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### Unlearning a Great Many Things: Mark Twain, Palestine, and American Perspectives on the Orient

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# Unlearning a Great Many Things: Mark Twain, Palestine, and American Perspectives on the Orient

A senior thesis presented by

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to the

International Studies Program, Trinity College

Supervised by Zayde Antrim

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the major in  
International Studies – Middle Eastern Studies

April, 2013

## Abstract

Recent scholarship has focused on the influence of cultural works, such as books and films, on American perspectives of the Middle East after the Second World War, but not as much attention has been given to their influence during the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century saw the development of American ties to the Orient through missionary activity, tourism and the publication of a number of travel books on the Orient. This thesis examines the way Arabs, Islam, and the Holy Land were depicted by Mark Twain in his 1869 book *The Innocents Abroad*, one of the most widely read books on the Orient in nineteenth-century America. The first chapter of this thesis gives a broad overview of American perspectives on the Orient before 1867, the time of Twain's trip to Palestine. The second chapter consists of a close reading of the Holy Land pilgrimage section of *Innocents Abroad*. In this section it is shown how differences in class and region, as well as the growing culture of materialism led to a devaluation of Palestine and a negative portrayal of its people. Through its analysis of *Innocents Abroad*, this thesis shows the multiple factors that shaped nineteenth-century American perspectives on the Orient.

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## Introduction

If asked to name the most popular book by Mark Twain, most people would respond with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *Tom Sawyer*. Although these books are popular now, during Twain's lifetime, his bestselling book was also his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*. First published in 1869, *Innocents Abroad* chronicled Twain's participation in "the great pleasure excursion to Europe and the Holy Land" on the steamship *Quaker City* as a newspaper correspondent for the San Francisco *Alta California* in 1867.<sup>1</sup> With the conclusion of the Civil War, Americans began to turn their attention abroad, although many lacked the financial means to travel. Michael Meyer writes that Twain sought to exploit this market of readers ready to shed their provincialism and vicariously experience Europe and the East through books.<sup>2</sup> For many of Twain's readers, his writings on Ottoman Syria and Palestine were of particular interest because they offered a picture of foreign peoples and cultures in a land familiar to many through its association with the Bible and the life of Christ.

Although travel is now an option for a greater number of Americans, many still encounter the Middle East indirectly. Books play a role in mediating this encounter, but today films, televised news reports, and YouTube videos also present narratives on the Middle East to American audiences. These narratives may be based on reality, but they are also reductions of reality and are subject to the interests and intentions of their authors. In his 1978 book *Orientalism*, Edward Said analyzes the ways European authors depicted and "narrativized" the Orient, that is, the regions, cultures and peoples east of Europe.<sup>3</sup> "Orientalism" refers not only to

<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Signet, 2007), 5, and Michael Meyer, introduction to *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Signet, 2007), xx.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, introduction to *The Innocents Abroad*, xx.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 2, 5.

European representations of the Orient, but also to the systems of knowledge and power that determined what could be represented as “oriental.” Of course, these systems of knowledge and power were formulated by Westerners to talk about the Orient with other Westerners. Said addresses this fact when he writes, “that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’ in discourse about it.”<sup>4</sup> The focus of Orientalism may be the East, but it is a Western system of knowledge influenced by Western values, ideologies, and the unequal power relationship between the West and the East. In this sense, an analysis of Orientalist writings may reveal more about Western values than Eastern culture. Said concentrated on European writers, but his theory has been applied to American writers on the Orient, including Twain.

In her book *Epic Encounters*, Melani McAlister applies Orientalist theory to examine the influence of cultural products, such as films and books, on American views of the Middle East since World War II, especially the view that the Middle East is an object of strategic and religious interest. McAlister argues that “the Middle East was not immediately available as an American interest; instead, it had to be made ‘interesting.’”<sup>5</sup> Cultural products generated interest in a geographically distant region of the world by associating it with salient ideas and issues in American society. Some works made the Orient an object of interest through its association with Christianity and Judaism, religions whose history, culture, and moral values were familiar to American readers. Other works, in contrast, made the Orient an object of interest through its difference. In these cases, the Orient represented either a hostile challenge to Western civilization, and thus to American identity, or an exotic escape from strict Western social norms.

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<sup>4</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

In *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain makes the Orient interesting to Americans by drawing out the disconnect between the accounts of other writers on the region and his experience in the Orient. “I can see easily enough,” Twain writes, “that if I wish to profit by this tour...I must studiously and faithfully unlearn a great many things I have somehow absorbed concerning Palestine.”<sup>6</sup> Pilgrimage accounts usually confirm one’s faith and ideas, but in Twain’s book American views on the Orient are challenged again and again. To get any value from the trip, these views must be unlearned and replaced. In place of these views, Twain claims to put forward a more “realistic,” more “American” perspective on the Orient, free from the romanticism of earlier American travelers, who saw the region through the lens of “Holy Land.” This new perspective reflected the interests of America’s emerging middle class and the influence of materialism on American encounters with the Orient.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first chapter contextualizes *Innocents Abroad* by outlining the development of American perspectives on the Orient from the American colonial period up to the 1860s and analyzing the role literature and missionary activity played in shaping these perspectives. At the end of the first chapter, William Cowper Prime’s *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (1857) is examined as an example of the type of sentimental literature on Palestine Twain challenges in *Innocents Abroad*. The second chapter analyzes Twain’s perspective on the Orient, including his depictions and evaluations of Arabs, Islam, the Christian holy sites, and his fellow American pilgrims. Each chapter examines the way notions of American identity, social class, and material progress impacted nineteenth-century representations of the Orient.

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<sup>6</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 372.

## Chapter 1

To fully understand Mark Twain's satire of the Middle East, it is necessary to place Twain within the context of nineteenth-century American views of the region, its people, and Islam. Although the United States would not emerge as a major power in the Middle East until the end of World War II, American contact with the region goes back as far as the seventeenth century. Indeed, the Israeli historian Michael Oren writes that the Barbary Wars between 1801 and 1805 were crucial to the formation of American identity as the states united to form a navy and fight the threat of North African corsairs.<sup>7</sup> If the Middle East appeared threatening and foreign to early Americans, it was also very familiar. The Middle East was the "Holy Land," and many Americans knew its ancient geography through the Bible. Although travel to the Middle East was restricted in the early nineteenth century to explorers, New England merchants, and Protestant missionaries, knowledge of the region came to America through texts, especially religious texts and travel literature. Through this indirect contact, the Arabs and Turks of the Middle East were conceptualized as the ultimate "other," and the Middle East as a land stuck in the past. These were the Orientalist views that Twain satirized and challenged in *Innocents Abroad*. This chapter will analyze the formation of these views, the role of texts in supporting and sustaining them and end with an analysis of William Cowper Prime's *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (1857) as an example of the Holy Land literature satirized by Twain.

### Early American Perspectives on the Middle East

American perspectives on the Arabs and Turks of the Orient began to form when the states were still British colonies. Drawing on European experience with the Orient, colonial

<sup>7</sup> Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 75.



Americans thought of the Arabs not just as cultural “others” but as cultural inferiors. Oren writes that a number of American colonial administrators, including John Smith, the governor of the Virginia colony, had traveled or fought in the Orient before coming to the New World. These men carried with them the image of a violent and filthy Orient.<sup>8</sup> This early negative impression of the Orient was enhanced during the Barbary Wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the United States, an “enlightened” republic, to pay tribute to the “despots” of Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis was a great shame to political leaders such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>9</sup>

Americans constructed their attitudes toward the Barbary States in terms of political and economic advancement. Despite America’s sizeable African slave population, Americans saw their country as a land of liberty in contrast to the “despotic” and “primitive” Barbary States. Melani McAlister writes that nineteenth-century Americans did not recognize cultural differences across space, but rather saw cultural differences as historic differences.<sup>10</sup> Americans believed that Western societies represented the height of human advancement and modernity. Arab culture was not seen as matching this level of advancement and as a consequence the Arabs were seen as cultural inferiors, stuck in the past. In the early nineteenth century, the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel put forward in his book *The Philosophy of History* the idea that not only did societies become more complex moving from east to west, but that the peoples of the Orient lacked the concept of individual liberty, reducing them to “children, who obey their parents without will or insight of their own.”<sup>11</sup> Such a philosophy gave added authority to ideas of Eastern inferiority and Western superiority. It should be noted, though, that these notions of

<sup>8</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

<sup>10</sup> McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), 104.

cultural inferiority did not stop American merchants from engaging in trade with the Ottoman Empire. These economic ties would increase substantially after the signing of the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce with the Ottomans in 1830.<sup>12</sup> However, in the minds of many Americans it was primarily Islam that marked Arab and Turkish culture as both different and inferior.

Although Islam, and Islamic civilization, could hardly be characterized as a threat to the United States, Americans nevertheless felt the need to denounce and reject it. Colonial religious leaders such as Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards deemed Islam to be a false and corrupting religion, and spoke out against it numerous times.<sup>13</sup> Yet, in their denunciations, these early American religious leader demonstrate the fascination that Islam held within the minds of many Americans. This interest in Islam was due to a desire to refute Islam's claim to be God's final revelation and Muhammad's claim to be the final prophet. Timothy Marr writes that Islam posed a fundamental challenge to Christian beliefs which held that Jesus was the final prophet. Islam's claim to supersede Christianity represented an aberration to Christian thought.<sup>14</sup> To refute Islam required better knowledge of it. The first English translation of the Qur'an in 1734 by George Sales was published with the intention of providing the necessary information to disprove Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from this religious threat, Islam also represented to early Americans the antithesis of republican values. Douglas Little writes that eighteenth-century biographies of Muhammad depicted him as a despotic conqueror, converting the peoples of Arabia and Africa by the

<sup>12</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 115.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Marr, *Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy*, 42.

sword.<sup>16</sup> This image of “oriental despotism” was due in part to the philosophies of Jean Bodin, Denis Diderot, and Montesquieu who thought of the Ottoman Empire as an oppressive system that enslaved its people through fear and passion.<sup>17</sup> These thinkers drew little distinction between the political system of the Ottoman Turks and the teachings of Islam. This tendency to blur the lines between politics and religion or ethnicity and religion can be seen in the fact that nineteenth-century Americans referred to Muslims as “Turks,” “Persians,” and “Arabs.”<sup>18</sup> Thus American opposition to Islam was articulated in both religious and political terms.

