

## Pierre Loti's Journey Across Sinai to Jerusalem, 1894

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Gaza, 1843. Lithograph by David Roberts.  
Source: *Library of Congress Photographic  
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### Travel to “The Orient”

When the French writer Pierre Loti set off in 1894 to cross the Sinai desert to Palestine, travelling to “the Orient” as the name and frame of an exotic destination for Europeans was firmly established. Prior to the nineteenth century, Europeans would either name the land to which they traveled, or else employ the term “the Levant” which had gained frequency in commercial and diplomatic parlance.<sup>1</sup> It was the French writer and poet Lamartine’s account of his voyage that established the term “the Orient” in its canonical sense with the publication of his *Souvenirs, impressions, pensees et paysages pendant un voyage en Orient* 1835. The nineteenth century saw significant progress in the means of transportation, so that access to the Middle East no longer required a long and arduous journey. Berchet, tracing the mid-nineteenth century journeys of two other notable French writers, observes:

Within half a century the journey to the East became faster, easier, and more amenable to planning, so that in 1843 it took Nerval no longer than fifteen days to reach Alexandria after a brief stop in Malta and a change of ship in Syria. In 1849, for one Flaubert, the journey was shortened to only eight days, with an additional forty-eight hours in Malta because of bad weather.<sup>2</sup>

Increased European travel generated a corresponding practice in the East based on deriving economic benefit from those journeys. Thus hotels and guesthouses were built to cater to these visitors. Initially, travelers tended to be notable Western personalities who would be provided with accommodations and protection by their embassies or religious missions, but by mid-century there were waves of more ordinary travelers heading to Palestine as tourists or pilgrims desirous of visiting the holy sites. Pierre Loti, although benefiting from both foreign diplomatic and extensive local assistance, sought to make his own way across the desert to the “Holy Land.” In doing so, his vision is often clouded by prejudice, even as his writing offers vivid and immediate impressions.

### **Pierre Loti: Engaging French Audiences, Critiquing the French Revolution**

Let those come, and only those, let them come with me to rocky Arabia, into the heart of this vast, sonorous desert. Let them be forewarned that this book contains no adventure, no strange hunting trip, no discovery, and no dangers... no... nothing of the sort, only the fantasy of a slow saunter, at the camels' lulling pace, into the infinite rose-colored desert. Until, after a long and arduous journey, Jerusalem appears before us shimmering through a mirage, or maybe it is only its great shadow...

Pierre Loti, *Le Désert*<sup>3</sup>

Pierre Loti, whose real name was Julien Viaud, was born on 14 January 1850, at Rochfort in the Charente-Maritime, and died on 10 June 1923. He attended naval school, became an officer in the French navy, and served for over 40 years. He became known for his frequent travels and for his writing about his many voyages. He is distinguished for the diversity of his writings, all of which are heavily dependent on visual observation while reflecting a personal way of looking at places and people. Loti primarily chooses scenes or events that would pique the curiosity of his French audience. Descriptions of weather conditions abound, yet at the same time his narrative style animates the physical scene and maintains a dynamic flow. Loti contemplates the human inhabitants in a manner that exhibits a marked taste for the peculiar, or indeed a fascination with the exotic, couching all this in a narrative style tinged with emotion and fantasy.

Loti visited Constantinople many times, and his portraits there are perhaps his most

engaging. Here he is describing a typical gathering where people meet to drink coffee and smoke water-pipes:

When we were there they called for coffee and a water-pipe. Sitting in our circle was the man who rented out the special wooden clogs worn in the public baths (*hammams*). No matter how poor a man might be, the Imam had no objection to his sitting with us, for everyone here was purified by prayer. Perhaps Turkey is the land of true equality, of equitable hopes and dreams. They are all religious by nature. They have a powerful clergy, a theocracy, and a caliph. This does not prevent the rich and poor, laborers and intellectuals, from greeting one another, sitting together and freely conversing in front of the simplest coffeehouse. We know nothing of the fraternity they enjoy, we who lay claim to the highest kinds of theoretical justice and equality that come to nothing in practice, when we fall victim to the disgraceful and stupid deceptions of the moneyed aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

Pierre Loti is not merely recording social and cultural observations but reflecting on the human culture that characterizes every society. Here he offers less a judgment on the basis of his French values than a critique of the distance between these “theoretical” ideas and human practice. In the bath-house, he feels an intuitive humanism that recognizes no separation between religion, as a spiritual and ethical system, and everyday life. The “fraternity they enjoy” as a human family seems free of those false social restrictions and considerations bred by selfishness and excessive concern for individual gain. This is what led Loti to the critical position he took against certain aspects of Western culture, or let us say French culture in particular, considering that the principles of the French revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, were not in evidence in France as he noted they were in other societies, especially in Ottoman Turkey.

