

The Memory of Architecture in Edith Wharton's Travel Writings

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Chapter 5 A Motor-Flight through North Africa

The miracle of Morocco

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5 A Motor-Flight through North Africa

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Introduction

Edith Wharton traveled in North Africa repeatedly. She visited the towns of Algiers and Tunis in 1888 while on a Mediterranean cruise on the yacht *Vanadis*. In 1914, she made a short trip to Algeria and Tunisia and embarked on a three-week tour of Morocco in 1917. Her Aegean cruise on the yacht *Osprey* took her to Egypt for a couple of days in 1926.

Wharton's literary representations of North Africa are few. North Africa appears in two of her short stories as a setting and only indirectly elsewhere. Her (1919) "The Seed of the Faith" recounts the story of two American missionaries in Morocco who provoke the wrath of a Moslem crowd that kills one of them and disorients the other (Wharton 2001a, 400). "A Bottle of Perrier" (1926) explores the circumstances of a murder in the North African desert. The British archeologist, Henry Almodham, lived in an abandoned building in the desert, half Christian fortress, half Arab palace. His death was inflicted by his half-English half-North African manservant, not by the local Arabs (Wharton 2001b, 470), his young American friend Medford slowly finds out.¹

Viewed chronologically, Wharton's (2004) first travel writing with sections about North Africa is her *The Cruise of the Vanadis*. The typescript of her account about the 1888 cruise was found by Claudine Lesage at the public library of Hyères in the late 1980s, so the book was published posthumously. Its first sections describe Wharton's visit to Algeria and Tunisia and they allow a glimpse into her view of the Orient as a young married woman. Its companion piece, Wharton's ([1920] 1996) last published travel writing *In Morocco* recounts her wartime trip to the French Protectorate of Morocco. It was the first travel book about Morocco in English written before the country was opened for tourists after World War I. Wharton's aim in this volume was to explore and visually record (Wharton 1996, xi) exotic Moroccan ways of life mainly untouched by European influence. This isolated position is the reason for

Wharton's main interest: the presence of the past, of a Medieval past, that she suspects is soon to be lost through modernization. At the same time, her account is to draw the very tourists who embody Europeanization into the country with her alluring book on Moroccan art, architecture, and history. Her account of Moroccan harems forms a section of the travelog, and she also adds chapters on Lyautey's work in the country, Moroccan architecture, and history.

Scholarship usually prioritizes Wharton's fiction about North Africa over her nonfiction. As Margaret Toth (2016) succinctly put it: "the unstable and even inconsistent views in Wharton's nonfiction about North Africa found clearer and arguably more progressive expression in the fiction she would compose in the next decade" (227). Approached from this perspective, *In Morocco* often figures in the introductory remarks of articles that focus on the analysis of short stories (Sensibar 1993, 242; Rich 2004, 59; Jabbur 2010, 8) or other related texts (Toth 2016, 235). This hierarchical division of fiction and nonfiction is evened out when the topic and means of travel are discussed in Wharton's fiction and *In Morocco*. From the perspective of travel by motor, modern technology distinguishes enlightened travel from tasteless tourism (Bentley 2005, 239). Somewhat ambiguously, the modern mode of travel by car provides access to profound impressions of places, an experience superficial tourism cannot attain (Totten 2013, 142; 2016, 97).

When *In Morocco* is studied by itself, both Wharton's aesthetic vision and endorsement of French colonial practices are routinely highlighted. Sarah Bird Wright in 1997 saw Wharton's connoisseurship in full power in the painterly descriptions of *In Morocco* (Wright 1997, 104) adding that restorative colonial rule saves Moroccan culture from obliteration (108), Gary Totten (2022) sees the escapist tendency compromised in the volume (131). More critically, Judith Sensibar (1993) read the book as a "subtler form of propaganda" (242) compared to Wharton's other outright propaganda pieces like *Fighting France* and *The Book of the Homeless*.² The same attitude has also been discussed as a "positive public relations report" with "clear political agenda" of French colonial administration (Rich 1999, 8) that represents a "nationalistic Francophile attitude to North Africa" (Lee 2008, 511). In the wake of Said's popular postcolonial ideas, the critique of Orientalist stereotypes and attitudes of the text has come to the fore in the secondary literature. Wegener (2000) discusses Wharton's attitude to US colonialism prompted by her letter to Sara Norton which "discloses an imperial sensibility that fundamentally shaped her social and political views" (784), Adam Jabbur (2010) compares Wharton's aestheticizing to the Orientalist practice of collecting exotic artifacts while "bemoaning that art dies in museums" (7), replete