During Greece’s 1821 War of Independence, pro-Greek Americans would use these religious and political ideas to stir up anti-Islam sentiments in the press. Although the United States, in accordance with the Monroe Doctrine, did not officially participate in the war, the image of Greek Christians fighting for their independence from the Muslim Turks generated a tremendous level of popular support for the Greek cause.<sup>19</sup> The war represented far more than just the clash of cross and crescent presented by the American press. Nineteenth-century America was at the time influenced by Philhellenism, an ideology described by Timothy Marr as “a Byronic desire to revive the noble qualities of Greek democracy and heroism that so permeated the classical texts of the American educational curriculum.”<sup>20</sup> Philhellenism, as Marr’s reference to Lord Byron suggests, was a romantic ideology in which the war could be seen as a struggle for freedom against the supposed epitome of tyranny, the Ottoman Empire. Such a struggle reflected America’s own fight for liberty against British oppression. American national myth thus became associated with clashes between West and East, Christianity and Islam.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Marr, *Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World 1776-1882* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 129.

<sup>20</sup> Marr, *Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 69.

If early Americans perceived Islam as the antithesis of American values, they still could not reject the East entirely as corrupt and backward. The East was the birthplace of Christianity, and it was believed that in the deserts of Palestine God had communicated with the Jewish patriarchs and prophets. However, the Holy Land was not only important for American Christians. It was also intimately connected to notions of the American national myth, and this generated intense American interest in the region.

Mental construction of the links between America and the Holy Land began with the colonization of New England by the Puritans. Unlike other colonial settlers who came to the New World looking for economic gain, the Puritan settlers saw their colonial project as a “Second Exodus,” in which they escaped the oppression of Britain and came to a “New Israel.”<sup>21</sup> In keeping with the idea of a “New Israel,” the settlers imposed Old Testament place names, such as “Zion” and “Salem,” on the New World, rendering an unfamiliar landscape familiar through the Bible.<sup>22</sup> These connections between America and the Holy Land reflected the type of place the Puritans wanted their adopted home to be: one chosen and guided by God, like the ancient kingdom of the Israelites. Exploring the connections between America and the Holy Land was thus one of the primary concerns of American travelers to the Orient. Hilton Obenzinger writes that “actual travel to Palestine allowed Americans to contemplate biblical narratives at their source in order to reimagine – and even to reenact – religio-national myths, allowing them, ultimately, to displace the biblical Holy Land with the American New Jerusalem.”<sup>23</sup> Travel to the Holy Land in the nineteenth century, in particular to see the places for which so many American towns and cities were named, was a way for travelers to better

<sup>21</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 5.

understand their own country. Americans could not completely reject the East due to this connection to the Holy Land, but they could try to redeem it through Christian missionary work.

## Missionaries and the Holy Land

American missionary zeal to work in the Holy Land was influenced by the Revolutionary War, which strengthened the connection between the Holy Land and American national myth. Oren writes that during the war, political advocates for independence drew on the Book of Exodus to portray the British king as the biblical pharaoh and the Americans as the enslaved Hebrews, who were led to freedom by their own Moses figure, George Washington.<sup>24</sup> This combination of faith and patriotism sparked a belief that America should spread the messages of both Christianity and liberty. American missionary spirit contained within it an intense belief in the power of Christianity and American values to promote and protect human dignity and felicity all over the world.

Out of all the “benighted” regions of the world, though, the Holy Land stood out in particular, because, as Daniel Martin Varisco writes, to work in the Holy Land meant “returning to the very land where Jesus had lived.”<sup>25</sup> In 1821, the first Protestant American missionaries to the Holy Land, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, arrived in Jerusalem. Although forbidden by Ottoman law to preach to the Muslims of Palestine, Fisk and Parsons concentrated on converting “nominal Christians,” such as the Armenian, Maronite, and Greek Christians, they encountered.<sup>26</sup> These American missionaries viewed the Eastern churches, with their wealth and elaborate rituals, as inferior to the simpler and more austere traditions of Protestantism. By converting

<sup>24</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Martin Varisco. “When Did the Holy Land Stop Being Holy,” in *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, ed. Michael E. Bonine et. al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 131.

<sup>26</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 91, 92.

these “Christians-in-name,” the missionaries believed they would eventually influence the Muslims of Jerusalem to convert.<sup>27</sup> Sixty Americans would serve in Middle East missions between 1819 and 1844, a third of whom would die there due to various illnesses, along with a number of their wives and children.<sup>28</sup> These missionaries, and those who followed them in the latter half of the nineteenth century, distributed religious tracts and Bibles, as well as founded schools, including the famous Robert College in Istanbul and Syrian Protestant College, now the American University of Beirut.<sup>29</sup> The exact number of converts is unknown, but by 1850, there was a sufficient number of Protestants in the Ottoman Empire for British authorities, under pressure from the American missionaries, to request that the Ottoman sultan recognize the Protestants as an official religious community, or *millet*.<sup>30</sup> The greatest success of the Protestant missions, though, may actually have occurred in the United States in terms of increased American awareness of the Orient and its peoples.

The missionaries generated a substantial amount of text on the progress of their evangelizing. One of the most well known missionary texts was William Thomson’s *The Land and the Book*, first published in 1859. Varisco writes that although Thomson, who came to Syria in 1834, saw the Arabs of Palestine in their present state as inferior, he saw the potential in them to advance through acceptance of the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Thomson’s text served as a counterpoint to the dominant anti-Arab attitudes then present in the United States. However, his work did little to challenge anti-Ottoman sentiments. Thomson blamed the Ottoman system of government for the impoverished state of the Arabs.<sup>32</sup> This attitude toward both the Arabs and the Ottoman

<sup>27</sup> David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 123.

<sup>28</sup> Finnie, *Pioneers East*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 123-124.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Varisco, “When Did the Holy Land Stop Being Holy,” 134.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

government would later be echoed by Twain in *Innocents Abroad*. However, Thomson's opinions appear to have been the exception and not the norm for American missionaries. Finnie writes that Thomson possessed "a streak of human tolerance that was all too rare among his missionary colleagues."<sup>33</sup> Thomson offered a minority view perhaps, but his book found favor with the American public, selling over 200,000 copies.<sup>34</sup> His book is just one example of the many missionary texts that reached the American market in the nineteenth century and spurred interest in the Holy Land.

The readers of Thomson's book were primarily interested in the relationship between the Holy Land and the Holy Bible. Americans looked to the Christian holy sites for physical proof of the biblical narrative, but conflicting accounts by pilgrims, medieval historians, and others cast doubt on the authenticity of a number of the holy sites. In the mid-nineteenth century, one American would travel to the Holy Land in order to determine and separate the authentic holy sites from the inauthentic. As a professor of Greek and Hebrew, who had written lexicons of both languages for the New Testament, Edward Robinson seemed uniquely suited to the task of determining the truth of the Holy Land's religious sites. In 1838, Robinson set out with Eli Smith, an American missionary, to survey the Holy Land.<sup>35</sup> The results of this tour, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea*, would be published in three volumes in 1841 and would launch the field of biblical archaeology.<sup>36</sup> Robinson's work was monumental not just in terms of what it added to scholarly knowledge of the Holy Land. His critical approach and condemnation of local Christian traditions gave Protestant American travelers a way to claim the Holy Land as their own.

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<sup>33</sup> Finnie *Pioneers East*, 187-188.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 175-176.

<sup>36</sup> Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 52.

Robinson's approach to the religious sites of the Holy Land entailed a close reading of both the Bible and the Palestinian landscape. Scripture provided Robinson with reason to reject the authenticity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Jesus' resurrection. References in the Bible suggested that the resurrection occurred outside Jerusalem, but the church is well inside the city walls.<sup>37</sup> In his "reading" of Palestine, Robinson examined the Arabic names of villages for evidence of the names of ancient Hebrew cities.<sup>38</sup> Robinson was also known for measuring the holy sites he visited in an attempt to confirm descriptions given in the Bible and other sources. William Thomson, author of *The Land and the Book* and Robinson's research assistant on his second trip to Palestine, called him "the greatest master of measuring tape in the world."<sup>39</sup> The result of this research was a "rewriting" of the Holy Land. In Hilton Obenzinger's words, "Robinson reinscribed the topography with his own 'evidence,'" namely the location of a number of previously unidentified biblical sites.<sup>40</sup> Robinson's critical approach to the Holy Land enabled him to discern its "authentic" sacred geography and even discover sites that local Catholic and Orthodox traditions had failed to recognize.

Robinson was not without his critics. The writer Herman Melville feared that Robinson would strip away Palestine's holiness through his critical analysis and render it profane.<sup>41</sup> In the nineteenth century there was a fine line between critical analysis and irreverence. Melville's criticism points to serious questions within nineteenth-century American society about how the Holy Land should be approached, and the degree to which physical "evidence" was necessary in religious experience. Robinson's emphasis on materiality and authenticity can perhaps be seen as

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<sup>37</sup> Finnie, *Pioneers East*, 178-179.

<sup>38</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Finnie, *Pioneers East*, 178.

<sup>40</sup> Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 53.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



part of a shift in American discourse towards a more empirical understanding of Palestine and the Orient.

Edward Robinson's "rewriting" of the Holy Land's geography had important repercussions for later Protestant travelers to the Middle East. His scientific approach provided Protestant pilgrims a basis on which to call into question the authenticity of the holy sites controlled by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and thus the authority of these groups. Robinson's work did more than just question non-Protestant religious authority though. Obenzinger notes that the doubt surrounding the Christian holy sites led to an increase in Protestant interest in Palestinian landscapes.<sup>42</sup> Although the cities of the Holy Land were considered the domain of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and their "erroneous" beliefs, the countryside was unclaimed. By directing Protestant religious interest toward the countryside, Robinson's work provided American Protestants with a way to appropriate some part of the Holy Land as their own. The influence of Robinson on later American travelers can be seen in the recurrent pattern of skepticism toward urban sites in their writings.

