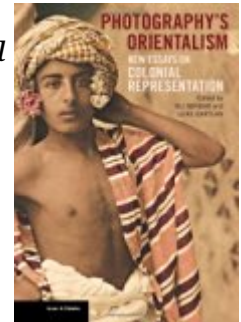


Ali Behdad, Luke Gartlan, eds.. *Photography's Orientalisms: New Essays on Colonial Representation*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013. vii + 215 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-60606-151-0.



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The 1978 publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* left an indelible mark on scholarship on the Middle East. In the decades since, Said's critical analysis of the exoticization of the East and its production through European visual and textual media has informed studies of photography in the Middle East, India, and North Africa and developed into the dominant framework through which such material is studied. Scholars such as Malek Alloula and Ali Behdad have relied on the Saidian model to construct a history of photography focused on the continuation of established Orientalist visual idioms inherited from painting and the repressive function of the European lens in the East. In recent years, however, scholars such as Zeynep Çelik, Christopher Pinney, and Mary Roberts have sought to complicate this model. By looking more closely at local uses and reception of photography, their work illustrates how non-Europeans used the medium as a means of self-representation, often explicitly in order to counter European-constructed stereotypes.

It is within the context of such expansions and divergences within the field of the history of photography that *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, a volume of eleven essays edited by Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, emerges. Building upon prior scholarship, the book is not intended as an introductory reader on Orientalism or photography from the Middle East, India, and North Africa; rather than endeavoring to provide a definition of the "Orientalist photograph," the volume instead provides an impression of its salient features over the course of the essays. This is in part due to the book's development out of a Getty Research Institute symposium that focused on the institution's Pierre de Gigord collection of Ottoman and Turkish photography and Ken and Jenny Jacobson Orientalist photography collection, which constituted the archival context of many of the essays. *Photography's Orientalism* presents a broad impression of the development of the field of the history of photography from the region and, by gathering together the leading and, at times, divisive schol-

arship that defines the field today, also serves as a platform from which new research and analytical frameworks may emerge.

The reader is introduced to the early foundations of the field through a series of essays rooted in the Saidian framework of interpretation. Literature scholar Ali Behdad presents a series of short reflections on the “Orientalist photograph,” arguing for nineteenth-century photography’s inability to escape Orientalism, which he defines as “a network of aesthetic, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries” and that generate an exotic portrayal of the region (pp. 12-13). Luke Gartlan, a historian of photography, shifts the discussion from Europeans’ fashioning *of* the Orient to Europeans’ self-fashioning *through* the Orient in his study of private travel photographs taken by Austrian bohemians in 1875-76. Gartlan demonstrates how these European male photographers, empowered by their position of colonial privilege, acted out their homosocial bonds and homoerotic fantasies in front of the camera lens while simultaneously obscuring and suppressing Egypt as the setting of their photographs. Moving beyond the confines of the nineteenth century, John Tagg analyzes the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 2007 exhibition “Impressed by Light: British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860” and underscores the continued presence of colonial prejudice by critiquing the exhibition’s strong nationalistic overtones and the exclusion of British colonial subjects’ voices.

Standing in productive dialogue with such postcolonial readings, a number of essays in *Photography’s Orientalism* break from the emphasis on European hegemony and Oriental passivity. Christopher Pinney delves into the subject of medium specificity to question photography’s continuity or rupture with prior artistic modes. By exploring examples of contingency and indexicality in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian photography, Pinney presents the case that photogra-

phy is not merely a receptacle for political ideologies but has a positive productive capability such as developing a “photographic citizenry” (a term borrowed from scholar Ariella Azoulay) through collective visibility, which allows photography to also serve as a site of resistance to Orientalism. This is later exemplified in Hannah Feldman’s chapter, where she traces the replacement of sexualized fantasies of the East with images of war and destruction during the Algerian independence movement in 1950s France. Feldman highlights Algerians’ employment of photography to further their cause, turning the repressive Orientalist lens back on itself and giving visibility to the oppressed.

The book is an especially valuable resource for readers interested in the Ottoman context, as it offers three essays addressing instances of resistance to Orientalism under the Ottoman Empire. Mary Roberts analyzes sultan Abdülaziz’s (r. 1861-76) use of portrait photography to project an image of a powerful, modern empire in response to European racism. Outside of the courtly sphere, Nancy Micklewright presents several examples of the ways in which upper-class Turks and institutions used photography to fashion a modern image of themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Esra Akcan uses a series of nineteenth-century “panoramic city albums” of Istanbul to argue that by their nature as records of reality and through their activation of the viewer’s firsthand knowledge of the city, the albums resist the Orientalist tendency towards fantasized notions of the Eastern metropolis. In each essay the author draws a distinction between Ottoman and Orientalist photography, pointing to photographic practices that stand outside the exoticizing paradigm of the latter, but also the slippage that can occur between the two modes depending on context.

The remaining two essays pursue a study of photography from the region outside the context of Orientalism. Through a series of photographs

of the eighteenth incarnation of Bakula in the Tibetan Geluk Buddhist community, Rob Linrothe details how photography in the context of Buddhist cyclical time ceases to exist as a reminder of death, loss, and rupture but instead serves as a symbol of continuity, reincarnation, and devotion. Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's study of the technical and perspectival limits of photography in recording the monumental Pyramids of Giza recontextualizes photography from the Middle East in the environment of Victorian scientific progress and phenomenology. Both essays answer Mickelwright's earlier call for alternative histories and for further work in the commercial, technical, and social histories of photography from the Middle East, India, and North Africa that will expand the field beyond the framework of Orientalism.

Over the course of the essays that compose *Photography's Orientalism*, each author contributes to Behdad and Gartlan's stated aim for the book to address the field's lack of "in-depth cultural study" of photography from the region by focusing on the "intertextual and intervisual relationship between photographic, literary, and historical representations of the Middle East" (p. 2). Taken as a whole, however, and with the exception of a few quotations from members of the Ottoman ruling elite, the essays are imbalanced in their overall reliance on contemporaneous European textual sources. Texts by non-European photographers and commentators outside of the court that record their reactions to and uses of photography are completely absent. In addition, while prior European artistic traditions, including painting, are discussed, there is no consideration of local art traditions and the role that these may have played in the formation of indigenous photographs. Such absences are not unique to *Photography's Orientalism* and reflect enduring gaps within the field. These lacunae point to new directions that future scholarship may take to give clarity to local perceptions of the medium and its designated social role. In this way, *Photography's Orientalism* is not only an important overview of current

means for interpreting such photographs but also gestures towards possible future frameworks that might help to create a fuller knowledge of the history of photography in the Middle East, India, and North Africa.

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