been attacked when they tried to stop the fire. However, the warning shots by the MP wounded several of the ANZAC and only worsened the already tense situation. By then the ANZACs were numbering several thousand troops and it wasn’t until troops from 42nd Division was mobilized against the rioters that the situation came under control and the riot dispersed.

¹⁴⁵ Hadaway argues that the riots were sparked because the ANZACs “felt cheated by the brothel” while New Zealand government offers both the spread of venereal diseases as well as the supposed mission to rescue a young English woman who had been taken as a sex slave. Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 47-50 ; NZ History “Anzac soldiers riot in Cairo’s Wazzir brothel district, 2 April 1915” 20.11.20 <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/page/anzac-soldiers-riot-cairos-wazzir-brothel-district>

¹⁴⁶ When the ANZAC first arrived, they had been travelling for a long time. Many of them were very young and inexperienced, and they had to wait for a long time until they would see some action as they had to train, but at the same time there were too many of them. As such, they had a lot of downtime and not really many recreational activities were offered, at least in the beginning, which meant that the bars and red-light district became attractive places for them. Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 26-30 ; Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 47-50

¹⁴⁷ The battle is named thus because of the street the situation happened. Hadaway *Pyramids and Fleshpots* 49

James Ryan was a young Gunner who served with the Royal Field Artillery in Cairo, Alexandria and Ismailia among other cities throughout the Middle Eastern theatre. During April 1915 as he was stationed in Egypt, Ryan was told by a fellow soldier about the ANZAC riot which had happened in Cairo. He mentioned the riot in a letter home to his family:

“There has been a bit of a riot in Cairo, and I was told by a chap that came here that the Australians and New Zealanders were burning all the things they came across in Cairo, and rioting and the result was the Manchester Fusiliers, had to charge them at the point of the bayonet, and it is reported that a lot of them have been wounded, I will tell you more later. I am sorry I can’t tell you where I am, because if I did it would ably[sic] be erased out and would [missing piece] trouble.”¹⁴⁸

While Ryan himself didn’t experience the riots and situation in Cairo, he was told about it from another soldier, so it appears that the riot was common knowledge amongst the soldiers stationed in Egypt. The explanation of the riot was brief, and Ryan instead explained that he would write more in a later letter, however this is the only letter that was available in the archives from him. He wrote that the ANZAC were burning down part of the city, but he didn’t specify where, only wrote that they “were burning all the things they came across.” Though Ryan didn’t explicitly write what the source of the riot in Cairo was, his parents might have already known or been told. If not, they would know soon enough in letter which Ryan promised to write “later”.

What the readers of the letter did know from this letter was that the situation was so out of control that a part of the British Army had to be put in against their own Commonwealth comrades in order to get the situation under control. The picture of Egypt that is presented in this source appears to be of a place of unrest and vice that might turn allies against one another.

Postcard by John Inch Low to his daughter

The second source in this category is one of the postcards John Inch Low sent home to his daughter, Jessie Helen. It contains a portrait of a woman at the front with text at the bottom which reads: “Danseuse Arabe”.

¹⁴⁸ 03.04.15, James Ryan to his family



The woman in the picture looks to be about her late twenties or early thirties. She has brown, curly hair which is partly pulled up in an updo. She has jewellery around her head, resting at the top of her forehead. The jewellery looks to be made up of pearls or beads, with large, golden circles and coins hanging off of it and covering her in a typical Arab-style adornment. A similar piece of jewellery hangs around her neck, as well as a pair of similar earrings in her ears. The colour of her jewellery is clearly hand-coloured, indicating that the other colours can have been enhanced as well. As the photo is a portrait, she is only visible from the upper chest and up, and as such it is difficult to determine if she is dressed in a white top or a white dress with sleeves. Though it is an old photo, it looks like the woman is wearing light make up and she is staring directly into the camera with an intense look in her eyes. The colours are

faded and there is light shining on her from a source outside of the picture, which might make her skin appear lighter than it really is. The back of the card contains the following message:

“15 Oct. 1918

Picture of an Arab dancing girl. Daddy is seeing many queer people in the towns of Egypt; some of them with old Bible names like Moses.

Love from Daddy & kisses.”¹⁴⁹

Low explained that the person on the card was, in fact, “an Arab dancing girl” and he used that to then write about all the odd people he had seen in the towns of Egypt. While he didn’t write anything about her, he wrote that he saw a lot of “queer people”, indicating that he probably counted her as one of them. This woman is described as being an “Arabic dancer” which indicates that she might have been a belly dancer or had a similar occupation at one of the many such establishments in Egypt. However, this can also be a posed motif as belly dancing, referred to by guidebooks as “formerly one of the chief curiosities of Egypt”,¹⁵⁰ had become very restricted, only allowed at certain places or arrangements.¹⁵¹ The woman on the front of the card is certainly very different and exciting, something that his daughter might have only read about in a book. The postcard might have been chosen at random, or he might have picked it in order to show his daughter one of the “queer” people that he saw in the streets of Egypt. The card is a very exotic trope and portrays Egypt as a place where one could find “queer people” and exotic performances, showcasing it as a free space.

Freedom to enjoy a good meal

Throughout the First World War, the food varied greatly. Like the troops at the Western Front, the soldiers at the front in the various Middle Eastern campaigns survived on what they had, which was typically bully beef and biscuits. Tea was a very important part of their routine as well, and the army did their outmost to vary the soldier diet and bring with them fruit and vegetables as well. While Egypt initially suffered from food shortages due to the sudden influx of military personnel, the situation soon improved. An example of this is from the memoir of Lance Corporal R. Loudon of the 4th Royal Scots mentioned by Hadaway:

¹⁴⁹ 15.10.18 J.I. Low to his daughter

¹⁵⁰ Baedeker *Egypt and the Sudan* xxvi

¹⁵¹ Baedeker *Egypt and the Sudan* xxvi ; Budge, E.A. Wallis, and Thomas Cook. *Cook's Handbook for Egypt and the Egyptian Sudan*. 3rd ed. London, 1911. 318

“Our rations in camp were tea, bread, bacon [or two eggs], cheese and jam for breakfast; tea, bread, cheese and jam for lunch [at 1 p.m.], and stew, or beef cooked in soup, and potatoes for dinner [at 5 pm]. There was a YMCA hut in camp where we could purchase a cup of tea, and various titbits, very cheaply.”¹⁵²

The military personnel stationed in Egypt, especially those stationed close to large cities, therefore had the freedom to enjoy a good meal. This was a luxury that was not always readily available elsewhere in the Middle Eastern war theatre, especially the combination of the opportunity and freedom to enjoy it. The soldiers could enjoy a good meal in the military camp, like described above, or travel into the cities and dine at the club or the restaurants there.

Letters from Jones to his wife

In his letters home to his wife, Private Jones mentioned several times how clothes didn't fit him and that he was “not the only one getting fat”. On March 17th 1917, Jones wrote a letter to his wife where he told her about the new uniforms they had been issued and had to parade in:

“We have all been issued out with new clothes for the hot weather. Of course it isn't hot yet, only about 110 in the shade, but it soon will be. This morning we had to parade with it on. This is exactly how mine fitted. I had to ask them whether they were supposed to be shorts or trousers I was wearing, & laughing so much at the other frights, I fell out the back of mine. I didn't hurt myself though it was on soft sand.”¹⁵³

152 Hadaway, Stuart “Water” *Egyptian Expeditionary Force in WWI* 20.11.20
<https://eefinww1.weebly.com/water.html>

¹⁵³ 17.03.17, Private Jones to his wife

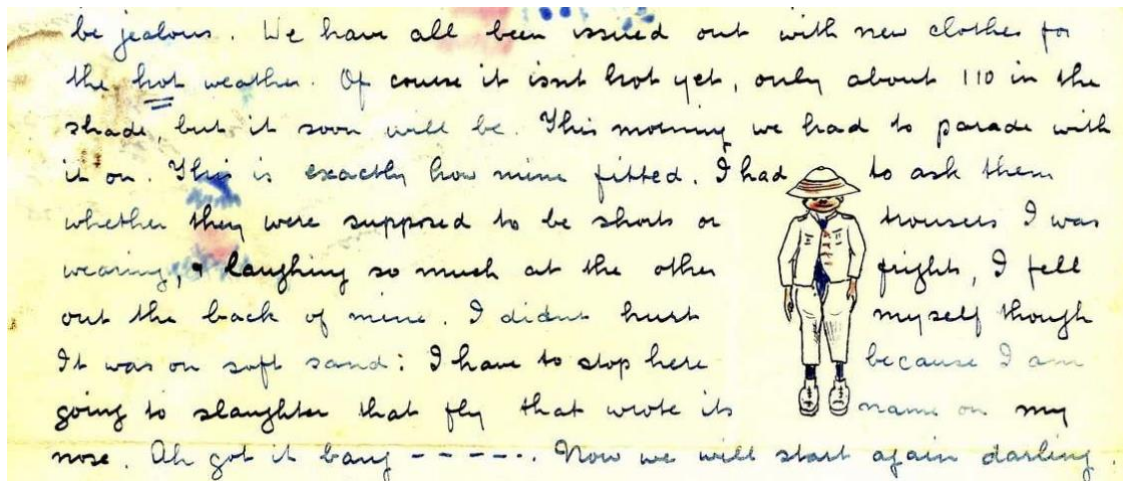


Figure 6: Photocopy of Private Jones' letter to his wife with a sketch of himself in tight clothes.

