

Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation

Saturday Seminar Series



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Beyond the Edges of their World

European Travellers in the East

Europeans had travelled to the edges of Western Asia and North Africa from Antiquity, merchants, pilgrims and military. Some went further and explored previously uncharted territory. However, during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries a different group followed. These were adventurers, tourists and scientists. This group recorded their explorations and gathered collections during their travels then taking these collections back to Europe. These lectures will tell the stories of just some of them. They range from an archaeologist who dug naked, a Dutch heiress who led a team into the centre of Africa, an eccentric professor who went missing in the Sinai in 1882' carrying a treasury of gold, a Transylvanian slave girl who spoke Dinka, the language of the central Nile, an eminent archaeologist who ventured into the interior of Arabia and an English aristocrat who lived out her life in the Ottoman Empire during which time she excavated at Ashkelon.

These were individuals who lived the richest of lives and in so doing added to the Europeans' knowledge of other worlds, knowledge of their culture and their histories. Their stories add to our lives by showing just how much an individual can achieve in a lifetime, enduring extreme hardship, constantly risking death but persevering against all setbacks to achieve their aim.

The lectures will be held in CCANESA, University of Sydney.

The lectures will start at 1 am with a coffee/tea break a 11.30, then the second lecture at 12 noon till 1.30pm, followed by drinks and a chat with the lecturer.

18 May 2019

Dr. Jamie Fraser

25 May 2019

Maree Browne

1 June 2019

Dr. Kate da Costa

8 June 2019

Dr. John Tidmarsh

More information

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Lecture 1

18 May 2019

Dr Jamie Fraser

Derring-do and derring-don't

Ill-fated travellers to the Levant in the 19th and early 20th centuries

Early British travellers were drawn to the Middle East by the prospect of exotic adventure. They faced dangers from banditry and disease, as well as from darker geo-political forces. Many did not return. In these lectures, Dr Jamie Fraser first examines stories of travellers to the ancient Hittite capital of Carchemish on the modern Syria-Turkey border. Such travellers include the famous 'nude' Assyriologist George Smith (who never left) and later T. E. Lawrence, whose left holding a deep personal sorrow that helps explain his heroism in WWI. Jamie then tells the intriguing story of Prof Edward Palmer, who went missing in the Sinai in 1882 while disguised as a Bedouin and carrying £3000 of gold sovereigns on behalf of the British Government.

Lecture 2

25 May 2019

Maree Browne

Afternoon Tea in Khartoum

Khartoum in the mid-Nineteenth was a meeting ground for explorers searching for the source of the Nile. This group included the Speke and Grant expedition, the Pethericks and Sam Baker. Within this expat group were two women, largely ignored in the classic recounting of the exploration of Nile. These two are discussed in these lectures. The first is the Dutch heiress and friend of the Dutch royal family, Alexandrine Tinne and the second a Transylvanian orphan, Florence Szasz, bought/rescued from an Ottoman slave market by the English explorer, Samuel Baker. Alexine Tinne led a largely female group, albeit supported by large numbers of Turkish soldiers and local staff, along the Nile as far as Gondokoro and into the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

On this journey she was accompanied by the German explorer, Theodor von Heuglin. They collected botanical and ethnographic specimens whilst extensively recording their journey. Alexine supplemented her records with photos, some of the earliest of this region of Africa. She was an accomplished photographer and had a studio and dark room installed on the steamer she hired to be the base of her explorations.

Living in Khartoum at the same time is our second explorer, Sam Baker's lover and later wife, Florence Szasz. Theirs is one of the great love stories of this period but it is far more. Florence had been reared in a harem in Vidden and here she learnt the Dinga language and about the land of this tribe, a tribe that occupied the banks of the Nile south of Khartoum. She also spoke and read Arabic. Her great protector and teacher was Ali, a eunuch slave removed from his Dinga homeland on the Nile and taken into service of the Ottomans.