## **Tourism and Pilgrimage**

Prior to the latter half of the nineteenth century, travel to the Holy Land was largely confined to explorers, missionaries, and merchants. This was due in part to the cost of travel and the lack of support structures, such as consulates, available to travelers. Following the end of the American Civil War, technological advances in the form of ocean-going steamships cut the Atlantic crossing down to eleven days. Increases in service between America and Europe, as well as competition between ship companies, made travel more affordable for America's middle

<sup>42</sup> Hilton Obenzinger, "American Palestine: Mark Twain and the Touristic Commodification of the Holy Land," accessed November 7, 2012. 123. <http://opus.macmillan.yale.edu/workpaper/pdfs/MESV5-3.pdf>.

class.<sup>43</sup> Doron Bar and Kobi Cohen-Hattab write that the growth of tourism in Palestine in the late nineteenth century shifted the Christian experience of Palestine away from religion. They argue that if pilgrimage represented the most religious form of spatial movement and tourism the most secular, late nineteenth-century travelers fell somewhere in between as “tourist-pilgrims.”<sup>44</sup> The objectives of American tourist-pilgrims differed significantly from those of other Christian pilgrims. For the tourist-pilgrim, pilgrimage was not just an expression of religious devotion but also a sign of social class and refinement. Jeffrey Steinbrink writes that the post-Civil War middle-class tourist traveled in order to become sophisticated. Unlike previous wealthier travelers, the American tourist was not as classically educated, but was nevertheless curious about other cultures.<sup>45</sup> To travel was a part of the tourist’s education. In contrast, Eastern Orthodox Christians treated pilgrimage to the Holy Land as an act of atonement and preparation for salvation.<sup>46</sup> However, in some ways, tourist-pilgrims shared the interests of religious pilgrims. In the aftermath of the Civil War, many Americans went abroad to heal physically, mentally, and spiritually, and some would seek healing through travel to the Holy Land.<sup>47</sup> Still, these different objectives would help create a new experience of the Holy Land. No longer focused on just religion, although this remained important, tourists also explored Palestine’s geography, history, and culture.

Jeffrey Steinbrink writes that American tourists were also influenced by the culture of materialism then developing in American society during the Gilded Age. Materialism in this sense refers to the growing preoccupation of Americans with material products as signifiers of

<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Steinbrink, “Why the Innocents Went Abroad: Mark Twain and American Tourism in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 16, no.2 (1983), 280.

<sup>44</sup> Doron Bar and Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage: The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (2003): 132, accessed January 12, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284295>.

<sup>45</sup> Steinbrink, “Why the Innocents Went Abroad,” 279-280.

<sup>46</sup> Bar and Cohen-Hattab, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage,” 133.

<sup>47</sup> Steinbrink, “Why the Innocents Went Abroad,” 280.

class status and power. During the Gilded Age, the period of American history stretching from the end of the Civil War up to the turn of the century, American society changed rapidly due to industrialization and the development of transcontinental transportation and communications networks.<sup>48</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman writes that during this time period Americans became obsessed with invention and celebrated the mechanical expertise of American inventors, scientists, and engineers.<sup>49</sup> The Gilded Age also saw the development of domestic mass markets to consume the products of American industry.<sup>50</sup> The growth of industrialization and the development of consumer markets had several effects on American tourists. First, tourists began to treat travel experiences like a product to be collected and consumed. Steinbrink writes that one of the goals of nineteenth-century American tourists was to visit as many sites of interest as possible.<sup>51</sup> Having paid their money, American tourists wanted to get their money's worth of experiences.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the experience itself came to be associated with a monetary value, and it was up to the tourist to decide if the site warranted the amount paid to see it. In addition, this materialist mindset led many tourists to seek out souvenirs and memorabilia.<sup>53</sup> Souvenirs, which were often pieces of monuments broken off by the tourist, not only helped commemorate the trip, but they also served as indicators of one's status as an experienced traveler. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain intentionally juxtaposes the materialist impulses of American tourist-pilgrims with their spiritual interests in the Holy Land to show the changing experience of Americans in the Orient.

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<sup>48</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York UP, 1993), 2, 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Steinbrink, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad," 283.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

The tourism industry also affected the way tourist-pilgrims experienced the Orient. Unlike religious pilgrims, who would at times go out of their way to make their pilgrimage arduous, tourist-pilgrims sought comfort. Bar and Cohen-Hattab attribute the boom in hotel construction in Palestine in the late nineteenth century to the influx of tourists in the region.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to religious pilgrims, who often brought a priest to explain religious sites, tourist-pilgrims would hire local guides, or “dragomen,” who could interpret and explain local culture and history to them.<sup>55</sup> The growth of these support services, while beneficial, commodified the experience of the Holy Land. One’s economic resources, or the economic resources of the tour group, determined the quality of guide and accommodations, and to a certain extent the quality of the travel experience. The cost of these services made the tourist experience an upper and middle-class experience. This too was in contrast to the experience of religious pilgrims, whose groups often included both rich and poor.<sup>56</sup> As the tourist industry developed in Palestine, religious pilgrimage became mixed with elements of commercialism, creating a new hybrid “tourist-pilgrim” experience of the Middle East.

### **Literature and American Discourse on the Orient**

To appreciate the sites they would see and the culture they would experience, American tourist-pilgrims turned to a variety of texts for information on the Orient. Books such as the Bible, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and travel accounts not only stimulated American interest in the East, but also provided Americans with the cultural concepts necessary to understand it. Twain writes that the directors of the *Quaker City* trip recommended that each passenger bring

<sup>54</sup> Bar and Cohen-Hattab, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage,” 140.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 139, 141.

with them “a few guidebooks, a Bible, and some standard works of travel.”<sup>57</sup> These texts would render the Orient intelligible to American tourists, and were in turn regarded as authoritative sources by their readers.

Two of the most important sources on the Orient for nineteenth-century Americans were the Bible and the *Thousand and One Nights*. The Bible contained more than just the sacred narrative that pilgrims would seek evidence of in the Holy Land. Within the Bible, especially the Old Testament, were numerous descriptions of the wealth and splendor of the ancient kingdoms of the Israelites and the Queen of Sheba. Michael Oren writes that these descriptions, as well as descriptions of exotic deserts, offered Americans an escape from the hard labor of frontier life.<sup>58</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bible, as the Word of God, was taken as truth, and so these descriptions of Oriental opulence were widely believed. If the Bible offered Americans a sacred depiction of Oriental exotic splendor, then the *Thousand and One Nights* provided a more secular version. Scheherazade’s stories of a magical Orient filled with flying carpets and genies provided Americans with an escapist fantasy.<sup>59</sup> With these images in mind, American tourists, including Twain, would seek out Oriental luxury in the Turkish baths and coffeehouses of the Ottoman Empire.

Travel literature written by missionaries, pilgrims, and other travelers offered another source of information on the Orient. To a certain extent, travel literature helped challenge the idealized images of an opulent Orient. Melani McAlister writes that many American travelers observed and wrote on the poverty of the Arabs.<sup>60</sup> These accounts were often interpreted by readers as a sign of the “fallen” state of the Arabs, whose initiative had been stifled by an

<sup>57</sup> Twain, Mark, *Innocents Abroad*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 44.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 14-15.

oppressive government. In that sense they supported widespread concerns about oriental despotism. Although previous descriptions of the Holy Land did not always match the experience of American travelers, Americans nonetheless drew on these descriptions to add authority to their own writing. Hilton Obenzinger writes that American travel writers often combined their personal experience of the Holy Land with stories from the Bible and Crusader myths when writing their books.<sup>61</sup> The writer William Cowper Prime included passages from medieval texts in his book *Tent Life in the Holy Land*.<sup>62</sup> This intertextuality put the Orient into terms familiar to American readers.

As more middle-class Americans began traveling and writing travel texts in the mid-nineteenth century, they would adopt this intertextual style of writing. However, it became apparent to Twain that these writers were not adding anything new to American discourse. Describing his fellow travelers Twain wrote “I can almost tell, in set phrase, what they will say when they see Tabor, Nazareth, Jericho, and Jerusalem – *because I have the books they will ‘smouch’ their ideas from.*”<sup>63</sup> American tourists wanted to see and experience European and Middle Eastern culture and art, but were often unsure how to critique and appreciate it. Steinbrink writes that for many Americans the best way to deal with this was “to leave it to the guidebooks to tell them what to value.”<sup>64</sup> In the Holy Land, many Americans merely repeated comments made by earlier travelers without expressing new perspectives or opinions. Perhaps these travelers were afraid to challenge the more established views of previous travelers, or perhaps they were not sure how to assign meaning to the cultural sites they saw. Twain also criticized the sentimental and idealistic style of the books that were the source of the pilgrims’

<sup>61</sup> Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, xvii.

<sup>62</sup> William C. Prime, *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), vi.

<sup>63</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad* 393.

<sup>64</sup> Steinbrink, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage,” 281.

“smouched” opinions. The following analysis of William Cowper Prime’s *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, gives a sense of the sentimental travel literature satirized by Twain in *Innocents Abroad*.

### ***Tent Life in the Holy Land and Sentimental Extremes***

The name William Cowper Prime is not mentioned often outside the field of art history, but during the mid-nineteenth century he was widely noted for his books on the Orient. Born in 1825 in New York to a Presbyterian minister, Prime studied at Princeton, where he earned a law degree. In 1851, Prime married Mary Trumbull of Stonington, Connecticut, who would accompany him on his 1855-1856 tour of Europe, Egypt, and the Holy Land.<sup>65</sup> Prime would publish two accounts of his travels in the Orient in 1857, *Boat Life in Egypt and Nubia*, and *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, which are parodied in *Innocents Abroad* as *Scow Life in Egypt* and *Nomadic Life in Palestine*.<sup>66</sup> Although numerous books were published on Palestine in the mid-nineteenth century, Twain singled out *Tent Life in the Holy Land* in particular, writing “*Nomadic Life in Palestine* is a representative book – the representative of a *class* of Palestine books – and a criticism upon it will serve for a criticism upon them all.”<sup>67</sup> Twain saw Prime’s work as an example of the type of sentimental travel literature that distorted American perspectives on the Orient and its people. To Twain, this type of literature, in which the emotions of the author were emphasized, was problematic not only because it did not present Palestine truthfully, but because the authors did not seem to care about presenting the truth.<sup>68</sup> In place of the truth, Twain believed Prime offered a melodramatic account of his time in the Holy Land. Summarizing Prime’s time

<sup>65</sup> Lee Sorensen, “Prime, William Cowper,” *Dictionary of Art Historians*, accessed 28 February 2013, <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/primew.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 412-413.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>68</sup> “I like to quote from Grimes, because he is so dramatic.... And because he seems to care little whether he tells the truth or not,” Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 410.

in the Holy Land Twain writes “Always, when he was not on the point of crying over a holy place, he was on the verge of killing an Arab.”<sup>69</sup> The emotional extremes presented in *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, combined with Prime’s focus on the biblical past, invited criticism from Twain.