Both his own descriptions and the sketch he created of himself show how the clothes were too small for him. Both the jacket and the pants appear to be too small over the stomach as Jones wasn't able to button his jacket or his pants, the pants being clearly too small on his legs as well. Jones wrote that he had asked if the pants were supposed to be so short and remarked that he laughed so much that he fell over in the sand. This letter alone could be interpreted as either the military had simply made a mistake and given Jones clothes that were too small, or that Jones had gained weight. However, together with the next letter he wrote home, on May 6th, we can determine that he was, in fact, gaining weight:

“Well Jessie dear I don't think I have much more to say, only that I am quite well & hoping that you are the same. I am not the only one getting fat, you ought to see my kitten, I am afraid my preaching to her don't do her much good, she mixed up with the rif raf of Ras-el-Tin & one of her companions is an old ginger cat & you know I never trust anything ginger. Notice the Sphinx like look she wears & the evil look longing on the Ms Cat.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ 06.05.17 Private Jones to his wife

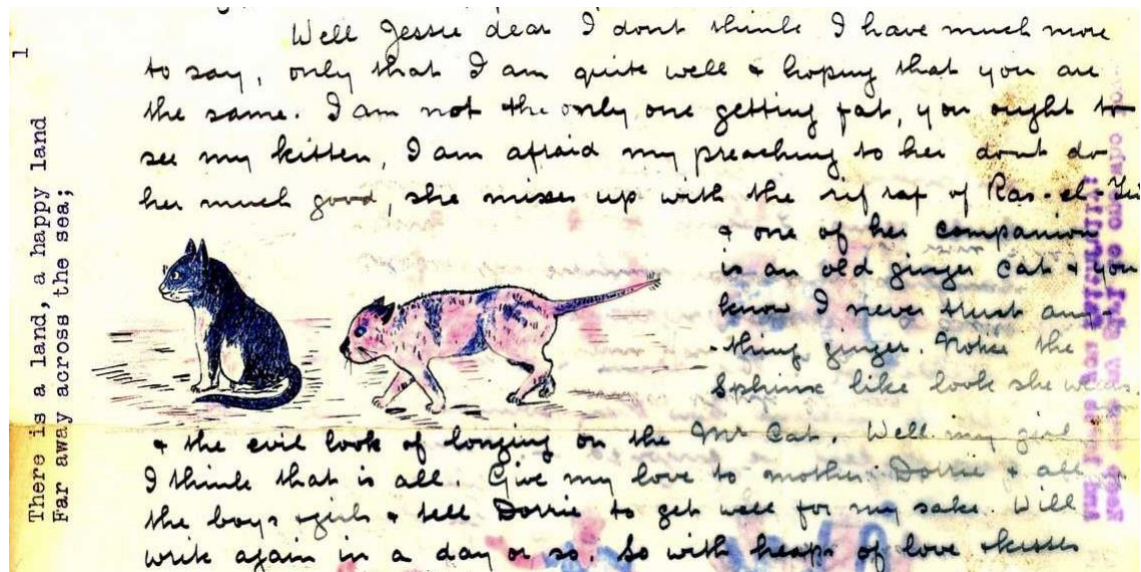


Figure 7: Photocopy of Jones' letter dated May 6th with a sketch of two cats.

Based on the way Jones wrote, defending his weight gain, it appears that his wife might have written and commented on it in reply to his previous letter. In this letter Jones defended his own weight gain by relating how the cat he was watching over was gaining weight as well. The fact that Private Jones was gaining weight over time despite being in the middle of a war indicates that he might have had a lot of downtime as well as plenty of food. While he doesn't appear to have taken part in travelling to the city to visit the restaurants there, both him and the cat have had more than enough to eat. Through this, Egypt is represented to the reader as a place where they had the freedom and opportunity to enjoy a good meal often, and by extent presenting Egypt as a fleshpot.

Women's free space

The second part of the chapter will focus on the women's free space part of Egypt which was conveyed by the nurses during the war. Like the soldiers, many of the nurses who served in the First World War had never travelled outside of Great Britain. Therefore, serving in the war was a unique opportunity for these women to travel and experience different cultures. This is reflected in Nadia Atia's lecture "Big Ideas: The women's war in the Middle East – women's First World War Service in Egypt, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia and Palestine." Atia explains how the nurses serving in the Middle East experienced "periods of intense work but also periods with little to do but bathe in the sea, go sightseeing, simply spend time having

teas, picnics or engaging in other leisure activities.” Because of these periods of downtime, discussions about to the behaviour of these women increased.¹⁵⁵

At the start of the war, the nurses were defined by a number of characteristics inspired by “the Nightingale ideals of respectability, chastity, discretion, morality”.¹⁵⁶ Atia explains that “the nurse, in her pure white, nun-like uniform, came to symbolize purity and self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of an Allied victory. Especially after the execution of Edith Cavell in 1915.”¹⁵⁷ Edith Cavell was a trained nurse from Great Britain who worked at a Red Cross hospital in Belgium during the war where she treated patients from both sides. She became involved with smuggling captured Allied soldiers who were patients at her hospital and in 1915 she was arrested and shot by German soldiers. While her execution was legal by international law, Cavell became a symbol for the Allied cause.¹⁵⁸ Despite the importance and value of these principles, the stay in Egypt brought more freedom of expression and travel than the nurses would have experienced back at home. This was especially true regarding “their freedom to associate with serving men”.¹⁵⁹

Another thing which affected these serving women were the restrictions surrounding their means of self-expression. Military censorship existed for all the letters sent out of war zones. However, Atia argues that the women had a second censor applied to them which built on the official censorship. This second censor was the women’s own internal censorship as they were given the opportunity to “escape from the tight social control of their upbringing” through their travels.¹⁶⁰ These women finally had the opportunity to do travel outside the social sphere they existed in, but at the same time they had to edit how they wrote about this freedom. This was necessary in order to fit into both the already existing literature written about their own gender as well as the literature written by other women. To keep within this “double censor”, Atia argues that they drew on their own education and literary background,

¹⁵⁵ Atia “Big Ideas” 26.58-27.18

¹⁵⁶ Atia “Big Ideas” 27.20-27.50

¹⁵⁷ Atia “Big Ideas” 27.53-28.18

¹⁵⁸ *Imperial War Museum* “Who was Edith Cavell?” 22.10.20 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/who-was-edith-cavell>

¹⁵⁹ Atia “Big Ideas” 29.02-29.18

¹⁶⁰ Atia, Nadia “First World War Nursing Narratives in the Middle East” in *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* Smith, Angela K. and Cowman, Krista (ed.), New York: Routledge, 2017 176

and when this failed, searched further and even developed their own literary styles in order to express themselves.¹⁶¹

The following sources are from Nadia Atia's article *First World War Nursing Narratives in the Middle East*. Like the previous chapter, these sources are originally from letters found at the Imperial War Museum which Atia then has quoted in her article. Furthermore, these sources are also a part of Atia's lecture "Big Ideas" where she, in addition to already mentioning the quotes from her article, also offer additional quotes from two of the nurses. Therefore, the excerpts from both Atia's article and her lecture which portrays Egypt as a "free space" will be included in this chapter.

Nurse Hills to her family

In her article, Atia writes about Sarah Anne (Annie) Hills who served with the QAIMNS between July 1915 and June 1918. Hills was stationed on a number of hospital ships as well as at the 21st General Hospital in Alexandria and was very interested in travelling. She wrote many letters home to her mother about her stay in Egypt and all that she experienced. In a letter home dated the 25th of July 1915 she wrote that she saw "people [who] are so very Eastern. Just what you read about but have never seen before. Most of the women wear a veil which hides three parts of their face."¹⁶² A few months later, in a letter dated September 26th she wrote to her mother that she found Egypt "most fascinating", and declared that:

"[s]ome say the novelty will soon wear off but if I stay here months I am sure it won't. The weather is still hot but I have never felt it very much. I've not done much sightseeing in the native bazaars yet, such quaint things there are to be seen. Imagine actually seeing Arabs in the desert on camels."¹⁶³

From these excerpts, Hills gives the impression of being very appreciative for the freedom to travel and experience a different culture which being stationed in Egypt offered her. She seems aware that this was a unique opportunity for her, to the point that she appears almost naïve by claiming that she is sure that "the novelty" won't disappear. This despite the fact that she was stationed there in the middle of a war and thus didn't know how long she'd be there

¹⁶¹ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 176

¹⁶² Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 183

¹⁶³ Hills, 26/09/15, Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 178, Atia *Big Ideas* 15.13-15.45

for. It is interesting to note that her statement is inadvertently confirmed by her comments surrounding the locals. When she first wrote about the local population in July 1915, she had just arrived in Egypt and it was the first time that she saw “people who look so very eastern”. However, by the time she wrote the second letter, she had been stationed there for some time, which meant that she had had the opportunity to adapt to living in Egypt. Yet, she appears to be just as excited over being able to “see Arabs in the desert on camels”, something she had never seen before she came to Egypt.

In her letters Hills gives off the impression that she was conscious over her own position. She had a certain amount of knowledge of the area, something she shared with the intended reader, and possibly a special interest for the region. Based off of her letters, the locals appear almost as another attraction, yet another thing to see, just like the camels. The Arabs and the camels were both foreign and exotic, corresponding with what she had read about, which filled her with excitement. The way she refers to the bazaar as having “such quaint things to be seen” is rather patronizing. While it is difficult to discern whether or not this was a deliberate use of words, it comes across as condescending. Quaint usually refers to something “attractively unusual or old-fashioned”,¹⁶⁴ which in turn elevates the writer and the reader to a superior position juxtaposed what is described. Hills herself was here in a position where she was free to travel around and observe, a freedom those she observed appeared to lack.

Hills’ appreciation of and opportunity to travel comes up in a later letter. In 1916 the military needed volunteers who would travel to Mesopotamia and East Africa which were some of the most challenging places to be stationed during the war.¹⁶⁵ Hills wrote home to her mother that she “could not miss the opportunity & put down my name for East Africa.”¹⁶⁶ Hills was given the opportunity and had the ability to put herself in a position to travel further and experience even more than what she had already seen. Something which she evidently realised as she wrote that she simply “could not miss the opportunity”.