Thus Loti, with thoughts such as these, was no mere tourist amusing himself with making geographical and sociological discoveries, nor was he a Western sailor standing in confusion before alien customs and strange values. I believe he was a philosophical thinker who watched and listened then wrote for his fellow Frenchmen criticizing the homogenous model created by the French revolution and the belief in its universal applicability to all societies. Loti expresses admiration for the local values of nations “colonized” by France in the belief, or under the delusion, that it is bringing them higher values. One such nation on which he wrote was Senegal, in his novel *Le roman d'un spahi* (1881); another was Morocco in *Les trois dames de la Kasbah* (1884). *Le Désert* (1895), *La Galilée* (1896), and *L'Inde sans les anglais* (1903) also deal with similar themes.<sup>5</sup>

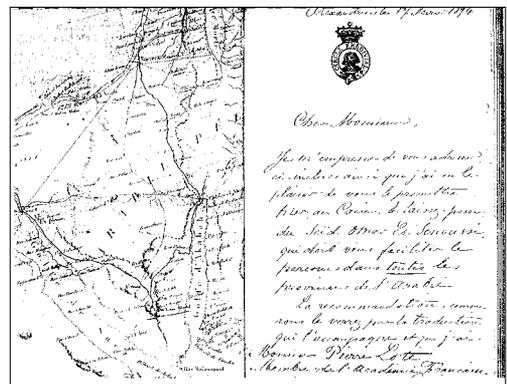
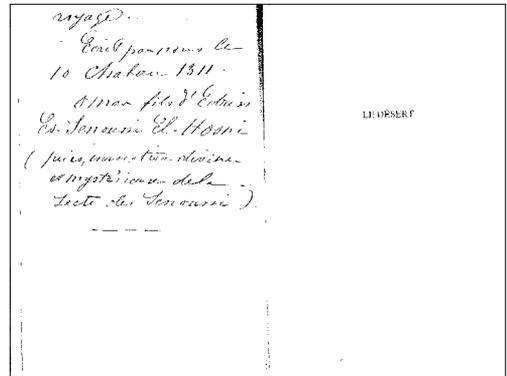
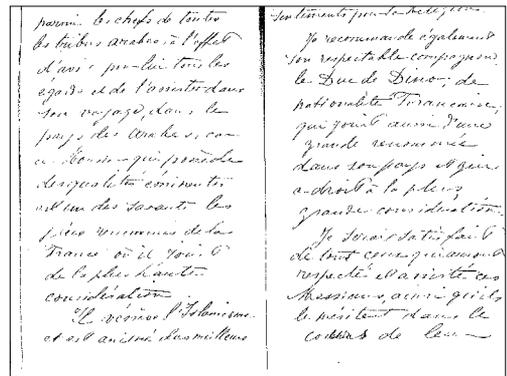
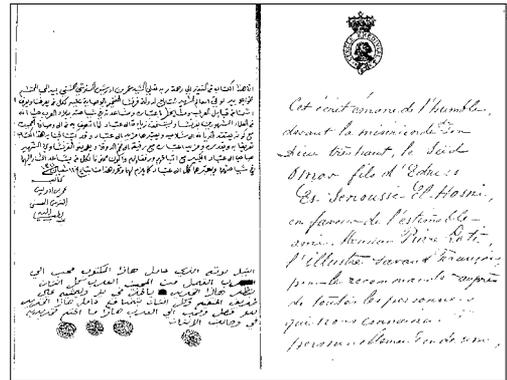
## Across the Desert: Sheikhs and Safe Conduct

What follows is an attempt at elucidating Loti's journey across the desert to Jerusalem which he describes in his chronicle with daily, sometimes even hourly, observations. It was an arduous and difficult journey, since Loti was determined to exit Egypt in the footsteps of Moses, by way of the desert. He set out on 22 February 1894, arriving in Gaza city on 25 March, Easter Sunday. A year later, his account was published in Paris as *Le Désert* (1895).