As an account of a religious pilgrimage, Prime’s book focuses on Palestine’s past. The villages and landscape assume meaning through their relation to the Bible, which in turn takes on new meaning as Prime passes through Palestine. While riding near Sulen, which Prime identifies with the ancient city of Shunem, Prime writes “we closed up together, and I read aloud the exquisite story of the Shunamite woman, which possessed an interest I never felt before.”<sup>70</sup> Travel through the Holy Land heightened the sense of connection Prime felt to the biblical narrative and to Palestine’s past, which caused him to ignore Palestine’s present. In one Arab village Prime writes, “The village has a few poor inhabitants but I found more interest on the eastern side of it, where the quantity of rock-hewn sepulchres in the hill-side indicated the locality of the ancient burial-place.”<sup>71</sup> The present day village and its inhabitants are of little to no interest, and the village itself only has value in its possible connection to a Judeo-Christian past. Although Twain was also occupied with Palestine’s past, one of his main concerns was the extent to which American reverence for the history of both Europe and the Holy Land prevented them from recognizing the corruption and poverty of the present.

Prime’s descriptions of his emotional reactions to the holy sites were also the object of Twain’s satire. One scene that was singled out by Twain in particular was Prime’s reaction at his first sight of Jerusalem. Upon seeing the city of Jerusalem for the first time, Prime whispers

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<sup>69</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 410.

<sup>70</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 341.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 342.



“*Deus vult*” and begins to cry.<sup>72</sup> The words *deus vult* translate from Latin as “God wills it.”

These words became connected to the Holy Land during the First Crusade, and they recall the clashes between Christians and Muslims over the holy sites.<sup>73</sup> Prime’s tears are an emotional response to Jerusalem as an object of religious devotion. In this scene Prime expresses simultaneously his intense spiritual connection to the holy sites as well as his hostility toward the Muslims who rule over them. In *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, Prime swings between extreme emotional states. For example, when he visits the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Prime faces a challenge to his belief in the superiority of Western reason to Eastern tradition. Prime expresses his doubts about the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, referencing “Dr. Robinson’s” opinions on the site, and enters the structure with “an involuntary sneer of derision.”<sup>74</sup> However, while in the church, the emotional connection of so many pilgrims to the site overwhelms Prime’s feeling of superiority. Prime writes “All the mummery was not sufficient to forbid in my heart the sympathy it felt for the poor pilgrims...or to drive back the thrilling memories that crowded on my mind.”<sup>75</sup> Sympathy wins out, and Prime becomes “a daily visitor to the Sepulchre” thereafter.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to this positive emotional connection to the holy sites, Prime expressed his relation to both Muslims and Arabs in hostile terms. Like his fellow Americans, Prime was curious about Islam and he devoted a number of pages in *Tent Life* to his visit to the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of Omar. Although Prime passed his knowledge of Islam on to his readers, he also expressed a militant rejection of Islamic beliefs. The Qur’an is dismissed as the

<sup>72</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 56.

<sup>73</sup> “*Deus vult*,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed February 28, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deus%20vult>.

<sup>74</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 72.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

“invention of Mohammed and Abubekr.”<sup>77</sup> Muslim belief in Isa ben Maryam, Jesus, is criticized because “Jesus is made the equal, if not a little less, than the camel-driver of Mecca.”<sup>78</sup> At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, upon seeing an Ottoman guard sneer at a pilgrim, Prime expresses the hope that the Christian powers, who allow the Muslim Turks to rule “by suffrance,” will rise up and “sweep from the face of the earth every vestige of the religion of the camel-driver of Mecca.”<sup>79</sup> Prime goes from sneering himself at the Christian pilgrims to imaginatively uniting with them against a supposed common enemy. The ideas of crusade, conquest, and domination expressed by Prime in this statement are evidence of the way he tried to depict Christian superiority when dealing with Muslims and Muslim power. Muslim control of the Christian holy sites complicated Western notions of Muslim inferiority. By writing that the Muslim Turks ruled “by the suffrance” of the Christian powers, Prime assured himself, and his readers, of Western superiority and dominance.

In his descriptions of the Arabs, Prime also tries to suggest Western power and dominance. While describing his preparations for a trip to the Dead Sea, Prime offers a comparison between Arab and American men. Prime writes that with his “volcanic repeater,” bowie knife and navy Colt pistol he was “not altogether the customer that an Arab would choose to deal with in an exchange of Arab civilities.”<sup>80</sup> Whitely, his traveling companion, is similarly described as “just the sort of man you would expect to throw a Bedouin over his head, and have a shot at him flying for the fun of the thing.”<sup>81</sup> Prime dehumanizes the Arabs and reduces them to “wild-looking animals called men by courtesy,” for whom violence is “civility.”<sup>82</sup> Although the Arabs could be seen as menacing figures, Prime assures his readers that American men are

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<sup>77</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 185.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 197.

superior. To a certain extent Prime is just posturing for his audience. He later writes that he paid a pound per person to an Arab sheik for protection from robbery between Jerusalem and the Jordan.<sup>83</sup> The presentation of a strong masculine image when facing the exaggerated threat of Arab violence was an important convention of the Holy Land travel genre, and it would become an object of Twain's satire when he made his own trip to the Dead Sea.

Although Twain might have gone too far in saying Prime did not care about presenting a truthful image of Palestine, it is clear that *Tent Life in the Holy Land* was more idealistic than realistic. Prime presents idealized and exaggerated depictions of the holy sites, Arab violence, and American male power. The sudden changes between Prime's sympathy for other Christian pilgrims and his assertions of superiority to the Muslim Turks and Arabs are too extreme to give readers an objective sense of Palestine. At the same time, Prime's interest in Palestine's past leads him to mostly ignore its present conditions. In writing *Innocents Abroad* Twain satirized Prime's style while offering his own "realistic" depiction of Palestine.

## Conclusion

Nineteenth-century American views on the Orient and the Holy Land were the product of both an intense feeling of religious connection to the Holy Land and a belief in the "otherness" of Turkish and Arab Muslims. These views were primarily expressed in the form of binaries such as liberty versus despotism, Christianity versus Islam, and critical analysis versus tradition. These binaries were reinforced in American consciousness through texts such as the Bible and the *Thousand and One Nights* which presented images of a foreign and exotic Orient. Although American views of Islam and the Arabs during this time period were largely negative, the sense

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<sup>83</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 200.

of connection between America and the Holy Land kept Americans interested in the East. American missionary work in the region would even offer the opportunity for some people, such as William Thomson, to challenge American beliefs in the inherent inferiority of the Arabs, although this was rare. The many myths and stereotypes surrounding the Orient, which were perpetuated by sentimental writers like William Cowper Prime, offered a humorist like Twain ample material for satire. In *Innocents Abroad* Twain would take aim at the emotional extremes of Prime, the exaggerated notions of Arab violence found in travel accounts, and the growth of commercial tourism in the Holy Land. Twain intended to do more than just make American audiences laugh. By satirizing sentimental literature and presenting his own “realistic” descriptions, Twain tried to present a new way for Americans to conceptualize the Orient.

## Chapter 2

Although the work of missionaries, like William Thomson, and scholars, like Edward Robinson, offered a counter-discourse to some degree, the Orient was still a land of fantasy to many Americans when Twain departed for Europe and the Holy Land in 1867. Twain may have written in the preface to *Innocents Abroad* that he made “small pretense of showing anyone how he *ought* to look at objects beyond the sea,” but it is made clear in the text that Twain did intend to change, or at least challenge, American perspectives on Europe and the Orient.<sup>84</sup> Twain champions a middle-class American perspective that focuses on the material reality of Palestine in opposition to the more sentimental and spiritual descriptions offered by upper-class American writers. The Orient becomes the stage on which Twain can act out and depict the changes in American society in the years after the Civil War. For Twain, unlearning past ideas on the Orient meant more than just correcting these ideas; it meant asserting the superiority of American middle-class views.

In contrast to previous travel writers, who wrote in an emotional, sentimental style, Twain wrote *Innocents Abroad* from the perspective of a literary realist. Realism was a literary movement that developed in the late nineteenth century in response to romanticism, which privileged emotions over reason. Realists sought to represent and describe social conditions as they were, or rather, as they appeared to the author.<sup>85</sup> In the preface to *Innocents Abroad*, Twain expresses his intention “to suggest to the reader how *he* would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him.”<sup>86</sup> This passage underscores the importance of independent thought to

<sup>84</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Carol Scheidenhelm, “Realism,” August 14, 2007, accessed March 13, 2013. <http://www.luc.edu/faculty/cschei1/teach/rn2.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 3.

Twain. The number of texts available on the Holy Land in the United States created, in the words of Hilton Obenzinger, “a thick textual lens and an elaborate set of travel and literary conventions through which engagement with the actual place was mediated.”<sup>87</sup> These travel accounts acted as filters, enabling travelers to observe certain aspects of the Holy Land while ignoring others. To think independently, as a traveler, was to remove these filters and engage in a more direct experience of the Orient.

Independence of thought was important to Twain, and it was something he believed previous travelers and his fellow pilgrims lacked. Most of the pilgrims, in Twain’s opinion, had already formed their opinions on the Orient. Twain writes that the pilgrims, mostly Presbyterians, “came seeking evidences of their particular creed; they found a Presbyterian Palestine, and they had already made up their minds to find no other.”<sup>88</sup> Informed by Presbyterian religious texts and beliefs, the pilgrims tried to fit the Holy Land into their preconceived notions of what it should be, instead of reassessing these notions when they failed to match the Holy Land they found. In the preface, Twain claims that American readers would share his opinion, or one close to it, if they were to travel to the Orient and, unlike the pilgrims, form independent judgments. The superiority of Twain’s approach to the Orient is made more explicit later in *Innocents Abroad* where Twain writes that “lesser men follow and see with the author’s eyes instead of their own.”<sup>89</sup> Although the number of Americans who held or were convinced by Twain’s views on the Orient is unknown, Twain believed that they would be better for adopting his independent, realist perspective.