Hills already had some knowledge about the Middle East, and she might have been quite aware of her own position compared to the position she had at home. Normally, she might have never received an opportunity like this, something both she and her reader probably

¹⁶⁴ Oxford Dictionaries s.v. “Quaint” 27.10.20 <https://www.lexico.com/definition/quaint>

¹⁶⁵ Atia *Big Ideas* 15.55-16.02

¹⁶⁶ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 178

knew. Or if she should be fortunate enough to receive such an opportunity later, it might not be under the same conditions. While Egypt was a tourist destination and continued to be so after the war, East Africa was not as easily accessible, especially not to a woman. As such, her letters portray Egypt to the reader as a place of liberation and new opportunities. A place where the nurses were readily offered opportunities, and most of all had the freedom to accept, travelling to places they might never have experienced otherwise.

Letter by Nurse Lea to her mother

The second nurse Atia mentions is Winnie E.B. Lea. She was a part of the QAIMNS(R) from September 1915 to July 1916 and was stationed in Lemnos and later Egypt as well as on hospital ships around the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁷ Lea frequently wrote home about her experiences, most often to her mother but also to the rest of her family. Atia notes that Lea's letters were often "long and diary-like" as they were written over the course of many days and ended up quite similar to travelogues.¹⁶⁸

In the same way Hills was excited by her encounter with the locals at the bazaars, Lea seems thrilled when she first arrived in Egypt: "Landed at Alexandria at last Hurrah! All so quaint – the Arabs with their long dressing gown sort of garments & the women with their faces covered by those long black things."¹⁶⁹ Like Hills, Lea uses the word "quaint" to describe what she sees. It is curious that they both choose this word to describe what they saw, especially since this word isn't used by any of the soldiers included in this thesis. It might simply be because women and men often use different words to describe things, especially when talking to others of the same sex. Or it might be an example of the "double censor" mentioned by Atia where the women had a more careful approach to descriptions. Nevertheless, the word carries a condescending air, hinting to the opinion of the writers.

The way Lea wrote about the locals also reveals a patronizing and maybe even naïve understanding of what she saw. She could be simply lacking the words to describe the clothes that she saw, or perhaps she felt that she had to simplify it for her reader to understand what she was referring to. However, it can also be read as an active dismissal, especially in regard to the face veils the women she saw appears to have been wearing. Veils are not a new

¹⁶⁷ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 181; Atia *Big Ideas* 23.12-23.43

¹⁶⁸ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 186; Atia *Big Ideas* 23.44-24.00

¹⁶⁹ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 183

invention but have been used since antique times to cover the face and or hair of women in different cultures. Through her account, Lea appears interested to travel around and experience new things, but maybe not as interested to interact with or understand what she saw.

This selected interest is portrayed in another letter dated February 4th 1916 where Lea recalls driving “about 7 miles out with Walter [...] we wanted to [go] into the Desert a [sic] see something of the tribes but we only touched the fringe of the real Desert & saw some Beouis [sic] in tents about 4 ft high covered with rags.”¹⁷⁰ It appears that Lea and her companion had a plan of exploring the desert and see the people that lived there, but “only” managed to get into the outskirts and see some Bedouins who lived there. From this we can assume that travelling around was something that the nurses could easily do, even alone together with a man.

While Lea doesn't write anything about preconceived views on visiting Egypt, it is clear that she had some ideas or views already. After all, as she went into the desert in order to experience it and see the people who lived there. At the same time, it can be argued that she might have been just as interested in the experience and opportunity as what she actually saw. She seems disappointed that she only saw “some Bedouins” and not all the tribes she had imagined, and she didn't even take the time to describe what she had seen. Just like when she went to the bazaars where she described the people but at the same time seemed to dismiss what she saw. Together, these letters portray an image of Egypt as a free space where the women could travel wherever they wanted and whenever they wanted. A place where they had more freedom from the social roles and expectations they were usually bound by back at home, and could look at and experience all the things that they had read about.

Nurse Russel's pictures

The fascination over the way women dressed seem to carry over into pictures as well. In her album from her war service, nurse Russell included several pictures which display this traditional clothing.

¹⁷⁰ Atia *First World War Nursing Narratives* 183



This picture was taken by Russell when she was stationed in Alexandria during the First World War. Like Hills and Lea described, it seems that Russell was also intrigued by the way the natives in Egypt dressed. This is only one of several pictures that she has taken of the local population. The picture shows four local women who appears to be wearing several layers of clothes. They all have a black veil covering their heads as well as a second veil covering the lower part of their face. A headpiece is placed under the first veil, possibly to keep it in place. The picture is quite close-up, so we can assume that Russell most likely asked the women to take a photograph of them. The picture is quite grainy and out of focus, so it is not so easy to see everything, however it is a very good shot.

Russell hasn't written anything about the picture, but she deemed it important enough that she chose to include it in her album. Unlike these local women who might have lived in Alexandria all their lives, Russell was able to travel around and see the world. Since the war started, Russell, who was originally from Edinburgh, had already been stationed first in Portsmouth and then on a troopship that travelled between Great Britain and Canada before she travelled to Egypt.¹⁷¹ While she was only stationed in Egypt for a year, she was able to travel around a lot and visit places that she might never have been able to otherwise.

¹⁷¹ *Away from the Western Front* "Women Away from the Western Front" 26.10.20
<https://awayfromthewesternfront.org/research/women-away-western-front/from-edinburgh-to-egypt/>

In these next photographs Russell and her fellow nurses appear to be playing dress up. This first picture portrays a nurse who had dressed up in a black cape, possibly similar to the clothes the Egyptian women wore. However, because of her awkward pose it is difficult to know for sure as the woman is hiding her body inside the large cape. Russell simply wrote “!!!” under the picture.



Figure 8: Photograph of unknown nurse from Elsie Russell's photo album. Russell's grandson commented underneath the picture: “Egypt 1916: Going by the shoes, I think this was a British nurse dressing up”.

The second picture is of a British nurse dressing up in what appears to be a male servant's clothing or something similar, complete with a fez on the top of her head. It is difficult to discern if this is the same nurse as the previous picture or not. This time, however, the nurse is quite looking straight into the camera and while her expression is rather neutral, she doesn't look to be very impressed. The way she is looking into the camera makes her resemble a child who has been dressed up and then asked to stand still while the parents took the picture.



Figure 9: Photograph of unknown nurse from Elsie Russel's photo album. Her grandson has written a caption underneath the picture: "Egypt c 1916. Nurse in Egyptian dress. Ras-el-tin British Military Hospital. Alexandria. Egypt."

The last picture of nurses dressed up in Egyptian clothing includes a man on crutches as well. Probably a soldier and patient at Ras-El-Tin Military hospital. The nurse is most likely the

same as the one in the first picture, standing in a similar position as earlier, hiding her arms. The two of them are looking at one another and while we can't see the nurse's face, the man is smiling at her. They are standing in front of a small, wooden house with multiple doors. It is possibly a public changing room or public bathroom as "BATH 1" "BATH 2" "BATH 3" and "BATH 4" are written over the entrances. Something else is written on the middle of the building as well, however the text is obscured by the two people in front. Russell added the caption "Our eyes have met!!" under the picture.



Figure 10: Picture of unknown nurse and soldier from Elsie Russel's photo album. Russell's grandson has written the caption: "Egypt c. 1916. 'Our eyes have met!' Ras-el-tin, British Military Hospital. Alexandria."

All three of these pictures convey a sense of freedom in that the nurses were able to take time off to dress up and goof around. It is clear that the nurses didn't dress up in these clothes to fit in with the local culture, but rather in sheer curiosity, possibly just because they could. This

freedom is especially expressed with Russell's comment "Our eyes have met!!" which she has added underneath the third picture. It conveys somewhat of a flirty message, indicating that flirtation between this dressed-up nurse and the soldier. Flirting and romantic relationships between nurses and soldiers during the First World War has been, and still is, a popular trope. They were, according to Atia, also prominent in many women's own recollection of the First World War. She quotes an interview with a QAIMNS nurse called Mary Rumney who recalled "The flirting, everybody – what I mean is we paired naturally. The time didn't drag. [...] We were very much watched. [...] one woman was compromised – they sent her off the ship."¹⁷² This flirtation is something Russell as well seems aware of and was most likely a part of. It might have been just for fun, but the point remains that it showcases a freedom in regard to flirtation and romance which they might not have had otherwise. It also contrasts with the Nightingale principles which they normally were supposed to adhere to. This flirtatious mood appears in several other pictures and captions as well.



Figure 11. Photograph taken of Elsie Russell[to the right] and a fellow nurse at a beach in Alexandria.

¹⁷² Atia Big Ideas 29.22 to 30.36

This photograph portrays Elsie Russell and another QAIMNS nurse on the shore of the Mediterranean ocean, most likely in the area around Alexandria. Tents are visible in the background, possibly indicating a camp site. By studying the nurses and their uniforms it is clear that the wind was blowing, but at the same time that sunlight was shining straight at them as seen on their faces. The description underneath the photograph reads: “Put us on an island where the men are few. But let it be an island where there might be two! Alexandria”. This text might be an alternative version of what is called “The Suffragette Song” written by Will Letters¹⁷³. This song was known to some as a so-called anti-suffragette song in that it criticized the suffragettes and their causes. As Russell wrote alternative lyrics to this song, she was probably making fun of the song by writing her own lyrics to it. Like the previous picture, the caption also conveys a more flirtatious image.