with misreadings of Muslim habits (Obeidat and al-Shalabi 2018, 43). Lucas Tromley (2010, 248) discusses the disillusioning absence of feminine sympathy to Oriental women in Wharton's report and David Hunter (2010) tracks the emerging Western discourse of Moroccan tourism in it (73–4). Nancy Bentley's (2005) elaborate reading shows how Wharton aestheticizes French Orientalism and Lyautey's colonial rule as a cultured and enlightened counterpoint to an aesthetically destructive colonialism and tourism (239). Hermione Lee (2008) adds that Wharton's fascination with the past "was also bound up with her patriotic commitment to France" (442): France held Algeria since 1830, Tunisia since 1881, and Morocco since 1912. Wharton's book about her 1917 trip to Morocco would rely on and extend all these interests.

This chapter expands upon combined aesthetic and postcolonial readings of *In Morocco* and contextualizes the book as a travel text written at the time of war. When the book is read in comparison with Wharton's earlier travel writings rather than the short fiction on North Africa, its colonial stereotyping can be interpreted as part of Wharton's architectural vision of travel and can even be linked to her architectural rhetoric of the Great War in her war reports. On the one hand, Wharton's architectural vision in her travel writings before *In Morocco* developed a method of evoking visual pleasure that William Decker (2009) called the "visual consumption of beauty" (132), and which Gary Totten (2013) refers to as "a spiritual and moral force of art" in Wharton (141–2, cf. Singley 1995, 26). On the other hand, in Wharton's war reports *Fighting France* (1915), moments of visual beauty are repeatedly thwarted by the threat of invisible danger to civilized forms of beauty (88). Two years later, colonial Morocco features many instances of the visual consumption of beauty and no war scenes – yet I would like to show that *In Morocco* is connected to Wharton's rhetoric of war in that her descriptions of space are evocative of descriptions of war scenes: both beautiful and dangerous, even frightening. Like the war setting, the colonial setting triggers an undercurrent of anxiety and threatens the observer's ability to appreciate beauty. The theme of beauty and anxiety is explored in three steps: the chapter explores the antecedents and influences at work in the production, then overviews the scenes of Oriental beauty and anxiety in the reports, and arrives at a comparative reading of elevating moments of observing architecture. In the war context, scenes of beauty take the form of a magic "unreality" in Morocco that lurks behind the pages of the travel book as a threat.

Composition, publication, contemporary reception

Wharton's first trip to North Africa by sea in 1888 is discussed in *The Cruise of the Vanadis*. The first chapter titled "Africa" describes her visits

to the towns of Algiers and Tunis. Wharton (2004) admires the narrow and lively streets of the Arab side of Algiers, and the “Oriental” arcaded café at Mustapha Supérieur (38–9). She is most taken by the memorable sight of the colorful and vivid bazaars in Tunis (40). The scene is “Oriental” and implicitly uncivilized, because when the company explores the town further and gets to the French quarter “the step through the Bab-el-Bahr to the Boulevard de la Marine, brought us back to civilization as abruptly as we had left it” (41). There is an easy transition between the colorful, historic, and picturesque Arab side of the scenes and the more ordered new French quarters.³

In 1914 Wharton visited Algeria and Tunisia again, but this time she was driven around in a hired car by her chauffeur Thomas Cook in the company of her secretary Anna Bahlmann and her friends Percy Lubbock and Gaillard Lapsley. Her trip was richly documented by letters to friends but she never wrote the travel book about it that James suggested should be titled *From the Duvet to the Desert* (Lee 2008, 444). She was fascinated by the presence of a past “in this magic land” (Wharton 1989a, 315) that has remained intact despite European influence in the coastal regions. She was also taken by the colors, the scenery, the desert, the oases, the ruins, the mountains, the lack of infrastructure (316). She described Algiers positively “the beauty & nobility of the native types makes the whole scene poetic” (Wharton 1989b, 318). Yet Algeria turned out to be also terrifying, as at her Timgad hotel Wharton’s room was broken into and the thief woke her from her sleep as he was searching for valuables around her bed and she fled her room shrieking: “(i)t was a really horrid moment—but I lost nothing but my voice, which was reduced for several days to a faint squeak! I would rather have given him my cheque book than gone through that minute when I touched him ... Brrr!” (1989b, 319).