Realism served two purposes in Twain’s work. First, realism helped refute the notion of European cultural superiority and American inferiority. Daniel McKay writes that Twain was

<sup>87</sup> Obenzinger, “American Palestine,” 120.

<sup>88</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 393.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

acutely aware that “Europeans had long passed judgment upon ‘his rapacious and ruthless nation.’”<sup>90</sup> Instead of accepting European superiority in art and culture, Twain examined the great cultural works of Europe, praising those he felt merited it and criticizing those that did not. Making these judgments suggests that Americans could act as arbiters of the cultural works of Europe and later the Orient. By making these judgments, Twain flipped the presumed power dynamic between Americans and Europeans, in which Americans were seen as culturally inferior. The second function of realism was to enable Twain, and his American readers, to judge social conditions abroad. Richard F. Fleck writes that Twain’s travels led him to develop an “international social philosophy” in which nations were evaluated based on their treatment of the common man. Fleck argues that this concern for the common man was due to Twain’s “exposure to misery and poverty he never dreamed possible” during his time abroad.<sup>91</sup> Application of this social philosophy was predicated on realistic descriptions of social conditions in other lands. Unlike the sentimental style of previous travel writers, realism promoted a more positive image of America in relation to Europe and at the same time offered a better understanding of life in other countries.

Twain may have believed realism offered a better way to conceptualize the Orient, but a realist perspective could be just as problematic as earlier romantic conceptions. Part of the problem with romantic literature on the Orient was the intense sense of emotional and spiritual connection between Americans and the Holy Land expressed in these works. These connections were so strong in Twain’s opinion that the pilgrims could “no more write dispassionately and

<sup>90</sup> Daniel McKay, “Imperial Therapy: Mark Twain and the Discourse of National Consciousness in *Innocents Abroad*,” *Colloquy Text Theory and Critique* 11 (2006): 165-166, accessed January 13, 2013, <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/ecps/colloquy/journal/issue011/mckay.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Richard F. Fleck, “Mark Twain’s Social Criticism in ‘The Innocents Abroad,’” *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 25 (1971): 39, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1346626>.

impartially about [the Holy Land] than they could about their own wives and children.”<sup>92</sup> In their interaction with the East, the pilgrims made the same mistake that Twain would later associate with the author James Fenimore Cooper. In his essay, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences,” Twain writes that Cooper saw “nearly all things as through a glass eye” and consequently never observed correctly the woods culture that formed the basis of his *Deerslayer* and *Pathfinder* stories.<sup>93</sup> “Accurate” observation may not have made the stories more interesting, but they would have made them more rational and plausible.<sup>94</sup> In a similar way, Twain believed the emotions of previous travel writers had blinded them to the point where their accounts were of no value or help. When put together, these accounts amounted to little more than “a most valuable volume to burn.”<sup>95</sup>

However, Twain was blinded in his own way. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain was the sole judge of what was and was not an “accurate” description of the Orient. In his attempt to offer a counter-narrative to sentimental accounts, he focused almost exclusively on oppression and degradation in the Ottoman Empire. In his descriptions of the foreign and the degraded, his perspective on the Orient is just as reductive as the romanticists he satirized. Claiming to base his work on observations, unbiased by emotion, Twain sought to add a level of authority to his account, despite the fact that, as pointed out by Marwan Obeidat, Twain “was not [in the Orient] as a serious examiner of the culture or the people but as a newspaper correspondent.”<sup>96</sup> Twain did not speak Arabic nor does his account give voice to the Arabs beyond the single word “baksheesh.” The reader is left to rely on Twain’s observations and interpretations of those

<sup>92</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 393.

<sup>93</sup> Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences,” 1895, *Online Literature Network*, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.online-literature.com/twain/1317>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 379.

<sup>96</sup> Marwan M. Obeidat, “The Innocent Eye: Mark Twain’s Perceptions of the Muslim Orient as a Traveller,” *Islamic Studies* 29 (1990), 199; accessed September 30, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839994>.



aspects of Arab society visible to an outsider. However, Twain was not just any outsider to the region, he was also a journalist. Twain was not only interested in reporting the facts as he saw them, but he also sought to report stories that would sell newspapers for the *Alta California*. His focus on the negative reflects the way Twain commodified the Orient for an American audience. Just as emotions influenced the romantic writers before him, the pursuit of profit influenced Twain's realist depiction of the Orient.

### Twain and Islam

Like previous American travel writers, Twain expressed hostility toward Islam in his book, but unlike his predecessors Twain did not reject Islam based on doctrine. Twain does not denigrate Muhammad as a false prophet, as Prime does when he refers to him as the “camel-driver of Mecca.”<sup>97</sup> Instead, Twain criticizes Islam because he believed it played a role in the continuation of oppression and poverty in the Ottoman Empire. Twain is very direct in this assertion. Upon entering Jerusalem, Twain writes that “rags, wretchedness, poverty, and dirt, those signs and symbols that indicate the presence of Muslim rule more surely than the crescent flag itself abound.”<sup>98</sup> The development of Twain's opinion on Islam was influenced by both his observations of the role of religion in society and his experience of Muslim intolerance in Damascus and Endor.

Throughout his journey in 1867, Twain observed the power of religion in society, especially the way religion helped people to accept rags, wretchedness, and poverty. In Italy, where the Catholic Church was dominant, it was almost incomprehensible to Twain that human beings could live in poverty while at the same time giving what money they had to the Church.

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<sup>97</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 84.

<sup>98</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 432.

“Where is the use,” Twain writes, “of allowing all those riches to lie idle when half of that community hardly know from day to day how they are going to keep body and soul together?”<sup>99</sup>

A more perplexing question for Twain was how people could beg for alms outside these sumptuous churches when the riches that could bring them out of poverty were contained within. In Italy Twain could only say to the Italians in frustration, “Curse your indolent worthlessness, why don’t you rob your church?”<sup>100</sup> Twain believed that just like Catholicism in Europe, Islam functioned as a means of control. The Muslims of Palestine could accept the external filth of their villages as long as they were, in terms of religion, internally pure.<sup>101</sup> For Twain any religion, regardless of its content, should be opposed if it leads people to accept a life of misery, and enables others, Catholic priests or Ottoman officials, to profit at their expense. Twain approved of the efforts of the Italian state to confiscate the riches of the Catholic Church, and he hoped the European powers would permit Russia to destroy the Ottoman system of government based on Islam.<sup>102</sup> Of course, the fact that the Ottoman government was not founded upon Islam, and was at that time seeking to reduce the role of Islam in its political and legal systems, is further evidence that Twain reported on the Orient he wanted to see.

It is at Endor that Twain first connects poverty with Islam and notions of Muslim superiority. Upon being refused water, Twain fumes, “They do not mind dirt, they do not mind vermin, they do not mind barbarous ignorance and savagery...but they *do* like to be pure and holy before their god.”<sup>103</sup> The Muslims of Endor can accept their material poverty due to their belief that they are spiritually superior to Twain. Twain experienced this type of intolerance before at Damascus where he wrote, “It hurts my vanity to see these pagans refuse to eat of food

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<sup>99</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 189.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 418

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* 336.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 418.

that has been cooked for us...or to drink from a goatskin which we have polluted with our Christian lips.”<sup>104</sup> Twain’s perception of exclusion and rejection may have caused him to write with such hostility on the Muslims of Endor and Damascus. However, this hostility was not generalized toward all Muslims. Twain’s passages on Islam can be interpreted in terms of reciprocity and exchange in which Twain reciprocated the hostility he felt was directed at him.

When Twain did not feel this hostility emanating from the Muslims he encountered, his writing on Islam changed. For example, Twain presents a more sympathetic view of Islam at Naim, a town he visited shortly after his experience at Endor. Twain criticizes his fellow pilgrims at Naim when they break off souvenirs from the walls of a mosque, and step on the prayer mats to do so. Twain recognizes this as a grave offense that inflicts emotional pain on people who have not harmed his group. Americanizing the situation, thus equating Muslims and Americans, Twain asks his readers how they would feel if “a party of armed foreigners were to enter a village in America and break ornaments from the altar railings for curiosities?”<sup>105</sup> This scene builds on the earlier scene at Endor. There, Twain justifies drinking from Endor’s pool, even if it offends the beliefs of Endor’s Muslim population, with the aphorism “Necessity knows no law.”<sup>106</sup> The pilgrims’ need for water to survive in the desert supersedes the principle of respect for religious belief. In contrast, at Naim, the pilgrims’ desire for souvenirs is not a sufficient reason to disregard Muslim beliefs. Thus, in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain does show some degree of tolerance for Muslim beliefs in contrast to the animosity shown by other American writers such as William Cowper Prime.

Even though Twain wrote that Russia should destroy the Ottoman Empire, this was not the equivalent of Prime’s hope to “sweep from the face of the earth every vestige of the religion

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<sup>104</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 353.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 419.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid* 418.

of the camel-driver of Mecca.”<sup>107</sup> Twain opposed the Ottoman Empire because he believed that it contributed to poverty in the Orient, and that its destruction could improve the life of its people. Twain’s views on Islam were more complicated. To the extent that Islam was used to inure people to poverty and to promote intolerance between Muslims and Christians, Twain opposed it. However, Twain never calls for the destruction of Islam in *Innocents Abroad*. For Twain, to do so would be a violation of Christian principles of gentleness and restraint. Next to Prime’s call for a new crusade, Twain wrote in his copy of *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, “The charity and gentleness Christ taught?”<sup>108</sup> Twain’s views on Islam were mixed and tended to change based on the degree of openness or hostility he felt from the Muslims he met, which shows a degree of nuance not often found in nineteenth-century American writings on Islam.

It is clear though, that the majority of Twain’s criticism of Islam was based on the belief that Islam was an obstacle to the material advancement of the Muslims of Syria and Palestine. Implicit in this assumption is the belief that one should seek material comfort in this life rather than suffer in the hopes of obtaining spiritual rewards in the next. This attitude can perhaps be connected to the influence of materialism in the United States during the Gilded Age. With the industrialization of American society came the belief that quality of life could be improved through material progress and consumption as opposed to spiritual practices. In this light, Twain’s criticism of Islam can be seen within the context of changing American ideas about the roles of religion and spirituality in society.