While Russell and her friend were both wearing their uniforms, the fact that they were out on a beach having their picture taken, as well as the text Russell added, suggests that they had the time off. This, in turn, indicates that having fun on the beach together might have been something that the nurses were able to do fairly often, like we saw in chapter 3. It also indicates that Russell had leisure time, though it probably varied based on the situation at the hospital and the situation in the war. While this picture offers a touristic view of Egypt it also reveals something about the nurses’ position and self-perception, especially in the face of travelling.

¹⁷³ “Put me upon an island where the girls are few/Put me amongst the most ferocious lions in the Zoo/You can put me upon a treadmill and I’ll never, never fret/But for pity’s sake don’t put me near a Suffragette” Chorus from “The Suffragette Song” <https://monologues.co.uk/music/hall/Songs-P/Put-Me-Upon-An-Island.htm>



This photograph of Russell was taken when she was out on a trip, possibly having a picnic or simply taking a tea break outside. The picture portrays her sitting somewhere, leaning into a stone wall behind her while a man sits beside her. She is wearing what appears to be civilian clothing and is drinking from a cup while looking into the camera. The caption underneath the picture is “Drink to me only with thine eyes!” and is from a well-known poem and song also known by the name “To Celia”.¹⁷⁴ Russell looks into the camera as if she is staring into the eyes of the onlooker, something which might have been deliberate with the added caption. Like the previous two pictures, it conveys a clearly flirtatious feeling though this time the flirting was intended for the viewer.

Like Hills and Lea, Russell appears to be aware of the unique opportunity she had been given in regard to travel and, like the two others, received it with open arms. Her tone appears playful and light through her descriptions, and she uses what has already been written to express her own feelings and experiences. Like previously mentioned, the soldiers and nurses stationed in Egypt flirted with each other much more openly and frequently than at home. They experienced a different freedom in that they could be much more open and honest with their affections, possibly because it was in the middle of a war, but also because they were so far from home. Thus, they were in a much freer position from the social gender roles that they

¹⁷⁴ Jonson, Ben “Song: To Celia (§Drink to me only with thine eyes)” Poetry Foundation, 27.10.20
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44464/song-to-celia-drink-to-me-only-with-thine-eyes>

were normally under. Like the soldiers, many of the nurses were young and single, and especially for the men, seeing British women came to be cherished, even if it was at the hospital.¹⁷⁵ Being freer than they were at home, it makes sense that many wanted to test and explore flirting with the other sex, though some ended up taking it too far and were sent home.¹⁷⁶



Figure 12: Picture of Russell[left] and two military personnel at the Breakwater near Alexandria.

This is another of many pictures in Russell's album which displays her and a group of military personnel having tea or a picnic in various places around Alexandria and possibly beyond. It portrays her and another woman, possibly another nurse or a staff member, as well as a soldier. They are all holding either cups or what appears to be biscuits and looking into the camera with jovial expressions. They are sitting outside close to what appears to be a

¹⁷⁵ Woodward wrote that the soldiers "yearned for companionship with a woman who spoke their language and shared their culture." Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 30-32

¹⁷⁶ Vera Brittain mentions in her memoirs a VAD nurse who had sex on a beach in Malta and was sent home from the front. Atia *Big Ideas* 29.22 to 30.36

stonewall, which is explained by the caption that reads “A ‘P.P.A.’¹⁷⁷ at the Breakwater”. This meant that they were right by the sea, probably having a tea party while looking out over either the Mediterranean or Alexandria.



Figure 13: Picture of Elsie Russell(right) and an unknown nurse. Caption underneath the picture reads "Our night out".

The last picture is of Elsie Russell as well as one of her nurse colleagues smiling at the camera. Like the previous pictures, Russell and the other nurse are wearing civilian clothing. They are standing in what looks to be a garden outside Ras-el-Tin British Military hospital in

¹⁷⁷ It is not clear what “P.P.A” referred to, something Russell’s grandson Stuart James also wondered over.

Alexandria. The caption reads “Our night out” which is rather self-explanatory. While it doesn’t say where they were going or what they would be doing, it is clear that they were going somewhere in Alexandria to have fun. They might have gone to the theatre or a restaurant to have dinner, possibly joining up with other military personnel as well. From this picture it illustrated that they had the ability and freedom to take time off and explore the country they were in. There is the possibility of a flirtatious freedom here as well, however it is not certain.

Together, all these pictures illustrate the freedom which Elsie Russell experienced when she was stationed in Egypt. Despite all the hard work at the hospital, Russell was able to travel around often with her colleagues and friends, either out for a picnic or for a night out on the town. They also had the time and opportunity to joke around and dress up in local clothes. Through these pictures, an image of Egypt as a free country is conveyed, in more ways than one. Free from established societal roles, free to flirt with people and free to travel were all things that the nurses experienced and conveyed in their letters and pictures home.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has looked into and further nuanced the picture of Egypt which the military personnel sent home. In addition to portraying Egypt as a touristic attraction and a difficult war front, it is here a place of freedom and new opportunities. Through this chapter we have looked at the many ways Egypt has been portrayed as a place of freedom by various military personnel. This has been displayed in two major ways: Egypt as a fleshpot and Egypt as a women’s free space. These two ways are more or less gendered as the fleshpot view was more prominent with the soldier while the free space view was more prominent with the nurses.

For the men, their type of freedom was more focused on pushing the boundaries and getting opportunities to explore Egypt’s nightlife. The fleshpot included everything from getting drunk to going to a brothel to looking at belly dancers to creating a riot. However, something which was very quickly seen is that this wasn’t something that the soldiers would write home about, or that the British censors would let slip past them from for that matter. There are some sources that indicate this view as well as a lot of literature confirming it, however the actual sources are mostly silent. While this was a new form of freedom for the soldiers to explore, it was also covered in secrecy as it was often morally frowned upon. Still, Egypt offered a new

type of freedom which many of these soldiers had never experienced before, and which they more than readily took.

In contrast to this, the women were offered an entirely different type of freedom. Instead of what could be called a sensual freedom, they were offered the freedom of free agency: opportunities to travel and explore new scenery that they might not have encountered before. Throughout history, women have typically been more constricted than men in regard to travelling. As such, being able to travel was for most of these women was an entirely new experience which they grabbed with both hands. The women actively went into their role in the new free space, unlike the men, often proclaiming and proudly documenting everything they experienced and all they did so everyone at home could witness it.

Chapter 6: Egypt as part of the Empire

“His Britannic Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gives notice that, in view of the state of war arising out of the action of Turkey, Egypt is placed under the protection of His Majesty and will henceforth constitute a British Protectorate. The suzerainty of Turkey over Egypt is thus terminated, and His Majesty’s Government will adopt all measures necessary for the defence of Egypt, and protect its inhabitants and interests.” – Proclamation by Sir Edward Grey, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, December 18, 1914¹⁷⁸

In the previous chapters, we have looked into various views and experiences that the military personnel had in Egypt. Egypt has been a tourist attraction, a hellhole and a fleshpot and a place of freedom. However, when we look beyond all of these, what we are left with is Egypt as part of the British Empire. The military personnel were all serving in a place that was a part of the Empire, which is likely to have affected the way wrote about it, conscious or not. Their attitudes and behaviour to Egypt and its people, their portrayal and expectations, were all shaped by the fact that they were in a part of the British Empire. As mentioned in chapter 1, Egypt was declared a protectorate in 1914 with the British promising to keep the Egyptians out of the war effort. However, as time went by, the British Empire would come to break their promise and involve the local Egyptians in their war effort against the Ottomans.

The British Empire and Egypt

What would become the British Empire was first established in the late 16th and early 17th century through settlements overseas. Throughout the 17th century rivalry with France and aspirations for profit fuelled the naval expansion in the North Americas and West Indies. Various settlements and trading ports appeared in India and South-East Asia during this century through the East India Company, and the first British settlement on the African continent was established in 1661. In these early stages of the Empire, most of these settlements were established by particular companies and magnates rather than the English crown. Through the mercantilist economic model, the crown mostly focused on trade and shipping in the 17th and 18th century. The colonies were regarded as a source of raw material for the British market and were granted monopoly for certain products. In return, the colonies

¹⁷⁸ McIlwraith, Malcolm. "The Declaration of a Protectorate in Egypt and Its Legal Effects." *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* 17, no. 1/2 (1917): 238-59. 20.10.20 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/752256>.

were obliged to use the British ships in order to trade as well as to establish markets for British manufactured goods.¹⁷⁹ By the turn of the 18th century, the East India Company had control of three vital cities in India; Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and would continue to expand their power and influence up until they reached supremacy in the 19th century.¹⁸⁰

While the American settlements broke free in the last part of the 18th century, Australian settlements were added to the empire. The Napoleonic Wars at the start of the 19th century brought in further additions to the Empire like Trinidad, Sri Lanka and Malta. During this time, the Empire developed and became more organised than it had been before with the establishment of the Colonial Office in 1801. Through the 19th century, the British Empire continued its expansion in the Pacific Ocean, South East Asia as well as Africa. New Zealand, Burma and Gambia were some of the new additions. In 1858, as a result of the Indian Revolt the year before, India became an official colony of the British Crown.¹⁸¹ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 furthered British influence in the area and served as a prelude for the British invasion of Egypt in 1882. By the time of the First World War, Great Britain controlled an empire in Africa alone which stretched from “the Cape to Cairo” and was often referred to as “the Empire on which the sun never sets”. Great Britain controlled nearly one-quarter of the world’s land surface and over a quarter of the world’s population.¹⁸² A person who was around 20 years old in 1914 and took part in the war effort might have never known there not to be a British global empire.