Wharton traveled to Morocco between September 15 and October 25, 1917, as a guest of general Hubert Lyautey. She was invited by the French government to visit the annual fair in Rabat with other prominent guests, including her companion, Walter Berry. Her host was marshal Hubert Lyautey, the military Resident-General of France in the French Protectorate of Morocco. Lyautey was a soldier and colonial administrator who had served in Algeria, Indochina, and Madagascar before securing Morocco for French colonial influence. He also took a swift unsuccessful turn as War Minister just before Wharton’s visit (*New York Times* March 15, 1917). Lyautey’s plan to invigorate Moroccan economic life at the end of World War I included a strategy to boost tourism based on the example of Egypt (Hunter 2010, 62), and he initiated annual fairs as part of his strategy.⁴ Wharton’s skill at rendering her impressions for an English-speaking audience was an asset for Lyautey, who made sure she enjoyed her visit and received many impressions to write about. Wharton stayed at

hotels and colonial residences, traveled around in a military motor with a military driver and a military aide to places of interest: ruins, tombs, historic towns, monuments, palaces, markets, ceremonies; she was invited to social events at private houses and French state institutions and was even entertained at the sultan's harem.

Wharton had prepared for her trip by extensive reading as usual. Although she complained about the limited range of available sources, more precisely “next to no books” (Wharton 1989c, 398) in a letter to Bernard Berenson, her reference list holds 22 items, 19 in French. This list contains Pierre Loti’s (1890) *Au Maroc*, Charles de Foucauld’s (1888) *Reconnaissance au Maroc*, Le Marquis de Segonzac’s (1903) *Voyages au*