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<sup>107</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 84.

<sup>108</sup> Steve Courtney, “Mark Twain on Islam and Christianity,” *The Mark Twain House Museum and Library Blog*, June 4, 2009. <http://marktwainhouse.blogspot.com/2009/06/mark-twain-on-islam-and-christianity.html>.

## Twain and the Arabs

Twain also challenged the romantic, idealized depictions of Arabs found in American texts on the Orient. To Twain, these romantic depictions were frauds that obscured the harsh reality of life in Palestine. One of the first frauds uncovered by Twain in Palestine was the fraud of Arab “horse idolatry.” By “horse idolatry” Twain meant the belief that Arabs doted on their horses to the point of near worship. Such a special relationship between humans and animals had appealed to Twain in his youth. “In boyhood,” Twain writes, “I longed to be an Arab of the desert and have a beautiful mare” with whom he could “speed over the desert like the wind.”<sup>109</sup> Reality hardly matches this romantic image. The horses provided by Twain’s Arab dragoman are covered with sores and saddle boils. Twain concludes that “if these Arabs be like the other Arabs, their love for their beautiful mares is a fraud.”<sup>110</sup> The reference to boyhood in this scene suggests that these romantic notions of the Arabs and their horses are for children. The more mature perspective is to recognize and report on the conditions observed.

Twain’s use of the word “fraud” suggests a process of deception in travel writing. Throughout his trip Twain returned to the idea that past writers had offered a selective and inflated account of the Orient. Twain first notices this discrepancy in Constantinople where he deems Turkish baths, Turkish coffee, and narghile to be frauds. In Constantinople Twain writes “When I think how I have been swindled by books of Oriental travel, I want a tourist for breakfast.”<sup>111</sup> To a certain extent Twain *was* swindled by these writers. As a tourist, Twain paid for the experience of the Turkish baths, the narghile, and the whole trip to Palestine, and he expected to get his money’s worth. These experiences did not match up to the sumptuous experiences advertized in the travel guides on the Orient, and thus the exchange of money for

<sup>109</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 364.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 364-365.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 283.

touristic experience was uneven. The identification of these frauds draws attention to the way previous travel writers selected and framed their experiences for consumption back in the United States. Through their descriptions, these writers made the Turkish baths, the narghile and even the Holy Land objects of interest to Americans. To the extent these authors profited through book sales while spreading misinformation to travelers, Twain considered them frauds. Twain himself was involved in a similar process of framing, or rather, reframing the Orient. However, in Twain's depiction, the desirability and value of the Orient and its peoples is considerably more modest.

Another issue with the deception of previous travel accounts is that they exerted a profound influence on the way Americans behaved in the Orient. Twain goes into great detail on the effect the "Bedouin violence fraud" presented by travel writers such as William Cowper Prime had on the *Quaker City* pilgrims. In Twain's opinion, Prime exaggerated the threat posed by the Bedouin to heighten the suspense and drama in his book when in reality the Bedouin posed no such threat. However, Twain writes that the pilgrims, having read Prime's book, become so paranoid about the possibility of an Arab attack that they keep their hands on their pistols at all times and occasionally lash out at invisible Bedouin.<sup>112</sup> Such a state of alert is disproportionate in Twain's opinion to the actual threat of attack. "I do not mind Bedouins," Twain writes, "I am not afraid of them because neither the Bedouins nor ordinary Arabs have shown any disposition to harm us – but I do feel afraid of my own comrades."<sup>113</sup> The American pilgrims are too caught up in fantasy to observe the crushing poverty that Twain believes characterizes Arab life in the Holy Land. Having seen rags, dirt, sickness, and hunger in almost every village visited, Twain finds it hard to believe that the Bedouin could really be the threat

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<sup>112</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 416.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

described by Prime. When Twain finally encounters a group of Bedouin, the “wild, free sons of the desert,” he immediately observes their ragged clothes and their horses “spined and necked like the ichthyosaurus in the museum.”<sup>114</sup> The descriptions of violent Bedouin with “picturesque costumes” have no basis in reality, at least as far as Twain can see, but the power of fantasy prevents the pilgrims from recognizing this fact. The juxtaposition of romantic images with Twain’s contrasting realism suggests that only by reporting, as truthfully as possible, these often deplorable conditions can fantasy be abandoned and Americans come to a better understanding of the Orient. Twain’s analysis of the fraud of Bedouin violence is a critique of the way travel writers like Prime turned even the threat of attack into an important part of any tour in the Holy Land. By imitating Prime, the tourist-pilgrims believed they were engaging in an authentic travel experience. Twain however, can see that the pilgrim’s energies are misspent on another touristic experience that does not deserve its reputation.

There is considerable debate among scholars about Twain’s intentions in describing the conditions he found in the villages and cities of the Ottoman Empire. Marwan Obeidat criticizes Twain for reducing Arab society to one dimension, writing that “other than filth and dirt [Twain] does not seem to have seen in these people, qualities of affection and kindness.”<sup>115</sup> Daniel McKay argues that Twain focused on the negative aspects of the Orient in order to contrast it with America’s presumed purity and enlightenment. McKay writes that Twain made this comparison as part of a larger project of “imperial therapy” in which Twain denigrated other cultures in order to emphasize American greatness after the Civil War.<sup>116</sup> However, these analyses do not address the fact that Twain was influenced by Gilded Age beliefs in material progress. In his description of the villages of Syria and Palestine, Twain devotes attention to the

<sup>114</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 422.

<sup>115</sup> Obeidat, “The Innocent Eye,” 199.

<sup>116</sup> McKay, “Imperial Therapy,” 165, 167.

material progress of the Arabs, especially in terms of their farming technology and housing. On the subject of Arab plows, Twain writes, “The plows these people use are simply a sharpened stick, such as Abraham plowed with.”<sup>117</sup> As for Arab houses, Twain writes that the city of Magdala, with its houses covered with “disks of camel dung,” represents “the styles of cities that have adorned the country since Adam’s time.”<sup>118</sup> In both cases Twain emphasizes the lack of technological advancement in Arab society. There is an implicit comparison between America, earlier identified by Twain as the “encourager and upholder of mechanics,” and the Arabs.<sup>119</sup> This comparison reflects the fact that Americans were beginning to attach greater importance to material and mechanical advancement as their own country industrialized. Sean Dennis Cashman writes that during the Gilded Age, “the promise of American life lay in its industrial future.”<sup>120</sup> Thus the material progress in his own country may have made Twain and his readers more interested in and aware of the material progress of other cultures. Material progress was one of the criteria by which Twain measured other peoples, and it was one of the easiest aspects of other nations for the tourist to judge. However, Twain does far more than just draw this comparison; he also examines the reasons behind the deprivation he saw in the Ottoman Empire.

Given the amount of space Twain devotes to village conditions in Syria and Palestine, it seems he was deeply affected by what he saw. In his paper, “Mark Twain’s Social Criticism in *The Innocents Abroad*,” Richard Fleck writes that Twain’s trip exposed him to levels of poverty he never believed possible.<sup>121</sup> As a result, Twain developed an “international social philosophy” which he used to judge nations based on their treatment of the common man. From this

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<sup>117</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 338.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 385.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>120</sup> Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Fleck, “Mark Twain’s Social Criticism,” 39.



perspective, Twain intended to show the reader the inhuman oppression of the Ottoman Empire through his negative descriptions of Arab village life.

Twain's belief that the Ottoman Empire was one of the main causes of Arab poverty echoes the American missionary William Thomson's analysis of social conditions in the Orient in 1859. Like Thomson, Twain saw the Arabs as goodhearted and intelligent people who would be "a happy and contented race" if given education and liberty.<sup>122</sup> As evidence of Ottoman corruption, Twain describes the Ottoman system of tax collection in which the tax collector would delay the weighing of a farmer's grain until the farmer, desperate to feed his family, would finally tell the collector to take any amount he wanted.<sup>123</sup> Fleck argues that passages in which Twain describes the Arabs as "human vermin" should be read within the context of his critique of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>124</sup> The Ottoman Empire was so oppressive that in Twain's eyes it reduced its subjects to an animalistic state.

However, unlike Thomson, Twain at times expressed the belief that the Arabs were happy with this state and even consented to it. In Tiberias, Twain writes that "squalor and poverty are the pride of Tiberias."<sup>125</sup> Another time, on seeing an Arab baby with flies ringing his eyes like goggles, Twain writes "the flies were happy, the child was contented, and so the mother did not interfere."<sup>126</sup> These scenes recall Twain's earlier reaction to the impoverished Italians he saw in Europe. In Italy, having seen the splendor of its churches and the deprivation of its citizens, Twain asked, "How can men, calling themselves men, consent to be so degraded and happy?"<sup>127</sup> These passages imply that the Arabs and Italians continue to suffer because they are

<sup>122</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 337.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Fleck, "Mark Twain's Social Criticism," 45.

<sup>125</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 387.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 362-363.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

too content and do not challenge the system that oppresses them. In the case of the Arabs, the system is the Ottoman Empire; for the Italians, it is the Catholic Church.

Richard Fleck argues that these passages should be interpreted based on the idea of the conditioning of human nature.<sup>128</sup> Fleck's interpretation is possible. Hunt Hawkins writes that the influence of the environment, including the social environment, on human nature was of particular concern to Twain.<sup>129</sup> However, Fleck's argument fails to capture the sense throughout *Innocents Abroad* that the Arabs were somehow complicit in their poverty. Recall that in his complaint against the Arabs of Endor, Twain claims that "they do not mind dirt; they do not mind rags; they do not mind vermin...they do not mind a reasonable degree of starvation, but they *do* like to be pure and holy before their god."<sup>130</sup> There is no mention of the Ottoman Empire in this passage and the repeated use of "they" underscores the Arabs' consent to their deplorable living conditions. The Arabs of Endor, as presented by Twain, take no action to improve their living conditions, but they do take action to prevent Twain and his pilgrims from drinking from their spring. Although Twain recognized that the Ottoman Empire did play a role in Arab poverty, he also believed the Arabs themselves bore some responsibility for their condition, perhaps reflecting an American belief in the power of the individual.

