

Guity Nashat and Judith E. Tucker. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa*. Restoring Women to History Series. Intro. Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. lxi + 160 pp. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Maps. \$11.95. Paper. \$29.95. Cloth.

Women in the Middle East and North Africa is one of a four-volume series on "Restoring Women to History." Along with its "sister" volumes on Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, it is a solid example of the "scholarship of integration", seeking to synthesize extant works, to draw comparisons across time and space, and to survey the state of the field for women's and gender studies. The book contains three parts of roughly sixty pages each: a general introduction by the series editors, Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel; a historical survey of women in the Middle East, sans North Africa, from 8,000 B.C.E. to C.E. 1800, by Guity Nashat; and an overview of women in the Middle East and North Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by Judith Tucker. Over ten years in the making, this volume, like the others in the series, evolved from a series of teaching packets published by the Organization of American Historians in 1988.

The series introduction, framed as a "thematic overview", ties the four volumes in the series together, by drawing upon all of them for a thought-provoking discussion on the diversities and commonalities in women's experiences across cultures. It justifies the regional arrangement of the series on the grounds that "most of these areas have experienced broadly comparable relationships with Western Europe and the United States in the past five hundred years" (p. xxviii). Though the editors do not mention it, the regions covered in the series have another, institutional feature in common: relative to the United States and Europe, they are underprivileged and undertaught in universities. Moreover, those who study these "non-Western" societies are sometimes confined in area studies departments which hinder intradisciplinary, cross-regional discussion among historians. Hence this series deserves applause not only for helping to "restore women to history", but for working to transcend regional boundaries within the discipline.

The series introduction starts with the following premise: "Women, just because they are women, have undeniably been disadvantaged in their access to political and economic power." Yet, it also makes two points which, woven in and out of the entire volume, add subtlety to the arguments. First, "women have never been a monolithic group even within the same society: class, race, and/or ethnicity could have consequences as significant for women's opportunity and status as did (does) gender." Second, "the concepts of 'traditional' and 'modern' are often both ahistorical and value-laden". They imply a static past and a dynamic recent history, and are fiercely contested, particularly insofar as they relate to ideals of cultural authenticity and visions of social change.

Guity Nashat contests ideas of the monolithic Muslim woman and of the nature of Islamic "tradition" for women in her essay on the Middle East from the "discovery" of agriculture (c. 8000 B.C.E.) to 1800. Searching for the roots of urban women's seclusion, veiling, and subordination to men in Islamic societies, she looks to ancient Sumer, where, three millennia before the rise of Islam, it appears that some form of female veiling was already in practice. In its treatment of women, she argues, Islam was less of a new cultural beginning than historians have often claimed. Moreover, Arabian Islam in its formative stage during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime (C.E. 610-632) gave women latitude in social, political, and religious affairs, in accordance with the customs of the pre-Islamic society of Arabian nomads. Only when the center of Islamic culture shifted to the agrarian-urban Fertile Crescent did roles become restricted, socially and legally, for Muslim women.

The expansion of domestic slavery led to greater seclusion for urban women of the middle and upper classes. Women disappeared from public life and from histories alike, until by 1318, the Persian chronicler Rashid al-Din apologized to readers of his history of the Mongols for including an account of 'awrat -- a reference to women which, as a euphemism for genitals, implied their unmentionability.

Nashat's ideas are intriguing. Africanists should note, however, that her chapter concentrates primarily on Arabia and the Fertile Crescent, and does not cover North Africa at all.

If the cultures of Mesopotamia impressed Islamic culture(s) so substantially, then what impact the cultures of the Nile Valley and the Atlas Mountains bear on them as well? One can only wonder them as well. Also, her distinction between the Qur'an and the Shari'a is confusing: what is the difference between them? She alludes to differences but does not clarify them; the glossary at the front of the book will do little to enlighten the reader on this point.

Judith E. Tucker integrates North Africa and the Middle East into her discussion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and focusses particularly on the nature and impact of "modernization" and of the West. Her essay explores a couple of related questions widely circulated in African studies: namely, did "modern" processes such as European colonialism, industrialization and cash-cropping, and the growth of the central state empower women or weaken them, either by supplanting their "traditional" sources of power or subjecting them to new forms of patriarchy? Among her conclusions, she writes, "The expansion of a modern capitalist economy in the twentieth century appears to have had significantly different effects on the economic participation of middle- and lower-class women. Opportunities for educated women definitely multiplied as the demand for female teachers and doctors increased, and an overall shortage of professionals encouraged the education and employment of all middle-class candidates, be they men or women. The options for lower-class women, however, appear to have shrunk. As the pre-capitalist systems of family-based farming and crafts production gradually gave way to a wage-labor market, women were largely excluded from the new skilled occupations." (p. 109) The effects of "modernity" have also been ambiguous because of the role "tradition" -- and especially Islamic tradition -- tradition assumed, as women became cultural symbols of authenticity in ideological battles against the West.

The patchiness of the North Africa coverage in Tucker's chapter reflects the general state of North African studies. Egypt is well-covered (for indeed it is the most-studied country in the "Middle East".) Libya and Morocco are missing entirely; while Tunisia, Algeria, and the Sudan make fleeting appearances, thanks to the work of isolated researchers. Egypt is well-covered -- for indeed it is the most thoroughly studied country in the Arabic-speaking world.

The perception of North Africa minus Egypt as a periphery to both the Middle East and Africa dissuades researchers from researching and publishers from publishing historical works on the region.

Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel begin the "Restoring Women to History" series. The editors declare that the project aims for an audience of teachers, researchers, and students. With its fresh ideas and crisp synthesis, this volume on Women in the Middle East and North Africa is certainly a valuable resource for teachers, researchers, and graduate students. Undergraduates, however, might find this book too much to absorb -- unless they read it to sum up a semester-long course in women studies, or as a summing-up for a long course in women studies, or referred to its bibliographies for research project ideas. read as a bibliographical reference synthesizes recent scholarship in and highlights major issues in the field, while in its introduction by the series editors. The first component of this book is a general essay by Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel, which ties together the four volumes of the series in a "thematic overview". It offers (but unfortunately, and unlike the other two sections, does not provide citations and a bibliography) represented in university departments and curricula. Moreover, scholars of gender studies are sometimes based that historians follow. The series introduction notes that throughout the historical and value-laden", and need to be analyzed and used with care. Women in culture (c. 8000 B.C.E.) to 1800, Gifty Nashat contests the notion of Islamic "tradition" for women. appears to have been continuous. The presence of women in public life and in had reached something of a nadir when, in the early fourteenth century, in theories provocative and as she argues, bore on it

Western presence. In her essay she considers whether. In part, she concludes in Muslim societies. Egypt is well-covered --, and Morocco are missing from this survey. The other North African countries make only. However, (The perception that, in any case, used for summarizing or consulting its bibliography for research 99. lxi + 160 pp. Bibliographies do not provide citations and bibliographies in , and draws. Within these regional groupings. Also (and thanks to the general essay) It gives subtlety to this premise by making run as a leitmotif throughout the volume and add thematic unity. ends. Moreover, or dance with the customs of society. Women's presence in history books around 1300. OA question therefore arises: thenear as well? has have become. , they read it to consult for references. Ultimately, -- and thanks to the general essay common to all four volumes -- fostering discussion across political and economic power" (p. xxix). did (does) gender" (p. xxix). (p. xxxiii) did. Clearly Islamic culture, like the experience of women, has not been monolithic in history. cludes Africa and the Middle East in past two it line. Muslim women have to find

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