The publisher of the 1923 edition of *Le Désert*—the first of a trilogy from his journey which includes *Jerusalem*, and *La Galilee* – took pains to include two letters of safe conduct from Sayyed Omar Sanussi given to Pierre Loti and addressed to the chieftains of the Bedouin tribes of Sinai and Petra. These were procured for Loti by the French Consul in Alexandria, who attached to them two letters of his own to Loti dated 17 February 17, 1894. The publisher also provides a map showing the path Loti followed across Sinai, starting from Suez and passing through ‘Ayn Musa, Aqaba, Gaza [city] and from there to Jerusalem. Loti himself had also clearly indicated the course of his journey.

The Consul's letters make plain his heavy reliance on the relationship between Sayyed Omar Sanussi al-Hosni and the sheikhs of the Arab

Loti's letters of safe conduct. Source: *Le Désert* 1923, 1987.



tribes, particularly one highly influential sheikh in the region, a supporter of Hussein, Sheikh Muhammad Jahl of Petra. This sheikh posed the greatest threat to caravans crossing the Arabian desert, whether they were headed for the Hijaz or setting out from Egypt towards Palestine to perform the Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land. The letter further reveals that the consul avoided addressing his recommendations to the official powers at the time, the Ottoman authorities, insisting that the letter be presented only to the chieftains of the Arab clans, and the sheikhs holding custody over small mosques, the tombs of saints (*zawayah*) and religious institutions, but never to Turkish authorities: “s’adresse tout particulièrement aux chefs des tribus, des mosquées, des établissements religieux, mais jamais aux autorités turques.”

### **Fear and Framing: Bedouin Companions and “Savage Ugliness”**

At the outset of the journey we see Pierre Loti sitting in a tent at the edge of the desert reading the letter of safe conduct he is carrying as protection against the raids of the hostile Bedouin tribes of the desert, and contemplating the occult inscriptions appended to the document representing divine invocations of the Sanussi sect of the Maghrib, whose representative in the Arab East was his protector Sayyed Omar Sanussi al-Hosni. (p. 27) Loti would have had no need for such a letter of safe conduct had he chosen the coastal road running between Egypt and Palestine. He concedes that it would have been the more secure route to follow, since it was guarded by Egyptian and Palestinian government officials. Yet he chooses a different way, one that Europeans had abandoned over a decade ago. Loti has no wish to follow the ordinary, well-trodden path. He is aware that there is a rebellious tribe in Petra assailing all European caravans, yet it is precisely the sheikh of this tribe, partisans of Hussein, who most particularly interests him. An additional religious factor was also drawing him to Jerusalem: subjecting himself to the burdens and hardships of an arduous journey to the sacred city, as he saw it, when people’s souls were suffering a weakening of faith. (p. 27)

From the very first moments of the journey Loti asserts that he has no fear of the desert, although the reader may well be skeptical of his claim. He rather fears the Bedouins walking with him and leading the convoy as they go ahead to pitch the tents and reconnoiter the way. He does not trust them, feeling that they pose a constant threat to the expedition. Early in the journey he describes them as follows:

When we drew close to them, they smiled. We and the men in the caravan were aware that they are part of our group, and that their animals are to be our mounts. They were armed with daggers and long scimitars, their bodies like parched mummies clad in tattered clothing, strips of goatskin or fragments of cloth. They were shivering in those wretched evening winds, their smiles

revealing long teeth. Within half an hour they had led us to the oasis of 'Ayn Musa which marks the starting point of the desert road. There our tents, which had preceded us by two days, were already pitched in the midst of a palm grove. Our interpreters and servants, all Syrian Arabs, were awaiting us. Surrounding the camp were twenty camels, each with its driver, forming a mass of misery and savage ugliness: humans and beasts asleep side by side on the sands in the midst of their own dung and bodily fluids. (p. 29)

The portrait Pierre Loti paints reflects his anxiety at choosing such a difficult way – but projects his fears onto his Bedouin companions. This is the desert with all the hardships it inflicts on those who venture to journey through it. The first of these hardships may well be the misgivings that beset the European traveler accustomed to cooler climes and fertile green terrain. As soon as he stands at the edge of the desert, he experiences psychological alienation and projects on all he sees around him the feelings of aversion at the thought of being absorbed into such an environment.