A possible solution to alleviate Arab suffering was, according to Twain, to let Russia "annihilate Turkey a little – not much, but enough to make it difficult to place again without a divining rod or a diving bell."<sup>131</sup> Direct military intervention was needed to rescue the Arabs. Twain even suggested that the Arabs wanted such an intervention. He writes that the Arabs "often appeal to the stranger to know if the great world will not someday come to their relief and

<sup>128</sup> Fleck, "Mark Twain's Social Criticism," 45.

<sup>129</sup> Hunt Hawkins, "Mark Twain's Anti-Imperialism," *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 25 (1993): 34, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27746527>.

<sup>130</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 418.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

save them.”<sup>132</sup> Although Twain would later become a member of the anti-imperialist movement, he believed that foreign military interventions could be used to liberate oppressed peoples. Hunt Hawkins writes that Twain initially supported the 1898 Spanish-American War because the United States denied any intention of annexing Cuba. Hawkins writes that “Twain saw the war as an unselfish effort for liberation.”<sup>133</sup> Richard Fleck adds that Twain may have chosen Russia as the country to intervene because he saw Russia as a symbol of liberty and progress after Czar Alexander II emancipated Russia’s twenty million serfs.<sup>134</sup> The call for military intervention suggests that the West can play a positive role in the region and that the Arabs deserve to receive this help, despite Twain’s lingering suspicions that they are in some way the cause of their degraded state.

## Twain and the Holy Land

Twain’s treatment of the land itself parallels his satire of the romantic depictions of Arabs in American travel literature. The holy sites are targets of satire in so far as they too are revealed to be inauthentic or fraudulent. The purpose of this satire is not to ridicule belief; indeed Twain believed that the holy sites, even the fraudulent ones, played a role in religious experience. Rather, Twain’s satire deemphasizes Palestine’s holiness in order to direct American attention away from the mythicized past toward the present.

By traveling to the Holy Land, Twain’s pilgrims sought to better understand, or even to confirm, the biblical narrative they were so familiar with in the United States. As Twain realized, this narrative was in part a creation of the pilgrims’ imagination. Pilgrimage could easily become

<sup>132</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 337.

<sup>133</sup> Hawkins, “Mark Twain’s Anti-Imperialism,” 37.

<sup>134</sup> Fleck, “Mark Twain’s Social Criticism,” 43.

a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the pilgrims ignored any aspect of Palestine that might challenge their mental image of the country and its history. To gain a better understanding of the biblical narrative, one had to be willing to reassess and change that narrative; to unlearn it if necessary, based on what was seen during the pilgrimage. For example, in order to understand the Bible's reference to the kings who joined in alliance against Joshua, Twain first had to unlearn his boyhood image of a meeting between the kings of England, France, and Spain. In place of this Eurocentric image, Twain substitutes "the poor old sheikh" he saw at Caesarea Philippi, who "with his ragged band of followers, would have been called a 'king' in those ancient times."<sup>135</sup> Although the verse lost some of its grandeur through this substitution, it enabled a better, more realistic, appreciation of the biblical story. This improved appreciation could only come through engagement with Palestine's present and a willingness to change one's preconceived notions.

Another major objective of pilgrimage in the Holy Land was to find physical proof of the biblical narrative. For the pilgrims, this evidence was to be found in Palestine's numerous shrines and grottos. Twain believed many of these sites to be fraudulent, reasoning that it was unlikely that so many biblical events could have occurred in grottos.<sup>136</sup> Nonetheless, Twain believed the grottos and holy sites were necessary. He expressed these mixed feelings toward the holy sites writing, "it is an imposture - this grotto stuff - but it is one that all men ought to thank the Catholics for."<sup>137</sup> Although the grottos may not have been the authentic sites, they fulfilled a human need for something physical that could direct attention toward the spiritual. "It is infinitely more satisfactory," Twain writes, "to look at a grotto where people have faithfully believed for centuries that the Virgin once lived than to have to imagine a dwelling place for her

<sup>135</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 371-372.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

somewhere, anywhere, nowhere.”<sup>138</sup> Without these physical sites the country offers too many possible locations for the imagination to focus. The grottos capture the pilgrim’s interest and direct it toward the spiritual significance of the site. Twain even implies that without these sites, the memory of the event might be lost all together. However, Twain could not concentrate on the past at the holy sites because the present constantly intruded into his thoughts. Describing his visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Twain writes “You *cannot* think in this place...Beggars, cripples and monks compass you about and make you think only of baksheesh when you would rather think of something more in keeping with the character of the spot.”<sup>139</sup> Unable to connect to Palestine’s biblical past through its shrines, Twain devoted greater attention to Palestine’s present and the conditions of its people.

Although Twain used a realist style for most of his descriptions of the Holy Land, it should be noted that there were places where he became more sentimental. At night by the Sea of Galilee, Twain wrote that “In the starlight Galilee...is a theater meet for great events, meet for the birth of a religion able to save a world.”<sup>140</sup> Twain may have criticized idealized notions of the biblical narrative and uncritical acceptance of the holy sites, but he still valued a religious connection to the Holy Land. Such a connection could only form when darkness turned the Holy Land into a stage. More than once in his pilgrimage, Twain remarks that it is only at night, when he has left behind the crowds and beggars at the holy sites that he can reflect on the spiritual significance of his journey. At night, the imagination can act and play out its fantasies upon this Holy Land stage. The projection of these fantasies is described as an unwilled act. Twain writes that the old traditions “steal” upon his memory and that even skeptics “must yield to the dreamy

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<sup>138</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 407.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 469.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 394.

influences of the starlight.”<sup>141</sup> The “old traditions” alluded to by Twain are the biblical stories Twain learned about the Sea of Galilee as an American Protestant. In this passage, Twain is like his fellow pilgrims, whom he had criticized just a few pages earlier for imposing the beliefs of their own religious creeds on the Holy Land in order to claim it as their own.

In his writings on Galilee at night, Twain can be compared to Edward Robinson, the American biblical archaeologist. By locating holy sites in the countryside, and shedding doubt on the authenticity of the urban holy sites controlled by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, Robinson sought to claim a part of Palestine for American Protestantism. For both Robinson and Twain, it was in the countryside that American ideas on the biblical narrative could play out. Twain was similar to Robinson in that his sense of spiritual connection to the Holy Land was not formed at the urban holy sites but away from them. Unlike most pilgrims, Twain found more reasons to doubt than to believe the closer he got to the holy sites themselves.

In his description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Twain challenges the accounts of past writers, especially the emotional account given by William Cowper Prime. As in his treatment of other holy sites, Twain suggests that while there is religious value to the church, it does not fully merit the emotional response it evoked in Prime. Twain even goes so far as to mimic Prime’s overbearing reaction to the holy sites. At the purported Tomb of Adam, Twain claims Adam as a distant relative and writes, “I deem it no shame to have wept over the grave of my poor dead relative. Let him who would sneer at my emotion close this volume here, for he will find little to his taste in my journeying through the Holy Land.”<sup>142</sup> This last sentence is taken directly from Prime’s *Tent Life in the Holy Land*.<sup>143</sup> The satiric effect is enhanced by the knowledge of the dubious nature of the tomb itself. The only reason to believe the authenticity of

<sup>141</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad* 394.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 438.

<sup>143</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, 60.

Adam's grave is because, "it has never yet been proven that that grave is not the grave in which he is buried."<sup>144</sup> For Americans to expend such emotional energy over this site, or any other inauthentic site, is for Twain the same as idealizing and romanticizing the Arabs. It perpetuates untruths. The tomb of Adam is, in a way, a swindle similar to the other swindles Twain identifies in the Orient. It is not worth the genuine emotions of the pilgrims.

Emotions should be spent on those sites with a stronger claim to authenticity, such as Golgotha, a site contained within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Twain doubted the authenticity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of the resurrection, but he was willing to believe it was the site of Christ's death. Daniel McKay argues that the immediacy of the American Civil War may have influenced Twain's acceptance of the site.<sup>145</sup> Twain accepts Golgotha reasoning that the execution of a prominent figure, such as Christ, would have been remembered by the people of Jerusalem, just as Americans remember the site of the battle of Bunker Hill.<sup>146</sup> In the aftermath of the Civil War, Twain clearly saw the lasting influence death has on the cultural memory of a place. Having given a reasonable proof for Golgotha's authenticity, Twain adopts a more reverential tone, writing that he looked at the site "with a far more absorbing interest than I had ever felt in anything earthly before."<sup>147</sup> Twain did believe there were sites of religious value in the Orient, but one had to first examine and screen out the numerous inauthentic sites.

The closing scene of Twain's chapter on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre reveals another point of difference between Twain and the sentimentalists. Prime closes his chapter on the church with an image of the united Christian powers defeating Islam. Twain, in contrast,

<sup>144</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 438.

<sup>145</sup> McKay, "Imperial Therapy," 173.

<sup>146</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 443.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

focuses on the violence between Christians over control of the church. In his reflections on the church, Twain writes that even in his time the Holy Sepulchre has led to “a war that cost millions of treasure and rivers of blood...because two rival nations claimed the sole right to put a new dome upon it.”<sup>148</sup> The allusion to the Crimean War, the effects of which were still evident when Twain visited the Crimea, demonstrated the dangers of the emotional extremes presented by Prime. Going further, Twain suggests, with some degree of irony, that it is because of the belief that the church is the resting place of the “Prince of Peace,” that the history of the Holy Sepulchre is full of blood.<sup>149</sup> To stop the bloodshed, a more critical, less idealistic perspective on Christianity’s holiest site must be adopted.

### Twain’s Criticism of the Pilgrims

Describing his travel companions after the *Quaker City*’s return to New York, Mark Twain wrote “None of us had ever been anywhere before; we all hailed from the interior; travel was a novelty to us, and we conducted ourselves in accordance with the natural instincts that were in us.”<sup>150</sup> Following the American Civil War, travel was no longer a pursuit of the elite. The decrease in prices to cross the Atlantic enabled more middle-class Americans, and as Twain notes, more Americans from the interior, to travel abroad. Twain himself was from Missouri, and he went on the *Quaker City* trip as a correspondent for the San Francisco based *Alta California*. As Twain would later describe in his “American Vandal Abroad” lecture, this group of Americans was not as educated, cultured, or refined as the American elite that had previously

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<sup>148</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 444.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 444.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 505.



comprised the majority of American travelers.<sup>151</sup> Twain's description of the *Quaker City* pilgrims in the Holy Land presents the encounter of non-elite Americans with the Orient. Although this new class of Americans felt a strong religious connection to the Holy Land, their experience shows the influence of materialism on the American experience of the Orient.