Egypt was only a small part of the British Empire, which might have affected the way the British military personnel wrote about it. Some of them might have viewed Egypt as only a small part of one large, African colony; “the Cape to Cairo”, this despite the fact that Egypt was only a protectorate. The main reason for British interest in Egypt was the Suez Canal

¹⁷⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica “British empire” 11.10.20 <https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire>

¹⁸⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica “British empire” 11.10.20 <https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire/Dominance-and-dominions> ; Encyclopædia Britannica “India” 11.10.20 <https://www.britannica.com/place/India/Revolution-in-Bengal#ref47010> ; Porter, Andrew, ed. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1999. ProQuest Ebook Central. 395-404, 20.11.20 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.pva.uib.no/lib/bergen-ebooks/detail.action?docID=886621>; Pollard, A. F. *The British Empire* London: League of the Empire, Caxton hall, Westminster 1909 591-593, 20.10.20 <https://archive.org/details/britishempire0000poll>

¹⁸¹ Encyclopædia Britannica “India” 11.10.20 <https://www.britannica.com/place/India/The-mutiny-and-great-revolt-of-1857-59> ; Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire* vol III. 422 20.11.20 ; Pollard *The British Empire* 578-591

¹⁸² Encyclopædia Britannica “British empire” 11.10.20 <https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire/Dominance-and-dominions>

which connected the British with their crown jewel, India. As with many of the other colonies of the Empire, industrial development often followed the British control. One example of this is the development of the Egyptian city Kantara. At the start of the war, Kantara was only a small village with a mosque and a few houses despite being the starting point of an old trading route across the Sinai Desert and into Palestine. With the British expansion across the Sinai, Kantara became an important starting point and thus developed at a rapid pace. In 1916 Kantara was described as “a western cow-town. Tents, marquees and wooden shacks stretched far out across the sandy waste.”¹⁸³ Woodward described it at the end of the war as being “more like a modern metropolis, with macadamized roads, electric lights, miles of railway sidings, workshops, cinemas, theatres, churches, clubs (including a fine YMCA establishment), and even a golf course.”¹⁸⁴ And he claimed that it had become “the largest British base camp in any theater.”¹⁸⁵

This account of Kantara’s development is a good example of what this chapter will look at and include. The British had de facto control of Egypt at this time and were able to do almost whatever they wanted in order to further their own interests. Mentions of or references to this control can look different and is focused on two major categories: the country and the people. In the category of the country Egypt, things like city expansion, development of infrastructure and extraction of raw materials for British gain will be mentioned. Communication with the outside world will also be included, as will instances where the military personnel took for granted where they were. In the category of the people, everything that has to do with attitudes towards the Egyptian people will be included, whether it was a simple dismissal or blatant degrading comments or actions. Any change that happened in Egypt because Great Britain needed it and it is expressed by the military personnel will be included. That also includes how Egypt inadvertently is portrayed as part of the Empire by pictures of train stations and battleships.

Private Jones to his wife

As mentioned in chapter 4, Private Jones ended up staying longer in Egypt because he had to help with the administration. This does show Egypt as part of the Empire in that there was

¹⁸³ Account by A. E. Williams, a private in the Army Cyclist Corps, Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 43

¹⁸⁴ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 43

¹⁸⁵ «By late 1917, it had almost certainly become the largest British base camp in any theater.” Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 43

still administration to be taught and trained to keep the forces that were still stationed in Egypt. Egypt didn't gain independence until 1922 but was still very much influenced by Great Britain until the revolution in 1952. Therefore, it is natural to assume that the military personnel that served in Egypt during the First World War might see and document Egypt as part of the British empire. Especially since Egypt turned out to be one of the most important theatres outside of the Western front.

In his letter to his wife on the 14th of April 1917, Jones wrote that he was stationed at what he called "the scene of the great bombardment of 1882". This referred to the bombardment of Alexandria on the 11th of July 1882 which happened in the British invasion mentioned in chapter 2. While Jones didn't write exactly where he was, it might have referred to one of the many forts which had protected Alexandria, for instance Fort Adda. What is clear, however, that he expected his wife to know what he was referring to, which shows that both he and his wife had at least some knowledge of the bombardment of Alexandria. The bombardment was probably common knowledge at the time, though it is interesting to wonder what type of common knowledge existed at the time. At this time, Egypt had become much more involved in the war effort than what was first planned.

Jones continued to write that they were "living over the graves of the soldiers that was killed & if you care to dig down you would find plenty of bones among the broken marble pillars which are buried here. There are also plenty of subterranean tunnels leading we believe to the Sultans palace, so you can tell the place is quite interesting one way & another."¹⁸⁶ This is a quite brief yet morbid description. By Jones' portrayal it doesn't sound like a graveyard, but rather the remains of some kind of building or possibly a fort. It also conveys the rich history of the place which is connected to the British Empire as it was the Empire that had most likely killed those men who laid buried there. The fact that they then camped on top of the final resting place of soldiers, however, was most likely due to them having no better place to camp. During the war Cairo and Alexandria were often overfilled with British and Commonwealth military personnel and as such, the soldiers had to take what they could get.

Whatever the interpretation of Jones' camping on a site of British invasion, his description nonetheless very clearly relates to the reader a picture of Egypt as part of the British Empire.

¹⁸⁶ 14.04.17, Private Jones to his wife

By the way Jones wrote it appears that he almost took it for granted that they were stationed in the British Empire as these few lines are just thrown into his letter without much more discussion or elaboration. He didn't delve into why they were stationed on top of the graves or anything else which had to do with the great bombardment. He simply mentioned it, as well as mentioned that there were plenty of subterranean tunnels before commenting that "you can tell that the place is quite interesting one way or another". It was simply just factual information, confirming that they were, in fact, in a place which had been invaded by Great Britain. He spent just as much space, if even more space in the letter, writing about the poetry he had written to his wife in the last letter and writing about how he had looked while composing it.

Later in the same letter Jones writes about when he and his Sergeant Major went into Alexandria the day before. He described the Sergeant Major as "a proper knut" which was another word for "an upper-class idle man about the world",¹⁸⁷ with Jones mentioning that the Sergeant Major knew "Alex like a book". This shows that the sergeant major had a lot of knowledge of the world in general as well as Alexandria and possibly the rest of Egypt as well. Jones then mentions the transportation they used to move about, comparing it to the transport they had used back in London. He states how much he preferred the carriages in Alexandria to the buses in London, since it was just as cheap as the buses and more comfortable. His comparison of the local modes of transport to the transport back in London, while a typical comparison, could also be read as Jones assuming that they would be able to move about just as easily as they would back at home. This, in turn, presents Egypt as part of the Empire.

By the early 20th century, a distinct racial and cultural hierarchy had become one of the hallmarks on the Empire. This hierarchy could vary between colonies but had one thing in common: the British were on top, based on notions of not only political and economic supremacy, but also racial and cultural. This attitude of superiority was something that soldiers too may have absorbed, towards the colonized, often viewing them as inferior. An example of this is from Jones' letter dated 14th of February 1919 where he mentions going to the cinema at the prisoner of war camp he was stationed at. He comments that he had to sit with the prisoners but brushes it off by saying: "it is certainly interesting considering [piece

¹⁸⁷ Wikitionary s.v. "Knut" 20.11.20 <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/knut>

missing] about a dozen different nationalities [piece missing] all speaking their main native tongue”. As mentioned in the introduction, the British Empire covered a lot of the earth and as such was heavily multi-ethnic. This is displayed through this account and Jones’ interest in all the different prisoners at camp. However, it was at the same very clear who was in charge, namely the British.

Further, he wrote about how bashful he felt by the various greeting by these prisoners, commenting that “any stranger would have thought I was Lord Muck¹⁸⁸ or so[sic] other great pot”. While Jones himself appears embarrassed, the encounter with these prisoners clearly show the difference that existed between him and the other prisoners. One reason for this was of course because of the fact that they were prisoners. At the same time, it is clear from this account that the British who are in command and thus stand in a higher position, implicitly showcasing Egypt as part of the Empire as they could have their own prisoners of war camps there.

Another thing that Jones, like many other soldiers made good use of, was the postage system. Several times throughout his letters, Jones writes about “mails getting lost”¹⁸⁹ or “a mail from here [that] had gone down.”¹⁹⁰ At this time, British post offices were established all over the world and when there were delays, and it is clear from Jones’ letters that he expected to be able to send and receive post without any major problem. If there were any problems or delays in the postal service, this was due to something unforeseen and not because they were far from home. This in turn may indicate that Jones took it for granted that he would be able to send letters home and stay in contact with his family despite the fact that he was stationed at another continent.

Blore to his mother

Like Jones, Dr. Blore doesn’t appear to have questioned the fact that he was able to send off and receive letters and packages either. On the 11th of February 1917 he wrote that “there is a mail leaving to-morrow, so I am writing to day to catch it. Since last writing I have had quite a lot of letters from home, most of them written about the middle of January, the latest being

¹⁸⁸ Lord Muck was slang for “a haughty or socially pretentious man” *Oxford Dictionaries* s.v. “lord muck” 07.11.20 https://www.lexico.com/definition/lord_muck

¹⁸⁹ 06.05.17 Private Jones to his wife; a lot of mail was lost due to German submarine activity during the war.

¹⁹⁰ 06.06.17 Private Jones to his wife

the 22nd. Newspapers have also been coming in in large numbers, and I have got the Times + Spectators up to Jan 21st.”¹⁹¹ Like Jones, Blore often wrote about receiving a lot of letters and packages from home. They both expected the post to come and leave regularly, and the war was the only thing that “interrupted” an otherwise well-established, colonial system.

The same attitude can be found in his letter written on April 22nd 1916. In the letter, Blore wrote that he was planning to travel down to Suez to meet with a friend. In his writing about, he complains about how long the journey will take, and that he will have to change trains. He doesn't for a moment stop to wonder over the fact that the trains are running and that he is even able to travel with modern means of communication to meet with a friend in an Arab country in the middle of a war. He does share a rather bleak outlook that he might not be able to see his friend again for a long time and therefore travels to see him, but at the same time he doesn't question their ability and freedom to meet up with each other. Rather, the fact that he was complaining about how long it would take him and that he had to change trains reveals his own privileges from back home, as well as the fact that he expected to be able to travel around just as easily and quickly in Egypt as back home. His complaints present Egypt to the reader as just another part of the Empire, a place where he expected to find an infrastructure which was just as developed as back home.