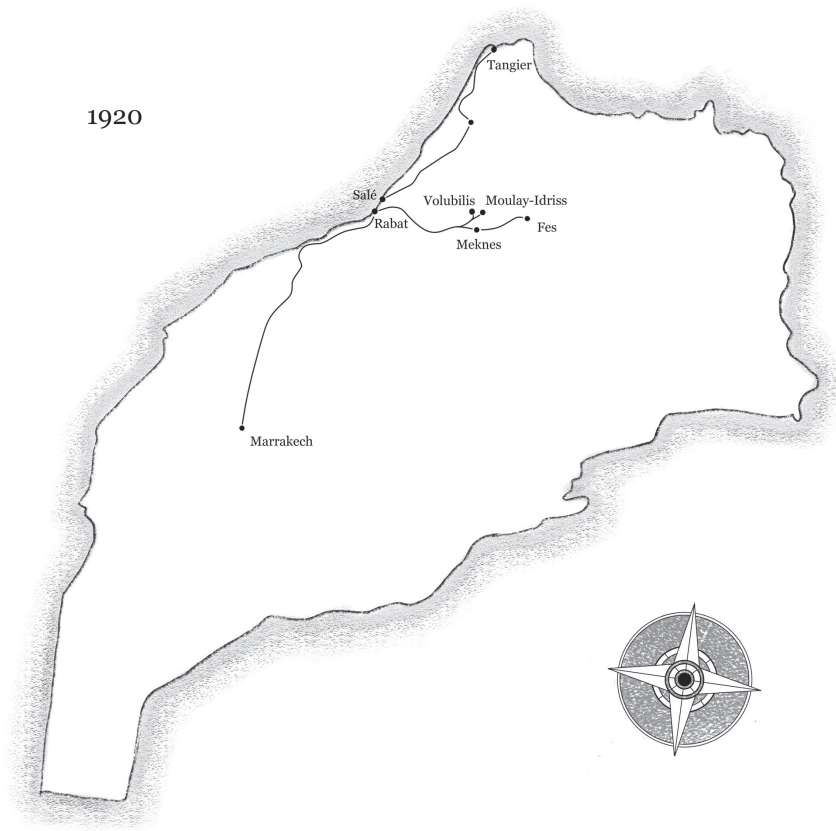


Figure 5.1 The map of Wharton’s North-African trips in *In Morocco* (1920).
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Maroc, 1899–1901, André Chevrillion's (1906) *Un Crépuscle d'Islam. Maroc*, and Augustin Bernard's (1913) *Le Maroc*, among others. Hermione Lee (2008) has shown that Wharton copied entire passages from Bernard's history (511), and Robert Hunter (2010) also identified Bernard's vision of Moroccan history as a recurrent cycle of struggle and despotism in her text. Moreover, Hunter has shown her reliance on Chevrillion's ideas of Morocco "as an unchanging civilization of the Middle Ages [...] rapidly falling into ruin," (Hunter 73–4) and demonstrated Wharton's reliance on Chevrillion's presentations of stunning landscape, beautiful architecture, colorful people, Arabian Night parallels (Hunter 74). Wharton's reference list does not include André Gide's *L'Immoraliste* (1902), but she corresponded with Gide on her travel plans and read his book, and she was especially grateful for his "beautiful evocation of the desert that I have loved so much" (Wharton 1989d, 397). Stacey Holden (2022) shows the extent to which Wharton was "taken by Gide's evocation of the desert" (146) in *In Morocco*, although according to Holden she never saw the desert she described. Wharton's list also includes the title of the periodical *France-Maroc* without further specification; the reason for including only the title of the journal is that many of her illustrations originate from this periodical. This illustrated monthly served as the mouthpiece of Lyautey's colonial administration of the Protectorate between 1907 and 1925. Wharton herself published a praising article in it about Mme Lyautey's charity work in Morocco in the fall of 1918 titled "Les Oeuvres de Mme Lyautey au Maroc/Madame Lyautey's Charitable Works in Morocco" (Wharton [1918] 1998, 31), in a double issue on "Maroc et Tourism/Morocco and Tourism." Her article is preceded by Walter Berry's "Impressions d'un Américain au Maroc" (Wegener 1998, 12).⁵ Through her research, Wharton became immersed in the French-generated knowledge of "Morocco as an otherworldly place" (Hunter 2010, 73), and when she compiled information from her sources and matched her experience of colonial Morocco to her sources, she was taking part in the discursive production of a Morocco of Oriental mysteries.

Another more immediate context of Wharton's text is the Great War. As Charlotte Rich (1999) put it "Wharton's great respect and concern for French civilization, as threatened by World War I at the time of her visit, informed her perspective on that country's presence in North Africa" (Rich 1999, 11). Similarly, Hunter (2010) points out that at the beginning of the war, "Wharton had developed strong anti-German sentiments [...] and it was from concern for France that she defended and justified France's occupation and control of Morocco" (74). It is important to point out that Wharton's concern for French civilization is directly linked to the contemporary media coverage of the war conflict. The great media outrage of 1914 was the shelling of Reims cathedral. The German side

was portrayed by Allied media accounts as barbarian and vandalizing, an approach that justified counterattack in the name of continuing civilization. Wharton relied heavily on cathedral imagery of French civilization in her war reports in *Fighting France* (1915), a sign of her firm position in favor of France in the war crime, although she never referred to the issue directly. Thus, her concern for the continuity provided by French civilization is an idea that is rooted in the language of the early war reports in the media, which was taken up by intellectual discussions as well (Gaetgens 2018, 98).

Wharton composed the articles of *In Morocco* in 1918 and 1919. She published four of them from July to October 1919 in *Scribner's Magazine*. "Harems and Ceremonies" was published in the *Yale Review*, and she added her essays of Lyautey's work, Moroccan architecture, and Moroccan history to the book text. The book version came out in 1920, one month before *The Age of Innocence*. The text of the articles is practically the same as the book text except for the reduction of some inner sections in the book.⁶ The photo illustrations have been redistributed in the book version to span the whole of the volume but have not been changed otherwise.⁷

Wharton's ([1920] 1996) book on Morocco was read by contemporary reviewers as an exercise in the consumption of Oriental beauty but also as a timely political commentary on the colonial situation in Morocco. First, the unnamed reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* regards the book as an exercise in the production of "impressions" by "the mind's eye" (Tuttleton et al., 299) of "the seeing eye" (300). Morocco is a terrain where Wharton ([1920] 1996) can practice her sensitivity and mastery of presentation to produce a "broad suggestiveness" (299). The fact that it is the Orient where this experience happens is sidelined, as Wharton's inferences are important "the most interesting reading in her book consists of her own comments and inferences – suggested [...] by the *thousand and one things* that are to be seen by anyone with a *seeing eye*" (300, emphases mine). In other words, it is not the Arabian Nights setting that brings magic to the volume but the way Wharton looks at the setting. Another reviewer, Irita Van Doren in the *Nation*, focuses almost solely on the Arabian Nights themes of Wharton's account: fascinating pictures of towns, merry-making, languor, ceremonies, and Lyautey's benign French colonialism that are politely questioned with a reference to Joseph Caillaux's views on a more peaceful relation with Germany in the colonies (Tuttleton et al., 301). The critic Dorothy L. Mann also concentrates on the colonial and war contexts of the account but she accepts Wharton's interpretation of the situation fully and stages colonial rule as the embodiment of stability and normality (302–3). Beside the Orientalist Arabian Nights setting and themes, the war propaganda context forms an integral part of the Moroccan account for its reviewers.