### **Tents, Arab Clothes and Childish Delight**

However, once we get beyond this miserable beginning of the desert journey, we encounter a different, less oppressive scene, that contains a measure of reconciliation with the environment – what Bachelard calls the inner scene.<sup>6</sup> This is the interior world of the tent. As soon as evening falls, and the weary traveler shuffles into his tent, the state of apprehension that marked the start of the journey begins to recede. “When we entered the tent,” Loti writes,

We felt protected from the wind and the glaring light. We took our first Bedouin dinner and began to regain our composure and acclimate ourselves to the calm that follows the setting of the sun... then we were overcome by a feeling of childish delight as we put on our Arab clothes – my two companions were putting them on for the first time on this journey, whereas in truth that was not the case with me. This dress, let us rather call it a disguise, was not absolutely necessary at this early stage of the journey through the Sinai, as numerous Europeans had passed through the region. Yet these clothes were more appropriate for the climate of burning sun during the day and bitter cold at night. Above all, they are more appropriate for mounting camels. And since we were not alone in the desert it was only proper that we not travel in English clothes, to avoid looking ridiculous. It is a matter of conforming with one's fellows and blending in aesthetically for one to dress in local costume. So there we were, after a few days, having rid ourselves of our Western suits and feeling more content with our appearance

in these long robes and cloaks that made us look like desert sheikhs, eager for dawn to break so we could resume our journey.” (p. 30)

## **Seeking Suffering: Following Moses to Palestine**

I would argue that Pierre Loti had steeled himself for embarking on an arduous journey through the desert to fulfill his desire to follow in the footsteps of the patriarch Moses when he left Egypt. The evidence for this is his choice of the long desert route rather than the one commonly followed by ordinary pilgrims. He also set a timetable that would have him arriving in Palestine at the start of Easter. No doubt this reflects both a spiritual and adventurous inclination, both to venture where others would not go, and to follow in the path taken by the Hebrews fleeing Egypt for the Promised Land, as recounted in the Old Testament. Indeed Loti prefaces the chapter of his book where he describes the events of 23 February with a verse from the Book of Exodus: “Moses made Israel move from their camp at the Sea of Reeds, and they made for the wilderness of Shur where they traveled for three days without finding water” (Exodus 15: 22, The Jerusalem Bible).

Following the quoted verse Loti vividly evokes the dryness and heat of the desert:

We would walk all day on this coarse sand, following those faint tracks across the ages, rare pathways made by man and beast that form the trails of the desert. In the distance the horizon appears to shimmer, with grey rocks scattered over the sands. Grey pervades everything, pinkish grey, yellowish grey. Farther away one can see plants of a pale green color bearing barely visible black blossoms, and the long necks of the camels bending down trying to graze them. The horizon trembles in the heat, and one yearns for an errant cloud to cast its shadow on his head. A wayward cloud high above the remote sands... but these clouds rush away into the distance with their small useless shadows that refresh nothing but rocks and sun-bleached skeletons. (p. 23)

The desert offers no welcome, nor does Loti, seek moments of pleasure in, or adaption to, this harsh environment. Rather he seeks the suffering of the pilgrim to the Holy Land, suggesting a journey of spiritual purification. But enduring the desert was not Loti's only concern. His fear of the desert Bedouins weighed no less on him than the terrors of the wilderness. He fancied that every movement in the hollow of night could be an attacker, and every sound the portent of a surprise invasion on his camp. “Despite himself,” he writes,

A man reflects on the vulnerability of this simple shelter in face of the desert and night marauders. With such noisy clamor and movement in pitch-black

night, a pair of hands might fall upon you, and a sharp blade hover over your neck, without your cry for help being heard by any human being, even those sitting in the next tent. (p. 35)

Loti had been warned about these Bedouins before he came to the desert and could not trust or feel comfortable in their company, even though his companions put in real effort at making the journey successful and at easing the hardship of travel. This effort is evident in Loti's cozy description of arriving at camp after a difficult day of walking:

At last... at last... after rounding a hill we saw yellow torch-lights dancing before our eyes... we had arrived, and there were our Bedouin friends rising to meet us. This time they had set up camp in an enclosed place, protected from the rear by walls of rock promising a defense against night raids. The feeling was one of coming home, and on entering the illuminated tents, with their Arab-style tapestries and oriental carpets covering the ground, they appear, to our eyes, long-used to the neutral tones of desolate emptiness like small desert mansions. (p. 37)

What is odd is that despite the suffering and difficulties endured by these Bedouins in order to look after him and his companions, and despite the fact that he was on a religious journey akin to the spirit of the East and the ascetic, frugal life led by these people in this harsh climate, Loti has no sense of the spiritual dimension of their existence. Nor does he have the curiosity to seek an intimate knowledge of their thoughts or culture. Rather, a preconceived, stereotypical notion prevails, despite a long journey of over a month of companionship and protection, even though he had paid for this service.