Driver Pashler to his son

Another mode of transport which was widely used in Egypt during the war was camels. In a letter to his son Arnold, sent somewhere between 1917 and 1918, Harold Pashler writes about the British dependency on camels:

“We are largely dependent on camels for food etc, these are driven by the black men, [Egyptians] they can do anything with them, they just pull a rope which is attached to their heads & make them lie down, so as to load or unload them, they carry everything on their backs, which of course has to be tied on; if one is going to ride them, they have to lie down to enable him to get on, it is a very uncomfortable ride, jolts too much for me, yesterday I saw an English man trying to make a camel lie so as to unload him, but the camel run him round, and he soon made himself scarce, a black

¹⁹¹ 11.02.1917 Dr Blore to his mother

man came up, caught hold of the rope & and punches his neck & made him lie down at once.”¹⁹²

During the First World War the Egyptian Camel Transport Corps(CTC) became a vital part of the British war effort in Egypt. While Great Britain at first had promised that no Egyptians would be involved, a lot of them ended up joining the CTC as caretakers of the camels. Through his account home to his son, Pashler describes these caretakers and their camels, mentioning how important they are to the war effort. At the same time, the way Pashler writes about the Egyptians and their camels comes off as somewhat demeaning. It appears that it is only the Egyptians that are able to control these camels, and instead of trying to learn from them or assist them, the British brought them in as caretakers. Instead of keeping their word, the British involved these Egyptians in their war effort and did not treat them as decent human beings when they did, instead they looked down upon them.

While Pashler wasn't openly racist to the Egyptians he wrote about, he casually refers to them as “black men” instead of calling them Egyptians or Sudanese, showing that he didn't actually have much interest in them or in getting to know them. They were simply there to help them with the camels and he just assumed that they knew everything about camels automatically and would help them out without questioning it. This letter is written to his young son, which is clear from the way Pashler writes. Instead of taking the time to tell his son about the Egyptians and trying to befriend some of them to learn more about them or their country, he just wrote about what they were useful for. He also failed to write anything about where all these camels came from, they apparently were just there right when they needed them. This conveys Egypt as part of the Empire, a place where the British viewed themselves as the elite and only spoke to or considered the local population and their animals when they needed something done.

In another letter to his son Arnold, dated on the 9th of September 1918, Pashler is writing home about the cotton he had seen in Egypt. He wrote that he might enclose some cotton in “its natural raw state” and described how the cotton grew. Describing the cotton, Pashler used various plants like raspberry canes and primroses to demonstrate the cotton's various parts and growing stages. This enabled his readers to create a vivid image of the growing cotton in

¹⁹² 1917/1918 Harold Pashler to his son

their mind. When the cotton had finished growing, Pashler writes that “these balls of cotton are gathered & put into sacks & sent away, most probably to England to be made into all kinds of goods, such as sheets, tablecloths, shirts etc. etc.”

While his descriptions and comments are easy to understand, Pashler is writing under the general assumption that this cotton would go directly to Great Britain. He doesn't consider any other option than that the cotton should be sent off to England in order to be a part of their clothing industry. Instead, he taught his son through his letter how Egypt's raw materials were used by Great Britain without question, taking it for granted that Egypt's cotton should be a part of Great Britain's economic model and industry. He didn't mention if Egypt had its own cotton industry or how much the Empire actually paid for its cotton. Pashler's account portrays Egypt as a part of the British Empire in that the British could just take whatever they wanted without considering Egypt or its economy, doing what they wanted. It was just taken for granted that Egypt, while only a protectorate, would comply to Britain's constant demand for cotton and raw materials. Through this, he reveals the colonial mindset which he taught his readers, in this instance his son, as well.

Brigadier General Guy Payan Dawnay to his wife

Like in previous chapters, some of the letters Woodward used in his book “Hell in the Holy Land” will be used in this chapter. The first account is from Brigadier General Guy Payan Dawnay who, on Christmas Day 1916 wrote a letter home to his wife. At the time, he and his troops were occupying El Arish as part of the British Sinai Campaign across the Sinai Desert to reach Palestine. In his letter, Dawnay described their many accomplishments and the logistics of the campaign:

“It really had been an extraordinary ‘campaign,’ this one in Sinai. It necessitated the fitting out of much the biggest desert column that there has ever been, with actually *tens* of thousands of camels. No wheels practically; camels, camels, AND camels! Then we have had to lay a railway 100 miles over a howling wilderness for the supply of the troops, the camels being used to carry on the supplies etc. in front of railhead. Finally we have had to lay a great pipe-line[sic] to carry water to the forces – the water being pumped up the pipeline from the Sweet Water Canal on the west side of the Suez Canal.”¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 33

Dawnay's account to his wife is very interesting and detailed. Based on the way he wrote, he seems to be very excited about all they have accomplished, and possibly wrote home to his wife in order to boast over everything they had achieved. Dawnay's want to boast might affect the way he wrote, as might his high position in the military. In this account, Egypt is clearly shown here as just another part of the Empire where the British could do whatever they wanted. Firstly, the fact that the British obtained so many camels is interesting as Dawnay didn't write where they got them from, nor how it affected the country by them taking what he called "tens of thousands" of camels in order for them to get across the Sinai desert. It might have heavily affected the local population; however, it seems that that wasn't to be considered as the British war effort was much more important.

Secondly, there is the fact that the British built and expanded the infrastructure, building "100 miles" of railway across the desert, which must have taken a lot of manpower. While it is not mentioned, much of this manpower was, in fact, Egyptian, despite the British promise not to involve them. The Egyptian Labour Corps(ELC) was, like the CTC, heavily made up of Egyptians who were hired by the British to help them in various ways. While it may be argued that it was for Egyptian infrastructure and thus natural that Egyptians would help build it, it was also a necessary part for the British war effort to continue and eventually invade Palestine. As mentioned earlier, there was already a very old caravan route established across the desert and the locals might not have felt it necessary to expand anymore across the desert. Dawnay doesn't even mention the ELC which was most likely involved in here, he just wrote that they laid the railway across the desert, the British taking all the glory for it.

Finally, Dawnay also mentions the extensive pipeline that they laid all the way from the Sweet Water Canal by the Suez and across the desert. Once again, he did not mention anything about the workforce which had built it. Instead, he only wrote that they had to build it in order to carry water to the forces, again to further the British war effort. This clearly presents Egypt as part of the Empire. In his account Egypt hasn't even been asked or been recruited as an ally. Instead, the British were acting as if Egypt was any other colony they had. They used the local manpower by breaking their word and on top of that, they didn't give them the recognition they deserved either. The reader will be left with the impression that the British can just do whatever they wanted, which they did, because they were in charge and in a superior position, leaving the locals with nothing left to say. The fact that they had already

reached El Arish, which was quite close to the border of Palestine. This in turn meant that they had already worked their way through the desert for several months already.

Lieutenant McPherson

Another person which Woodward mentioned and spent a lot of time discussing is Lieutenant J. W. McPherson, a member of the CTC. McPherson wrote several letters home during the war, describing his work with the CTC after he had recovered from taking part in the Gallipoli campaign. Woodward uses a combination of retelling and direct quotes to recount McPherson's long letters, which at times can make it hard for the reader to differentiate between Woodward's comments and McPherson's letter. That means that we at times when it's not clear if it is McPherson's comment or Woodward's have to be more sceptical of what is being said.

McPherson was fluent in several languages, including Arabic, and after recovering from Gallipoli, he was tasked with acquiring camels for the British Army. Woodward describes the longwinded process thus: "the unusual practice was for the army to inform the high commissioner how many camels were needed. This order then went down the line from the governor general of the Sudan to the governors of the provinces to the sheiks and then to every clan and subclan, informing them how many camels were needed and where they were to be sent." McPherson was then tasked by the colonel in command of the CTC to take the train to Shellal, which was in the southern part of Egypt, to collect the camels sent from the Sudan. McPherson was also, in the colonel's own words, to "obtain by any means necessary" the men to look after the camels.¹⁹⁴ Yet again, despite the British claim that they would not involve local Egyptians, we can see that the Egyptians became very much involved.

The views of the British towards the Egyptians become especially clear as McPherson was to obtain the men by "any means necessary", something he also described that he did.

McPherson does come across as something more sympathetic than his colleagues in that he at first refused the usage of so-called "press gangs".¹⁹⁵ Instead, McPherson tried to use money to attract workers, promising temporary daily work for "7 piastres a day and the right to quit at

¹⁹⁴ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 37

¹⁹⁵ A press gang was, according to Oxford Dictionary, «a body of men employed to enlist men forcibly into service in the army or navy». Oxford Dictionaries s.v. "press gang" 09.11.20
https://www.lexico.com/definition/press_gang

any time” or “half a sovereign (or 50 piastres) and 7 piastres a day with rations” to anyone willing to officially enlist for service.

