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Egypt has long been regarded as a crossroads. A bridge between Africa and Asia, it has also, through the agency of the Nile, connected the Mediterranean to desert regions and sub-Saharan Africa. It has been close enough to Europe to inspire fascination as the centre of a great ancient civilisation, as a location of early Christianity, and as a notable region of Islamic culture and power. Consequently, Egypt attracted the interest of Napoleon and of his *savants*. The British saw it as a major route to India where their interests could be threatened in alarming ways. This became even more obvious after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the British were quick to establish their informal imperial power. Thereafter, and particularly after 1882, Egypt became a unique phenomenon within the British Empire. Neither colony nor protectorate (until the British formalised the latter status in 1914), it was nonetheless one of the most celebrated instances of British power. Although its British ruler had the apparently lowly title of consul-general, he – particularly in the guise of Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer (1883–1907) – was nonetheless one of the major proconsuls of the high noon of empire.

As Diane Robinson-Dunn demonstrates in this book, it was also a major location for British anti-slavery activity. The British had been grappling for some decades with the tensions between the humanitarian concerns of the anti-slavery movement and their diplomatic and power objectives. Slavery had been abolished in India in 1843, by a ruling company that was under evangelical influence. Later, pressed on by the publications of David Livingstone and the agitations of his followers, the British had conducted an assault on the Omani–Swahili trade of the East African coast, partly through the operations of an anti-slavery naval squadron, partly through a series of treaties culminating in that of 1873 with the Sultan Barghash. But that dealt only with the slave trade and the British recognised that slavery was so woven into the social and economic fabric of Zanzibar and its dependencies that it was another two decades before they forced the abolition of the institution.

Egypt seemed to be an even more complex case. Still theoretically a dependency of the Ottoman Empire, it also had imperial ambitions of its own, not only in the Sudan, but also, on the eve of the partition of Africa, on the North-East African coast. It was also one of the most cosmopolitan societies of the entire Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds. But slavery in Egypt was mainly domestic rather than (as in Zanzibar) plantation. Even Cromer accepted that domestic slavery was a very different condition from that on plantations. Yet from a treaty of 1877, the British set about dealing with what they saw as the objectionable aspects of Egyptian slavery. The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and various missionary interests combined in a campaign which the English saw as one of the principal benefits of their 'veiled protectorate'.

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But, as Robinson-Dunn penetratingly reveals, these bare facts offer merely a route into much more complex analyses. Bound up in this campaign were questions of identity, cultural relativism, race, gender and class. The protagonists of the anti-slavery agitation were almost inevitably unable to escape from the mores and perceptions of the period. Since a high proportion of Egyptian slaves were women, questions of their manumission became extensively connected with both conservative and liberal discourses of femininity in Britain. Moreover, the relationships between Christianity and Islam were characterised by sets of highly pluralistic commentaries that were expressed in a variety of shades of hostility and sympathy. And within Britain itself Islam had its adherents, its converts, and its intellectual and religious protagonists. The anti-slavery crusade unveils much about the society that generated it, as well as about the society against which it was directed.

Of course *othering* is seldom merely a bilateral matter. Responses to the other are invariably conditioned by perceptions of and relationships with other others. By the later nineteenth century, some British were identifying Muslims as a valuable counterpoise to a growing class of educated and nationalist Hindus in India. A developing interest in a conservative romanticism was moving towards anxieties to preserve traditional systems and hence to the system that what would come to be known as 'indirect rule'. Connections with Egypt and the *reputation* of Islam were closely bound up with both of these developments.

Today's political, popular and media perceptions of Islam and of Muslims, attitudes invoked in contemporary conflict and war, reveal that aspects of the issues analysed in this book remain pertinent in the modern world. Egypt is still pivotal within the Middle East, evidenced by its role within the negotiations of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. All of this makes this book timely and relevant. Robinson-Dunn's acute dissection of the wider aspects of the anti-slavery campaign are informed by her considerable knowledge of Egypt, of Arabic and of Islam. This is a striking addition to an *interactive* imperial historiography.

John M. MacKenzie