Wharton's Moroccan Orient: history, dreams, women

In Morocco provides an introduction into the mysterious life of Morocco, an Oriental country that had been closed for tourism until 1924 and has thus preserved its connections with a Medieval past. This Oriental Morocco is colorful, gay, crowded, and exotic but also different from Oriental Algiers and Tunis, the Mediterranean ports. Morocco seems more remote and less colorful than Algeria and Tunisia; it is "Tunisia by moonlight" (Wharton ([1920] 1996), 16). Its oases are more varied, its life is more subdued, its women never leave their harems (51, 110). Part of Oriental life is a cyclic sense of time: a recurrent history with the rise and fall of rulers from Barbarian background who are unable to start a dynasty (128). Wharton is most concerned with this curious Oriental presence of the past in the country. Her descriptions are permeated by both the voice of the historian and the voice of the dreamer about the past. The historian is concerned with the presence of the past in Morocco and the possibility of losing these manifestations when the country becomes open to European economic and cultural influence. The scientific concern for the past is paired with references to the magical fictional world of Arabian Nights, a concern with the mystery of the past. The professional female author can switch between these two discourses seamlessly, her voice only fails her when she is to comment on life in Moroccan harems.

Facts and dreams of the Moroccan past

The Preface sets the tone for the concern with history. A visit to Morocco is likened to a visit by Crusaders contemporary with the Caliphate of Baghdad, as visitors today are to find a Medieval life the Crusaders must have seen as well (Wharton [1920] 1996, x). The general idea of a perpetuated past comes up at several instances of Wharton's travels. In Fez, wandering along the narrow streets of the old city, the spectator feels like she is walking into the past, becoming absorbed in it (28). The same experience is repeated in Marrakech where riding on mules in the city Wharton describes the queer feeling that "the mules carried us out of the bounds of time" (84) into a perpetually prolonged past. Wharton's metaphor about this is an overripe fruit that is soon to fall off (85), so she has worries as to how long this past can be perpetuated. The specific instance of the past being held out here is a medieval past that constitutes the present in 1920s Morocco.

This Medieval past is manifested in many forms. In architecture, for one, Medieval floor plans and decorative patterns were being produced at the time of the visit. Also, the social structure of the society seems out of contact with the present for the traveler; the way women are locked away

in harems cannot be changed into a Modernized version, and the way Jews are compelled to live under dire conditions in unwelcoming ghettos resembles conditions in Medieval France and Germany (114–5). Cities and roads look the way they must have looked in Medieval times. No wonder Wharton ([1920] 1996) the traveler identifies with the position of Medieval travelers, especially Crusaders (18), and within that, Venetians (68).

The perpetually prolonged past represents a standing danger for the Modern traveler, because where it is present, one can lose one's connection to Modern civilization at any time. Early in the book, Wharton ([1920] 1996) explains this borderline situation when she comments on their motor car being broken down. The company sits in the blazing African sun, waiting for some miracle to happen and save them, but there seems none in sight. Wharton admits a feeling of being lost; she would like to have a djinn's carpet to fly them to their destination (14). At another moment of a problem with the car (41), she feels the same and expects a miracle. In both cases, Wharton comments that they are lost to European civilization; throughout the trip, it is only their carefully planned itinerary that saves them from being immersed in this state of being lost in the Moroccan prolonged past like a Medieval traveler, (13) where "civilization vanishes as though it were a magic carpet rolled up by a Djinn" (14). Being immersed in the past, a constant possibility in Morocco, thus also stands for the constant menacing possibility of being lost in the past and losing contact with Modern civilization.

The discourse of tales and dreams from Arabian Nights accompanies the discourse of history because the availability of the Moroccan prolonged past is presented as a miracle. Wharton ([1920] 1996) uses textual markers to indicate the times when the dream world becomes visible for the European eye. The light of twilight hours evokes the dream world, in its golden haze at dawn or sunset miracles happen. As she puts this:

Dawn is the romantic hour in Africa. Dirt and dilapidation disappear under a pearly haze, and a breeze from the sea blows away the memory of fetid markets and sordid heaps of humanity. At that hour, the old Moroccan cities look like the ivory citadels in a Persian miniature, and the fat shopkeepers riding out to their vegetable gardens like princes sallying out to rescue captive maidens.

