



### **British Encounters with Syrian-Mesopotamian Overland Routes to India, 1751-1795**

Rethinking Enlightenment Improvement

*By Mohammad Sakhnini*

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This book argues that eighteenth-century British travel writings about the Arabian Overland Routes to India offered fascinating anecdotes of encounters that allow us to rethink Enlightenment understanding of the meaning of improvement. Travelling among and writing about the inhabitants, government, culture, religion and ruins of Syria and Mesopotamia offered Britons opportunities to pose themselves in their narratives as men of improvement abroad. To that end, travelling appeared in their books as serious attempt to improve their readers' knowledge about a region that many in Britain saw as decayed, barbaric and primitive. But the various encounters British travellers experienced in the region allowed them to negotiate the impact of excessive materialism on the traditions, morality, religion and landscape of eighteenth-century Britain. At the heart of this book's understanding of Enlightenment writings about the Levant is the idea that a journey in a region which many considered as a theatre for the arts, sciences and military conquests in the past and decay in the present represents a fraught relationship modern Europeans had with the past, present and future.

#### **Key selling points**

- This book rethinks our understanding of the history of British and European encounters with the Middle East.
- It shows how Enlightenment debates about improvement shaped and also were reshaped by eighteenth-century British travel books about the Middle East.
- It demonstrates how British encounters with Arabs and Muslims in barren deserts expose the fragility of the culture-nature divide drawn up in many Enlightenment celebrations of European progress.
- It reveals the deeply fraught relationship between the Enlightenment and time, as evidenced in British descriptions of Syrian and Mesopotamian ruins.

#### **Contents**

Acknowledgment; Introduction; Chapter One Improvement of Knowledge: John Carmichael's A Journey From Aleppo to Busserah, Over the Desert (1772); Chapter Two Polite Englishman in the East: Edward Ives's Journey from Persia to England (1773); Chapter Three Commerce, Virtue and Improvement: Abraham Parsons's Travel in Asia and Africa (1808); Chapter Four Henry Abbott: A Cosmopolitan in Cities and Deserts; Chapter Five Eyles Irwin's Travels: The Politics of Adventure in the Levant; Chapter Six Political and Moral Improvement: Donald Campbell, A Journey Overland to India Partly by A Route Never Gone Before by Any European (1795); Conclusion; Unpublished Manuscripts; Reference List; Index

#### **About the Author(s) / Editor(s)**

Mohammad Sakhnini is a senior lecturer in English studies at Khalifa University of Science and Technology, UAE.

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