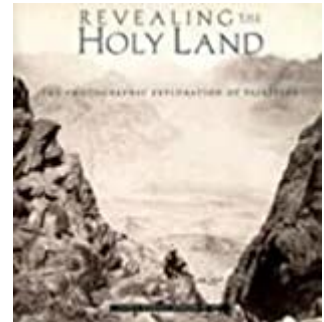


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kathleen Stewart Howe, ed. *Revealing the Holy Land: The Photographic Exploration of Palestine*. Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1997. 144 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89951-095-8; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89951-094-1.



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This volume is the second in a series of six which comprise the catalogues for six planned exhibitions of nineteenth-century photographs. While the focus of the exhibitions is on the art and technology of nineteenth-century photography, this volume will be of particular interest to readers of H-Judaic. The exhibit itself, "Revealing the Holy Land," took place at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art from January 29 until May 31, 1998, at the University of New Mexico Art Museum from October 13 until December 13, 1998, and at the St. Louis Art Museum from February 23 until May 23, 1999.

While the distinctions should not be too sharply drawn, it may be said that history focuses on the atypical, on those people and events that are noteworthy and who thus earn a place in the recorded annals of a people. By contrast, archaeology often focuses on the mundane, on the material evidence for the broader spectrum of human life, much of which goes unmentioned in historical texts. If history focuses on people and events of particular importance, archaeology, analogically speaking, deals with the world of light bulbs and ball point pens, of shoe laces and coffee cups. Text and monument, history and archaeology, complement each other, and photography gives us yet another perspective on the past. Seen selectively through the eye of one individual, a picture freezes in time and space a subject of particular importance to the

photographer. In this volume, as at the exhibit, a modern person can move back in time to be present, if only as an observer, at an earlier moment in history.

As a preface, the volume contains three short expressions of appreciation for the collegial efforts that produced both the exhibit and its catalogue and a foreword, written by Karen Sinsheimer, Curator of Photography at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Following this informative prolegomena, a brief essay by Nitza Rosovsky sets the exhibit in its historical context. Describing both the perceptions and the realities of nineteenth-century Palestine, she notes that, in the decades following the Industrial Revolution, popular attitudes toward religion included "a yearning to return to a simple belief in God ... accompanied by the desire to re-examine the scene of biblical events." Travel and economic conditions allowed many missionaries and clerics, soldiers and diplomats, adventurers, writers, painters, and photographers to come to Palestine. Her discussion of their role both in changing and documenting the landscape of nineteenth-century Palestine is most interesting reading.

A major essay by Kathleen Stewart Howe, the Curator of Prints and Photographs at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, introduces the plates (which comprise more than half of this volume). Largely descriptive of the expeditions and surveys which brought photogra-

phers to Palestine, Howe provides her readers valuable information about the technology of nineteenth-century photography as well as the role of such organizations as the Royal Engineers and the Palestine Exploration Fund, which were closely allied in their activities. Most important, however, is Howe's thesis, more fully developed elsewhere, that "photographing the land is never a neutral undertaking." She suggests that in these photographs the discerning viewer can see political and cultural realities, in particular the "imperial, cultural, and intellectual assumptions that England made about Palestine in the nineteenth century." Readers of H-Judaic unfamiliar with her work will find these pages thought provoking.

Most of the photographs in the exhibition come from the collection of Michael and Jane Wilson. The great majority of them were taken by Sergeant James McDonald (1822-1885) of the Royal Engineers between 1864 and 1868. Although a few minor errors mar this volume (the picture of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on p. 53 is reversed and a note on p. 41 directs the reader to a nonexistent p. 151) it is a pleasure to peruse and illustrates well the British attitudes that Howe describes.

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