Their stories interlock briefly during their stays in Khartoum but then diverge, one onto a settled old age in rural England, the friend of the future Edward the Seventh and his wife, the other to be murdered in the Sahara while exploring the overland route from Tripoli to Timbuktu via Lake Chad.

Lecture 3

1 June 2019

Dr Kate da Costa

Lady Hester Stanhope

Hester Stanhope's life, if she had never left England, would have provided enough material for multiple books and films: the grand-daughter of Pitt the Elder, favourite niece and head of household for her uncle Pitt the Younger, confidant or lover of politicians, lords and generals, daughter of an Earl who believed in the ideals of the French Revolution, rescuer of her brothers who were locked up by the Earl, and unmarried at 33.

At that age, her uncle, her brother Charles and her soulmate General Sir John Moore all dead, she embarked from Plymouth. Originally intending to travel to Sicily and Malta, she met and fell in love with the much younger Michael Bruce. They journeyed east. Hester spent the rest of her life in the Ottoman empire, first in Constantinople and then briefly Cairo. She ended up living outside the Lebanese village of Djoun in a renovated former convent renamed the Deir el-Sitt. As well as remaining well in touch with the interests of the British, and negotiating the delicate relationships of the Druze, the ambitions of Mehmet Ali and the Sublime Porte, she increasingly embraced Arab life and Sufism.

Hester was the first European woman to see Palmyra. More remarkably, having translated an Italian manuscript, she embarked upon excavations at Ashkelon, guided by the text. This is considered by Neil Asher Silberman to be the first stratigraphical archaeological excavation in the Levant. In her final years, increasingly impoverished and abandoned by her lovers, she gave refuge to those fleeing the Battle of Navarino and supported "her" Druze in rebellion.

The study day will cover Hester Stanhope's extraordinary life, with a focus on her travels, adventures and archaeology in the Levant. As the 'Queen' of Palmyra and "Nejmet al Sabah (Star of the Morning)", her exploits precede and, in many cases, outshine some of the more famous later female European explorers of the Middle East.

Lecture 4

8 June 2019

Dr. John Tidmarsh

In the steps of Dame Freya

Travels in the land of Incense

Despite Wilfred Thesiger's description of her explorations in Iran and Arabia as not exceeding "what any moderately enterprising Embassy secretary could have managed", Dame Freya Stark was a prolific traveller and writer throughout much of her 101 years and in many ways can be ranked alongside Gertrude Bell, Peter Fleming, and Thesiger himself in terms of those late nineteenth/earlier twentieth century travellers whose books (always in print) continue to inspire those with Middle Eastern leanings.

In the late 1930's Freya made two journeys into the interior of Southern Arabia (modern Yemen) where she worked both for the British government as a diplomat-cum-propagandist—it was just before the outbreak of World War II—and as an archaeologist in the then scarcely known (to Europeans) Wadi Hadramawt.

This talk will follow her journeys through Southern Arabia, using both her written records and photographs (depicting a way of life for both the Arab inhabitants and European colonisers that has now vanished) as well as those of the speaker from a more recent time.

Booking Form

- The series will be limited to 55 people and will have a minimum of 10.
- Unfortunately, we cannot refund payments made for this series unless in exceptional circumstance.
- The lectures will be held in CCANESA, University of Sydney.
- The lectures will start at 10 am with a coffee/tea break at 11.30, then the second lecture at 12 noon till 1.30, followed by drinks and a chat with the lecturer.
- The cost of the series is \$105 for members and \$140 for non-members.
- The cost of an individual lecture is \$30 for members and \$40 for non-members.

Whole series: Name

No. of tickets. Member..... Non-member.....

Individual lectures: Name

Lecture 1 18 May 2019. No. of tickets. Member..... Non-member.....

Lecture 2 25 May 2019. No. of tickets. Member..... Non-member.....

Lecture 3 1 June 2019. No. of tickets. Member..... Non-member.....

Lecture 4 8 June 2019. No. of tickets. Member..... Non-member.....