### **Fear into Chauvinism: Three Portrayals of Bedouins**

Three consecutive depictions by Loti provide a sensory and highly physical sense of his prejudices. The first is visual. A night storm had struck and several Arabs arrived to protect the camp.

Those men came out from among the rocks that were supposed to be our defense ... They had obscure features, brown faces with white teeth, creeping about in the dark, around our blazing fire. (p. 38)

The second is aural:

Every now and then one of the camel-drivers would start to chant, rousing us from our sleep and dreams. It is more of a call than a chant, an extremely melancholy call in which the terrifying name of Allah is repeated incessantly,

producing distinct echoes in the wadis ... frightful sounds, roused from silence. (p.41)

Loti was no stranger to the Muslim call to prayer, which he had become familiar with when he lived in Turkey, and about which he had written at length and with a measure of respect. But here, it arouses no appreciation or understanding in Loti, nor is he capable of seeing it as a reassuring factor indicative of the Bedouin devotion. Instead, his negative attitude towards the inhabitants of the desert prevails.

The third vivid depiction places the life of desert Bedouins, their customs and culture in a timeless space, and mis-recognizes song as a primal moan. His companions arrange a customary night-time entertainment known in their culture as *samer* by which they hope to amuse their guests and provide them with some relief from the troubles and hardships of travel. This is how Loti describes this evening entertainment and the feelings it aroused in him:

When darkness fell and twinkling stars lit up the sky, our Bedouins were seated in a circle around a bonfire, as is their custom – black silhouettes against a background of yellow sparks – as they sat thus, twelve of them rose, arranged themselves in front of our tent in a circle around a bagpipe-player, and started to sing as a choir in keeping with the slow rhythm of the piper in their midst. They swayed their heads in time with the music as they sang ... the mood was ancient and mournful ... No doubt these were the same sounds people heard when Moses crossed the desert, sounds more desolate than silence, a Bedouin music closer to moaning than to song, dissipating into space that knows no noise, yearning for sound like these sands thirst for dew. (p. 34)

Although Loti wished to set himself apart from other pilgrims and travelers to the Holy Land through his arduous journey, yet he succumbed to a common preconception of the Bedouins as part and parcel of the wilderness they inhabit, or let us say, they constitute a natural element complementing the phenomenon of “the desert.” Loti’s aristocratic bent, which he shared with other educated and influential Frenchmen, also shaped his chauvinism in his dealings with the Bedouins (which does not necessarily mean that we consider him as only a chauvinist). When he refers to them in the demeaning possessive as “our Bedouins” he is giving expression to this chauvinism. On the subject of the Bedouins’ bloodthirsty savagery Loti writes:

Diminutive, bronze-colored people waving long bare arms stretching out of old robes. Against their black rags and animal skins shines the brass of their long pipes, their old rifles that have killed so many, and their ancient swords that have torn many a limb.(p. 83)

This view was not exclusively Western, for Loti might possibly have been influenced by the views of Ottoman Turks he had met before coming to Arab lands.

### **Sheikh Mohammed's "Clawed Fist"**

The Turkish administrative officer at Aqaba would not allow Loti to proceed to Petra and stay for a few days with his acquaintance Muhammad Jahl. So after a problematic delay he was allowed to continue on to Gaza, bearing a permit from the governor, and accompanied by two Turkish soldiers as well as Hassan, the son of Muhammad Jahl, the sheikh of Petra, and his cousin 'Ayed. Their journey from Aqaba to Gaza city took ten days to complete. The sheikh of Petra had supplied replacements of both camels and companions, and it appears from Loti's account of his agreement with the sheikh that he had also been provided with a most beautiful and fast camel harnessed with a saddle of the highest quality. Additionally Hassan and 'Ayed attended Loti and each was quick to offer him his favorite she-camel. Yet despite all this, and the fact that the journey took place at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan when Loti noted that his companions were praying regularly, his prevailing view of the desert and of desert Bedouins and Islam again trumped both friendship and protection. Loti describes Sheikh Muhammad Jahl after Loti has paid a sum of money in exchange for the camel caravan and the protection provided:

I could make out Muhammad Jahl among his followers, clutching his staff as if he were holding a scepter, his eyes aflame with anger under a head-dress held with a golden head-band. He was roaring like an aged lion, still in control and fearsome, surrounded by people in threadbare clothes representing the nobility of his desert, with whom he was sharing the booty he had won from us, keeping the lion's share to himself. It was possible to see the pieces of gold being repeatedly transferred to and fro from one clawed fist to another. (p. 143)

Loti's journey from Aqaba to Gaza city continues across the hills of the Naqab, where he suffers great hardship and distress from rugged trails, an extremely hot sun, robbers and highwaymen. After the first five days the scene opens up before him to reveal a mountain range and "pale hills lined as if they were drawn on canvas," as he puts it. Then,

A series of long, black-like things which appeared from a distance like animals sticking to the ground. It was as if these were prodigious enlargements of the caterpillars of Wadi Elhessi. A fearsome tribe inhabits that locality, one of those tribes that are 'rich in flocks,' according to the prophets. Their tents are pitched low, so the winds would not blow them away, and ranged longitudinally in three or four rows in this limitless space.

Innumerable flocks grazed nearby, with many she-camels giving suck to their young. (p. 181)

## **Arrival in Gaza: Palestine's "Eternal Fascination"**

This is the prelude to arriving to a wet and verdant land, breaking the monotony of the arid desert scene. Loti undergoes a clear change of mood as he approaches the plains of Gaza, which remind him of the landscape between Miknas and Tangiers in Morocco as he enumerates the various kinds of vegetation and flowering plants. "Shortly," he writes, "we will reach the land of Canaan, where milk and honey flow, in contrast with the places of perdition and deadly solitude whence we came, where life offers the most meager bounty to the emaciated thieving Bedouin. (p. 187)

Loti arrives in Gaza on Good Friday, March 23, 1894, considering it his first entry into Palestine. Clearly his frame of reference is a religious one, since he has been walking in the historical land of Palestine for seven days in the Naqab desert, yet does not recognize that he has reached that land. The miserable and exhausting desert can only be an entryway, a difficult passage to the desired end, or earthly paradise (the land of milk and honey) even when this does not correspond to traditional religious teaching, for Gaza, and specifically its coastal stretch, constitutes the harsh land of Canaan, home of the giants. But Loti is seeking the stereotypical image associated with land and people, the blessed land, and so he remains under the influence of the religious symbolism of Good Friday:

Precisely on this day we enter the land of Palestine, the anniversary of the day on which our savior was crucified nearly two thousand years ago, beyond human comprehension. His mere memory endows this land with an eternal fascination that will never cease to draw us hither. (p. 187)

In keeping with his religious attraction, this positive sense colors everything around Loti. He cannot resist the appeal of fertile nature, nor of the inhabitants of this land. Even the Bedouin here are different from the desert Bedouins. Loti sees a group of girls, and listens to their voices. They are real women, and he has not heard women's voices since he went forth into the desert. These are not savage like the desert women. They wear colorful clothes, and adorn their necks with necklaces of coral and silver. (p. 189) We also encounter another type of woman in this scene:

A group of peasant women or shepherdesses wearing dark blue veils with a prosperous appearance and pretty features, bearing jars on their heads. Then there are hundreds of sheep and goats, and cows with bursting udders. It is a picture of plenty and pastoral tranquility. After the desert, this is the Promised Land. (p. 190)

This description, brimming with contentment and joy, certainly goes beyond the visual, transcending its material limits and changing into a spiritual vision deriving from a preconception rooted in a religious view. It should be recalled that Pierre Loti is addressing French readers wishing they could visit the Holy Land, so he strives to enhance the visual image with biblical references, aiming to make the scene more attractive and exciting. Loti tries to make the reader feel that he is accompanying him to those places, leading him by the hand through the fields to springs and cascading waters, in corroboration of scriptural descriptions of this land made holy by God's hand and inundated with miraculous delights. Eager to bring the scene closer to the minds of his French readers, Loti compares the fields with the countryside of Beauce and the plains of Normandy in northwestern France, replacing their villages with Arab camps of tents made of hair, ranged in long rows over moist grassland. (p. 190)