American tourists were primarily interested in the Orient for its connection to Christianity, and Twain's pilgrims are characterized by their strong desire to see the holy sites of Palestine. The pilgrims hoped to reenact scenes from the Bible at the very sites those scenes occurred and in doing so feel a greater connection to the holy places they had been "taught from infancy to revere."<sup>152</sup> However, in several scenes, Twain suggests that Americans are beginning to value the Holy Land in terms other than religion. At the Sea of Galilee, Twain writes that the pilgrims' excitement of sailing on the sea grew to such a point that he "began to have misgivings that in their present condition they might break recklessly loose from all considerations of prudence and buy a whole fleet of ships."<sup>153</sup> Twain's pilgrims are concerned with more than just the religious experience; they are also interested in getting the most value for their money. A fisherman offers to take them for two napoleons, eight dollars, but leaves after the pilgrims decide the price is too high and offer one napoleon instead.<sup>154</sup> The monetary concerns of the pilgrims prevent them from realizing what Twain considers to be one of the main spiritual aims of their trip. Another example shows the way this commodification of the pilgrimage changed the way Americans experienced the holy sites. In Jerusalem, Twain writes, "Our pilgrims compress too much in one day... Since breakfast we have seen enough to furnish us food for a

<sup>151</sup> Mark Twain, "The American Vandal Abroad," University of Virginia, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/innocent/vandtext.html>.

<sup>152</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 379.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

year's reflection."<sup>155</sup> Twain's "food for reflection" is a literal reference to the touristic consumption of the commodities of the Holy Land. The pilgrimage becomes less about forging a spiritual connection or even bearing witness to the realist presence, and more about seeing the most sites, thereby maximizing the value of the trip.

Instead of concentrating on the spiritual, Twain's pilgrims focus more on the material and the quantifiable. At the Jordan River, the pilgrims dream of crossing the Jordan and mentally reenacting the crossing of the Israelite armies and the Ark of the Covenant into Canaan.<sup>156</sup> However, this grand image is replaced as Twain and the pilgrims come to realize that "many streets in America are double as wide as the Jordan."<sup>157</sup> Twain suggests that for Americans, size matters. Certainly to Twain it does not seem to make sense for people familiar with the Hudson, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi, the great waterways of America, to write praises of the tiny springs of Palestine.<sup>158</sup> This comparison with the rivers of America minimizes the importance of Palestine. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes that prior to World War II the United States had little interest in the Orient because "the American frontier, the one that counted, was the westward one."<sup>159</sup> However, Twain's pilgrims had a high interest in Palestine for its religious associations. It is only when the pilgrims begin to think about Palestine in material terms that their religious fervor is tempered, and they begin to grow disenchanted with the region. Palestine was a region rich in spiritual value but poor in material resources, and, as Twain shows, the American experience of the region shifted as the influence of materialism increased in America.

The emphasis on the material as opposed to the spiritual is also indicative of Twain's western American perspective. Reviewers of *Innocents Abroad* praised Twain for offering an

<sup>155</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 452.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 461.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 462.

<sup>158</sup> "If all the poetry and nonsense that have been discharged upon the fountains and the bland scenery of this region were collected in a book, it would make a most valuable volume to burn." Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 379.

<sup>159</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 290.

“unvarnished tale” that would appeal to many American farmers.<sup>160</sup> This unvarnished tale was novel in comparison to the works on the Orient put forward by East Coast Americans such as William Cowper Prime and Europeans like Alphonse de Lamartine. The satire of *Innocents Abroad* was seen as an example of a western or pioneer perspective. In his review of *Innocents Abroad*, Bret Harte wrote that Twain “has caught, with great appreciation and skill, that ungathered humor and extravagance which belong to pioneer communities.”<sup>161</sup> From this perspective Twain’s complaint that the pilgrims will write of Palestine “as it appeared to Thompson and Robinson and Grimes” can be seen in a new light.<sup>162</sup> Thomson, Robinson, and Prime were all examples of an educated East Coast elite that Twain’s pilgrims were trying to emulate. This emulation involved saying the neat, respectable and poetic thing about Palestine as opposed to what Twain saw as the truth.<sup>163</sup> This deference to the opinions of East Coast Americans was due in part to a feeling of intellectual inferiority. Twain and his pilgrims took with them, and quoted from the Bible, *Tent Life in the Holy Land*, and *The Land and the Book*, books that were widely available in church libraries at the time.<sup>164</sup> In contrast, Prime’s book, which includes excerpts from medieval texts by Hildebert of Lavardin, Robert the Monk, and Bernard of Cluny, reflects his higher level of education.<sup>165</sup> What comes out of Twain’s criticism is a sense that American Orientalism was influenced by social class. Portraying the Orient in a sentimental way signified membership in the upper classes, while Twain’s realist depiction signified his membership in the middle class. In writing *Innocents Abroad*, Twain tried to show the superiority of this realist, middle-class American perspective on the Orient.

<sup>160</sup> “Unsigned Review, *Nation*,” *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, Frederick Anderson ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> “Bret Harte: unsigned review, *Overland Monthly*,” *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, Frederick Anderson ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 35.

<sup>162</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 394.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 470.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 395.

<sup>165</sup> Prime, *Tent Life*, vi.

## Conclusion

Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* draws attention to the way changes within American society affected American depictions of the Orient. Twain's description of the Orient and the Arabs in *Innocents Abroad* reflects his position as a member of the growing western American middle class. The sense of conflict between Twain's perspective and that of previous East Coast travelers is most clearly seen in Twain's criticism of the sentimental style of these East Coast writers and his support for realist descriptions of the Orient. Twain believed that these realist descriptions, in so far as they recognized Arab poverty and punctured the myth of Arab violence, provided Americans with a better basis for action in the Orient. However, Twain does not offer a more positive perspective on either the Arabs or Islam. His concentration on the deprivation of the Arabs and the role of both the Ottoman Empire and Islam in maintaining this state builds from earlier American ideas of the despotic nature of Islam and the Ottoman sultan. Despite Twain's efforts to challenge American myths surrounding the Orient, he reinforces the negative discourse on Islam and the Arabs.

## Conclusions

“Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the *curse* of the Deity beautify a land? Palestine is no more of this workday world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition - it is dreamland.”<sup>166</sup> With these words Mark Twain closed his pilgrimage to Palestine, and in them can be seen the complex attitude of nineteenth-century Americans toward the Orient. For many nineteenth-century Americans, Palestine was a dreamland, a region of the world to be visited through the Bible and travel literature. The intense spiritual connection felt between Americans and the Holy Land, the idea of Palestine, would lead them to the region first as missionaries and then as tourists. Yet, to Americans, such as Twain, coming to Palestine from the western American frontier, Palestine did not compare in beauty, size, or material progress to their homeland. This comparison reflects the influence of materialism on the new wave of middle-class American travelers of which Twain was a member. The experience of Twain and his pilgrims in the Orient was also influenced by social class. Twain’s fellow pilgrims quoted sentimental authors such as William Cowper Prime because they wanted to be identified with the educated East Coast elite that Prime represented. Twain’s realist style was a counter-discourse to the sentimental writings of the East Coast, and an assertion of the superiority of American middle class views.

Twain believed that his realist style offered a clearer picture of Palestine to the American people, but clarity is perhaps the one thing that is lacking in his views on Islam and the Arab people. At certain points in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain writes on the ways Islam inures the Arab people to a life of poverty under an oppressive Ottoman government, while at other times, he expresses a degree of tolerance toward Muslim beliefs. Similarly, in his description of the Arabs,

<sup>166</sup> Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 474.

Twain at times advances the idea that Arab poverty is due to the Ottoman Empire, while at other times he suggests that Arabs consent to their degraded state. This ambivalence toward the Arabs and Islam is a continuation of earlier nineteenth-century American opinions of the Orient. In other words, Americans up to and including Twain could indulge in the fantasy of the *Thousand and One Nights* while still denouncing Islam and the Ottoman Empire as despotic systems antithetical to republican values.

Reading *Innocents Abroad* provides insights into the development of an American form of Orientalism. The United States was not a Great Power in the Orient during the nineteenth century, but its spiritual, commercial, and touristic ties with the Orient helped create a complex web of ideas and symbols associated with the East. Twain knew the powerful role travelers played in the shaping of American views of foreign lands. Travelers had the power to separate fact from fiction, but as Twain observes, they often perpetuated misconceptions and mistruths about foreign lands in their attempts to impress family and friends back home. Twain himself wanted to impress others with accounts of his travels. As a newspaper correspondent, Twain reported on those aspects of Arab society and the Ottoman Empire that he believed would sell newspapers and later books.

Scholars such as Michael Meyer and Richard Fleck have written that Twain's focus on degradation and poverty in the Ottoman Empire was due to his concern for human welfare and dignity regardless of race or nationality.<sup>167</sup> Despite Twain's concerns, his negativism creates the impression that the Arabs are helpless and backward, in need of Western help or even military intervention to improve their lives. Twain's suggestion that Islam played a role in Arab poverty added another argument to the body of thought against Islam that had been developing in America since the founding of the colonies.

<sup>167</sup> Meyer, introduction to *Innocents Abroad*, xxviii.

As one of the most read works of travel in the United States, and Twain's most popular work during his time, *Innocents Abroad* played a role in shaping the perspectives on the East of many common Americans, whom Twain's reviewers believed would appreciate the book for its matter-of-fact style and length. In *Innocents Abroad* the reader can recognize the influence of social class and materialism on Twain, his pilgrims, and their experience of the Holy Land, despite Twain's claim to write in a realistic unbiased style. These forces continue to exert an influence on American encounters with the Middle East, despite the claims to realism and objectivity made by Twain's successors in the field of journalism. Study of *Innocents Abroad* not only encourages thought on American perspectives of the Orient during the late nineteenth century, but it can also stimulate thought on the factors shaping American attitudes toward the modern Middle East and what Americans may need to learn or even unlearn about it.

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