The first time he tried this, McPherson only managed to get temporary workers since no one “swallowed the latter bait” as he called it, referring to the official enlistment. However, when he tried again some days later, he managed to get hold of 100 men who “stepped forward to collect the king’s half-sovereign and affix a seal or thumbs mark.” McPherson compares this process to Voltaire’s satire “Candide, ou l’Optimisme” where the main character is forced into military service by military recruiters for the Bulgarian Army.¹⁹⁶ It seems he used this comparison as many of the Egyptian men had not understood that receiving the King’s sovereign meant that they were placed under military command, with McPherson commenting that he “held (my) little Courts Martial when necessary”. While McPherson notes that his punishments were relatively mild, only “a small fine or mild flogging”, Woodward points out that this was not the case with one camel driver who was found drunk and absent from his guard post.¹⁹⁷

According to Woodward, McPherson “considered the man’s behavior a case of serious insubordination”.¹⁹⁸ As punishment, the man was placed in the middle of a half circle formed by the other men, stripped naked and flogged 25 times by a “trusty Sudanese boy”. McPherson recounts that an Arab doctor tried to stop the flogging, threatening to report McPherson to his superiors. Unfazed by this, however, McPherson threatened to flog the doctor or even shoot him if the doctor tried to stop him or rally the other recruits against him. While the doctor stood back to let the flogging proceed, he interrupted again after twenty lashes to beg for the criminal whose back had turned into “a bloody pulp”. McPherson’s relented, commanding instead that the criminal should receive the last five lashes on his feet.

This letter was, as mentioned, written and sent home to his family. McPherson operates with an almost matter-of-factly way of writing when describing what happened and what he had to do, giving off an air that he didn’t care too much either for the camels or the men he “obtained”. While it seems that McPherson at times considered the natives somewhat naïve in their not understanding that they signed up into service for instance, he doesn’t give them any

¹⁹⁶ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 33

¹⁹⁷ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 38

¹⁹⁸ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 34

slack as shown by how he punished the driver who got drunk and fell asleep on duty. While a British soldier would be punished for getting drunk and falling asleep on duty, it is difficult to imagine that they would be flogged for it as punishment. While the Egyptians were actually supposed to have been protected from lashings by the Army Act, McPherson was not the only one who believed in flogging as punishment. When General Allenby became commander in chief in Egypt, he tried to appeal to the War Office in order to change the Army Act and legalise flogging of the native labour. He argued that: “Everyone who knows the country considers power of flogging to be necessary. The general behaviour of the Egyptian Labour Corps is very good; but there are now and then cases for the lash.”¹⁹⁹ Woodward noted that the flogging of the local workforce continued despite the fact that the War Office dismissed Allenby’s appeal.

It is clear from this account that McPherson considered himself to be in a superior position, not only to his recruits, but also to other Egyptians as seen by the aggressive and threatening way he answers the Arab doctor. McPherson appears to think that he is just in his punishment and is willing to enact an even greater punishment on the doctor for trying to stop the punishment of his “court martials”. Based on the way he writes about the natives; we can see that he considered them naïve and somewhat pitiful. He seemed almost offended over the fact that no one “swallowed the [latter] bait” to enlist into service at first and then commented on how their “mouths watered at the sight of this wealth and feasting” when referring to the payment he was offering them.

Overall, McPherson writes and behaves in a most patronizing manner towards the natives, disregarding the words of the doctor and degrading the natives through his use of words. Through his letters, McPherson shows what may be referred to as an “imperial attitude” in the way he behaved towards the locals. An attitude which would not have been accepted back at home or to British troops, yet because it was towards the Egyptians, it was accepted and maybe even promoted. At the same time, it is important to remember that Woodward wrote his accounts in order to make a point regarding how the British treated the locals. This becomes especially clear some pages later when Woodward writes of another letter from McPherson.

¹⁹⁹ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 42

Introducing this second letter, Woodward writes that “a more sympathetic, and indeed truer, side of McPherson was revealed when his company began a desert march at dawn on July 21, 1916, from Heliopolis, the City of the Sun, which was not far from Cairo.” While Woodward argued that this letter introduced a “truer side” of McPherson, it is difficult to judge that properly as, again, this letter is told second-hand through Woodward. It might be a “truer” side of McPherson, but that doesn’t take away from his previous actions in the earlier letter. McPherson writes that he and his company were to travel from Heliopolis, now a part of Cairo, towards the British front which at the time was about “twenty-five miles east of the canal”.²⁰⁰ Two days later, on the 23rd of July with his company still on the west side of the canal, they reached an ancient city called Bilbeis. McPherson here expected a long rest and pause until the evening because of the intense heat during the summer. The company commander, however, decided that they should push on.²⁰¹

Because of this decision, McPherson called the commander a “cocksure idiot without judgement or common sense” and described that “the heat was most intense and the sand burnt and cracked the natives’ feet”. Water was already sparse for the military in Egypt, and even more so for the natives: “Half of them were unprovided with water bottles in spite of the reports and urgent requests for them from the Section Officers for months past. It was a pitiful sight, the poor devils fainting with thirst, heat and weariness, falling out or plodding on blindly.”²⁰²

It wasn’t only the Egyptians who were suffering for this, apparently one British officer “went mad and attempted to kill himself”. Woodward writes that McPherson “did what he could, sharing his water and allowing one of his exhausted drivers to mount one of his camels and ride for a while.” This is written in stark contrast to the company commander who, when he saw Egyptians trying to mount their camels, “had them pulled down and flogged”.²⁰³ When the company finally stopped for the night, McPherson watered his men “as they lay half dead on the ground.” While only two men died in his section, other sections weren’t as lucky in this “fool’s march” as McPherson termed it.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 38

²⁰¹ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 39

²⁰² Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 39

²⁰³ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 39

²⁰⁴ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 39

Through this letter, we can see that McPherson, in fact, appears to be behaving differently than in the previous letter. He appears to have some genuine concern towards the natives they were travelling with, but it is difficult to know if this was a truer side to McPherson or not. After all, as he might just be concerned that the camels and men that he had gone to some lengths to obtain might not make it to the front where they were needed. McPherson does appear to be quite upset with the commander in charge by the way he wrote about him, at the same time the hierarchy which existed within the British military seems to have kept McPherson from being able to stop what he later called a “fool’s march”. The Egyptians themselves simply had to comply with the orders they were given, not at all having been properly cared for or prepared for this march and almost driven to death’s door. This is another display of Egypt as part of the Empire as the British pressed not only themselves, but the native men under them through inhumanly conditions in order to serve their own war purposes. One can wonder if such a march would have been pushed through, and accepted for that matter, if the men with the camels had been British rather than native Egyptians.

As we have seen above, the Egyptian Labour Corps (ELC) were responsible for expanding the infrastructure and building the pipelines and railways across the desert. The building of the railway across the Sinai started in February 1916 and was done in stages, the industrial prowess and wealth of Great Britain enabling them to do what the Ottoman Empire could not.²⁰⁵ The ELC also became important for the success of the EEF, supporting them and building rather than fighting its way to the borders of Palestine. Woodward writes that “Thousands of native laborers, assisted by British sappers, pushed the line forwards.”²⁰⁶ It was hard and difficult work, something junior Royal Engineer officer Case embodied in his letter home to “my dear people.” Case wrote: “Oh, what a life, my wretched sappers²⁰⁷ working intensively for 5 hours this morning and 5 hours yesterday, digging and sandbagging and sawing and cursing; Egyptian Labour Corps the same, Reises cursing and reviling, flaying chunks out of yelling dagoes with their shambocks.”²⁰⁸

While his account is brief and clearly included in order to prove a point, Case manages to convey a lot of interesting points. Firstly, the sappers that he described were British soldiers

²⁰⁵ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 39-40

²⁰⁶ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 40

²⁰⁷ Sappers are soldiers who are “responsible for tasks such as building and repairing roads and bridges, laying and clearing mines etc.” *Oxford Dictionaries* s.v. “Sapper” 09.11.20 <https://www.lexico.com/definition/sapper>

²⁰⁸ Woodward *Hell in the Holy Land* 40

who worked side by side with the ELC in building the railway across the Sinai desert. From this account, it is clear that the Egyptian labours had some extra “motivation” in order for them to work, namely someone in charge who cursed at them and lashed them with a whip to keep them working. This is quite contrary to the British promise to not involve Egyptian labour and certainly not a way to treat people they were supposed to protect. The Egyptians very clearly received a different treatment contra the British “sappers”, which in turn showed the reader see a very colonist view of the Egypt and its people. The attitudes towards the natives were clearly demeaning, Case doesn’t seem to think anything odd about the fact that these “Reises” were, as he wrote, “flaying chunks out of yelling dagoes with their shambocks”. He seems to have taken it for granted that he was in a place where the British could do whatever they wanted to the local population in order to further their case, including flogging them to force them to work faster.

Photographs from Elsie Russell’s album

Like with the different letters, determining what pictures were to be included in this chapter and which weren’t, one had to consider several things. One thing is that some of the sources overlap. For instance, a picture of taken of a couple of people enjoying tea together could be considered both an expression of freedom and something predominately British. Several of Elsie Russell’s photos fall into this category, in part overlapping each other. As do several of the letters as one letter seldom portray solely one account. However, I have tried to limit the amount of times a certain picture or motif is included in the different chapters, arguing instead that coming to this discovery in turn argues for a more nuanced picture of Egypt than simply fitting into just one category.

Below is the first picture I have chosen to include, which is of a boat filled to the brim with British soldiers as well as some Egyptian ferrymen crossing a body of water. Russell her written the following caption underneath the picture: “Ferry Boat at Wardan” and the picture was taken in 1915.



Figure 14: Picture of British soldiers on a ferry in Egypt 1915 taken by Elsie Russell

Russell's grandson added in the caption that the soldiers were taken across the Nile. Visible on the opposite bank of the river we can see a lot of people, most likely British soldiers, as well as camels standing. We can see that the ferry is filled to the brim with British soldiers and we can reckon that on the shore where Russell stood and took this picture are just as many soldiers waiting to be carried across on the ferry. Possibly there are more than this one ferry carrying British soldiers across, if not, it might have taken a very long time and the soldiers might be a little fed up.