### **Gaza City: Modern Features and the Tomb of Hashim**

Arriving in Gaza, Loti is somewhat embarrassed at entering the city in a camel caravan, looking like a desert Bedouin. He and his companions pass through narrow lanes running between mud dwellings and he notes that people here practice hundreds of trades and crafts, unlike the Bedouin who only know warfare and plunder. He remarks that the houses in Gaza are built of mud, and notes the white minarets in the midst of green fields that indicate prosperity and contentment. The local inhabitants cannot be compared with the desert Bedouins. These enjoy security and a life of ease, and are in contact with the rest of the world, “and all modern amenities that we had totally forgotten,” Loti remarks.

We pass thorough dirt streets flanked by cactus plants that border the Edenic meadows planted with fig, orange and lemon trees, and rose bushes. People here have white skins, less tanned than ours. There are Christian women, Maronites and Greeks, wearing raised veils that do not conceal their strikingly rosy and fresh beauty. The Muslim women only expose their beautiful eyes. One can see Arabs, Turks, and Jews, each group in their own traditional dress, creating a mix of colors that delights our eyes after the monotonous greys we so recently left behind us. (p. 195)

Loti starts his visit to Gaza by calling on the Ottoman governor, whom he describes as a gentle and distinguished emir, the seventeenth son of the famous Kurdish prince Beder Khan Pasha, the ruler of Kurdistan, who had for many years rebelled against the authorities in Constantinople. The governor lives in the center of upper Gaza, in a stone house built in the Turkish style, surrounded by buildings housing government agencies and high-ranking officers. There are telephone cables crossing these localities and extending towards Jerusalem. The rest of the city, with the exception of the

mosque and the fountain, is built out of dried mud, just like the dwellings in the oases to the south. (p. 197)

Clearly Loti found in Gaza a place quite dissimilar from what he had endured while walking in the desert for over a month. It is the first true city, since leaving Cairo, where he encounters people engaged in civil life. He wonders how Gaza can stand at the edge of the desert with no fortifications against the raids of desert Bedouins. His amusing answer to this puzzle is that half the inhabitants of the city are thieves and the other half are their protectors, so the Bedouins find there all they desire. Not surprisingly, while touring the city, Loti visits the tomb of Hashim, the Prophet Muhammad's grandfather, and ridicules the shrine, which incidentally is also a mosque. He refers to the Prophet Muhammad as "Mahomet", a derisive form in French dating back to the time of the Crusades. Loti's tour takes him to another mosque where he discovers the ruins of a Crusader church. There he recalls with sympathy and lamentation those heroes who built the church in time of war. He sadly contemplates the place, remarking that "nothing remains except 'Mahomet's' green banners planted at the nave, where once the simple Crusaders had hung their icons. Nevertheless there is some consolation to be had here, something intangible yet infinitely sweet and good that evokes Sunday holy service, and Easter." (p. 203)

Afterwards Loti and some Syrian companions prepare for another journey, heading for Jerusalem. He bids farewell to, Sheikh Hassan, the son of Sheikh Muhammad Jahl, and Sheikh 'Ayed. Sheikh Hassan presents him with his dagger, and Loti reciprocates with his pistol, after which he sets out on his journey, this time on horseback, in the direction of Jerusalem.

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*Translated from the Arabic by Alex Baramki.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 It is possible that the phrase "voyages to the Orient" first appeared in France in 1772 in the translation of Richard Pococke's book *A Description of the East*, and was reused by Victor Fontanier in his book *Voyages en Orient*. See Jean-Claude Berchet, *le voyage en Orient* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), p. 2.
- 2 Berchet, p. 4.
- 3 Pierre Loti, *Le Desert*, Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: .Pilot, 1987, p. 2. With Jacques Lacarriere. All subsequent page numbers in the text refer to this edition.
- 4 See Berchet, p. 421.
- 5 See Henri Le Maitre, *Dictionnaire Bordas* (Paris: Bordas, 1985), p. 465.
- 6 Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique de l'espace*. Paris: P.U.F (Presses Universitaires de France), 1957, p. 26.