This picture might be depicting British soldiers on their way out to the front or the place they were supposed to be stationed as this picture was taken quite early in the First World War. It is not possible to know if the ferryman was an independent operator, but with so many soldiers surrounding him he might have been conscripted into offering his services for free as a way to serve his country. This is, as mentioned, still quite early so most likely the ferryman was in fact paid by the British as they didn't want to involve the locals unless they had to. The picture depicts Egypt as being a part of the Empire with the locals helping out the British army on their way as, apart from the camels, the picture could have been taken in just about anywhere in the British Empire. The sheer number of soldiers could also work as a way for

the British Empire to keep control over the area simply by them being there or patrolling through the area. This is something the second picture displays just as clearly.

This second picture by Russell is of another, rather larger, boat: the HMS Jupiter. Russell hasn't written any caption for this chapter, but Stuart writes: "Egypt 1915. HMS Jupiter on the Suez Canal. She was sent to patrol the Suez Canal between August and October 1915."



Figure 15: Picture of HMS Jupiter on patrol down the Suez Canal in 1915.

Like the description details the photograph shows a large battleship travelling down the Suez Canal on patrol. The battleship appears to be filled with soldiers and crew which makes sense as the ship was out on patrol. On the shore closest to the photographer, there are many people standing and watching the ship as it passes by. At the other bank there are a lot of white small dots, most likely there is one or several military camps which are stationed along the Suez Canal. The photograph is both impressive and a little imposing at the same time. It clearly conveys the British as being in power, they are clearly displaying their military power by these patrols. While it might seem natural, just another patrol, to the British, it also presents Egypt as just another small part of the great Empire. Egypt was just one country on a long list of countries that the British controlled and protected. The patrol served as both a warning to

the Ottomans to stay away and a warning to the locals about superior British power. It presents the viewer with an Egypt which is controlled and protected by the British, which most likely confirmed the view they already had of Egypt as part of the British Empire.

The final photograph included in this chapter portrays a nurse, a woman in casual clothing and some soldiers all enjoying themselves in a garden. The added caption underneath her picture says “In Mr. Drapers Garden”.



Figure 16: Photograph taken by Elsie Russel of Military Personnel in a garden in Egypt in 1916.

The picture is dated to 1916 and in the comments underneath the picture on Flickr, someone commented about Mr. Walter Draper who was most likely the “Mr Draper” referred to underneath the picture. He was an Anglo-Egyptian who had been trained at the Kew Gardens and a fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society.²⁰⁹ By 1916, when this picture was taken,

²⁰⁹ Draper, Walter. “Gardening in Egypt: A Handbook of Gardening for Lower Egypt” London: L. Upcott Gill., 170, Strand, W.C., 1895. 10.11.20 <https://archive.org/details/gardeninegypt00drapgoog/page/n4/mode/2up>

Draper had created gardens like the one in the picture all over Egypt. He had become the Director of the Egyptian Government Gardens by the Delta Barrage and written the book “Gardening in Europe: A Handbook Of Gardening For Lower Egypt”.²¹⁰

Visiting gardens like these can be considered a very British thing to do, especially hanging out there in order to enjoy an afternoon tea. While gardening has been a thing for thousands of years,²¹¹ afternoon tea started in the middle of the 19th century, typically credited to Anna, the seventh Duchess of Bedford. When Queen Victoria started with her tea parties in the 1860s, afternoon tea became a part of it. These garden parties were for the uppermost part of society, but as time went by, it became increasingly popular, and connected with the British identity.²¹² Afternoon tea and garden parties was something that spread with the Brits throughout their Empire. Many of the soldiers survived on the tea breaks that they took each day. It was vastly important to them despite being stationed in a different country, they appear not to have thought about this, and just expected to be able to take their tea like usual. This shows Egypt as part of the Empire in that that it appears that the military personnel didn’t appear to question if they would be able to visit gardens like these and have tea parties. They seem to take completely for granted being able to hang out with other Brits and do British things. Instead, they befriended the man who created these gardens and visited his gardens in the middle of the war.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has, like the preceding chapters, looked at a certain view the military personnel stationed in Egypt portrayed. This view might be referred to as the most British of them all as it focused on how Egypt was portrayed as being a part of the British Empire. As mentioned in the introduction, this view might have been the most subconscious of all the views as, when removing all of the other categories, they were ultimately stationed in the Empire. Being

²¹⁰ Draper, Walter. “Gardening in Egypt: A Handbook of Gardening for Lower Egypt” London: L. Upcott Gill., 170, Strand, W.C., 1895. 10.11.20 <https://archive.org/details/gardeninginegyp00drapgoog/page/n4/mode/2up>

²¹¹ The online encyclopedia Britannica explains that «Western gardening had its origins in Egypt some 4000 years ago.” Encyclopædia Britannica s.v. “gardening” 10.11.20

<https://www.britannica.com/science/gardening/Choice-of-plants#ref34669>

²¹² Social Pantry “History of the Garden Party” 20.11.20 <https://socialpantry.co.uk/blog/history-garden-party/> ; Taylor, Elise “The Historic Evolution of the Royal Family’s Grand Garden Parties” *Vogue*. 29.05.2019. 20.11.20 <https://www.vogue.com/article/the-historic-evolution-of-the-royal-familys-grand-garden-parties#:~:text=Garden%20parties%20began%20in%20the,party%20shows%20an%20extravagant%20scene.>

stationed in somewhere which was a part of the British Empire, whether it was actually a colony or not, affected the way they wrote home.

In this chapter, we have seen two different ways in which the military personnel expressed this and how they in part overlapped. Firstly, it was the way they wrote about and acted in the country itself. Through the war, several projects were initiated to expand infrastructure within Egypt, yet not one of the accounts actually questioned the British right to do it. Instead, there are various accounts and even boasting of the development which happened in Egypt throughout the war, taking it for granted that they should be able to use Egypt like they wanted. In many of the sources, the military personnel also behaved as if they should be able to do just the same as if they had been at home. In fact, Blore even complained that the train service wasn't as good as back in Great Britain, having clearly expected it to be just like at home. The usage of Egypt's own raw materials, while it was brought up, was automatically connected to the industry of Great Britain. And even historic places, which might have a painful history for the Egyptian population, was used as camps for the British military personnel.

Then there were the attitudes which the personnel had towards the local population. Some of the military personnel, like Pashler, mostly dismissed the local population unless it was necessary to mention them or they were able to do something which was needed. Others, like McPherson, appears to have had much more contact with them and also much more clearly expressed prejudices towards the Egyptians in the way they acted and wrote about them. At the same time, he also seemed to have gotten to know the locals in contrast to some of the others who merely wrote about them.

There is a clear difference between the British and the local population which can be described as a hierarchy. Through their accounts, whether conscious or not, a clear power balance in favour of the British is displayed where they are in an elevated position just because of their nationality. They were the ones in power, something they were more or less aware of and which affected the way they interacted with and wrote about Egypt and her people. This chapter further nuances the picture which the military personnel presented of Egypt, linking it up to the British Empire and presenting it as just another colony instead of the protectorate it was supposed to be. This represents a general view which the British held

of Egypt, and rather than challenging this view, pictures and postcards from military personnel mainly confirmed it.

Conclusion

This master thesis set out to find out what kind of picture of Egypt the British military personnel portrayed to their friends and family back at home. This was while the military personnel were stationed there during the First World War and although they might have travelled there with a preconceived picture thanks to the tourism industry, that image wasn't always the picture they themselves portrayed back home. In order to properly look into this, the thesis was parted into four categories which made up one analysis chapter each. In each of the four analysis chapters, one image or view of Egypt was discussed through the first-hand accounts of various British military personnel, as well as some second-hand sources. These four views were Egypt as a tourist spot, a hellhole, a free space and as a part of the empire. While looking into these various portrayals, they were also compared and contrasted with the other views.

Something that became clear very quickly is that the portrayal of Egypt was typically more nuanced and not as clear cut as might have been expected. There were instances where military personnel sent home only one post card of themselves in front of the pyramid, leaving that as the only picture of Egypt for those at home to. However, most of the military personnel corresponded more frequently as the postal service was the only way for them to be connected with their family. The way the military personnel experienced their service in Egypt naturally affected the way they portrayed Egypt, and several factors played into their experiences. Money, social status, military rank and where they were stationed could all influence the military personnel's experience in one way or another. The tourism industry for instance, while it was well established through the country it often catered to the military personnel who had the most money as that was more profitable.

In this thesis we also saw examples of just how nuanced the view of Egypt was as some military personnel portrayed several views of Egypt within the same source, like the letter from Private Jones written on the 14th of April 1917. Through this letter he portrays Egypt as a horrible place to be stationed at through the descriptions of all the mosquitoes and fleas which bothered him. At the same time, he also very clearly wrote of Egypt as being a part of the British Empire when he described where he was stationed. On top of that, he also drew a picture of himself on the beach looking at a beautiful sunset, placing the letter in three different categories at once.

Therefore, it is not possible to determine that just one of these views was the singular way which the British military personnel portrayed Egypt. Rather, the depiction of Egypt was portrayed as a mixture of these four views, which in turn created a new, collective image of Egypt as a travel destination. So even if one of these four views featured more prominently than the others in the account of a military personnel, that might only confirm Egypt as an exotic travel destination. Through the military accounts, Egypt was formed a more complete image than one received in the travelogues or tourist guides as the accounts focused on everything, not just the attractions. It was a place described as a little dangerous but at the same time contained a lot of attractions, even more so after the war. It might be slightly uncomfortable and different, but at the same time it was warm and constantly sunny. In short, it was exotic.

This more complete image might be especially important as shortly after the war, Egypt became a major tourist destination once more, even more popular than it had been before the war. And while the military accounts might not have been what enticed people to travel to Egypt after the war, they might have contributed alongside the discovery of Tutankhamun and developing Egyptomania.

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