(Wharton [1920] 1996, 36–7)

This image is remarkable because of the golden light and because of what that light enhances and conceals. Elements of an unpleasant reality recede into the background while elements of a normally tacit romantic Arabian fairy tale background come to the fore together with artful elements of the scene. Wharton relies on this rhetoric of the golden light to indicate a change in the perspective/vantage point of the observer of art all along her journey from Salé (36) through Moulay Idriss (52) to Fez (93) and Marrakech (127).

The result of the experience in the golden light also brings about reflection on the relationship between reality and the world of dreams. As Wharton ([1920] 1996) reflects: "The light had the preternatural purity which gives a foretaste to a mirage: it was the light in which magic becomes real, and which helps to understand how, to people living in such an atmosphere, the boundary between fact and dream perpetually fluctuates" (38–9). Wharton sets out to explore this fluctuation of fact and dream in the Moroccan atmosphere.

Wharton represents the fluctuation of fact and dreams by interposing the discourse of history and the discourse of dreams within the description of the same experience. In these interpositions, it looks as if she could watch the magical Moroccan atmosphere as a professional outsider. She has no intention to get lost in the magical Moroccan past and uses the factual voice to control and criticize the effect of the magical one.

Moroccan harems

The interposed discourses of the past and dreams return in Wharton's accounts of harems as well. Wharton is allowed to visit four harems during her journey, and she gives an account of them in a special chapter titled Harems and ceremonies. In these accounts, she relies on the juxtaposition of the discourse of dreams and history first, to criticize the social performances of the people she meets.⁸ Yet, as she encounters the lack of social life in harems repeatedly, the discourse of facts becomes dominant, and her account becomes a detailed criticism of the social system that allows for the institution of the harem.

All four accounts begin with an impression of the mysterious isolated space the harem is situated in by not being able to describe it through customary means of assessing domestic architecture. Wharton always notes that access to a harem is no easy matter: low doors, archways, and intricate staircases lead one into the labyrinth of the Imperial harem or into the arcaded rooms of wives of rich magistrates. In the central interior space, the rooms are invariably equipped with the same furniture: sofas, draperies, cheap bric-a-brac from Europe, and a mounted double bed as compulsory ingredients. There is no care for beauty or personal style manifested here. The general impression is that of an airless prison or mine as difficult to leave as it is to enter. The space of the harem cannot be assessed through its relations to the house or the garden, as would be the usual way of assessing domestic space.

The inhabitants of the harems impress Wharton ([1920] 1996) as passive, inert and melancholy. In the Imperial harem, the Sultan's 12 teenage beauties flutter around as princesses from Arabian tales. Yet, their animation only enhances the shyness and silence of the plain Princess,

who is the Sultan's legitimate daughter. It is only the Sultan's mother who knows how to talk to strangers in the proper manner, transcending the limited small talk of the harem. The magistrate's assemblages of wives, daughters, daughters-in-law and concubines appear as fat, pale and amiable as cellar-grown flowers who know nothing of fresh air or freedom. Wharton is struck by the passive-looking women, the apathy of the young ones, their melancholy, and their vacant eyes. A slight variation appears in Marrakech: here the inhabitants come from Georgia (Asia) by way of Constantinople and know about the freedom of shopping, traveling, and Europeanized clothes; they regret their loss explicitly.

The experience of stagnant domesticity in the harem makes Wharton ([1920] 1996) more and more critical of its isolated life. In the Imperial harem, the animated chatter of the *houris* is in fact vacant. It consists of trivial dissimulations, childish cunning, and idle cruelties. Only the Sultan's mother can perform socially beyond these activities. She not only has the ability to talk about matters outside the scope of the harem, she also acts as an advisor to her son. However, after the exceptional encounter with the Empress Mother, the small talk of the harem is similar everywhere, with the themes of children, clothes, household duties, and compliments to exchange. Once these topics are exhausted, conversation lags. Another problem with chatting is interpretation – it is usually a male family member who is allowed to interpret, and this interpretation also censures in order not to disturb the life of the women in the harem. Wharton's tone remains polite, but she is frustrated by the lack of personal contacts and feels her “lips stiffening into the resigned smile of the harem” (187).

Wharton's third visit to a harem takes place in Fez, where she goes to a strict old style Fez harem chaperoned by the usual brother-in-law, Wharton ([1920] 1996) blurts out a list of criticisms of Moroccan domesticity. Her open-air occidental mind pities the “beings imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave service and incessant espionage” (193). She is also critical of the role sexuality plays here: sexual life is centrally important as the position of the double bed in the main room indicates. The colorless eventless life of the harem depends on the whims of one sedentary man, and the women's sexual relations to him. Despite this basic arrangement, wives and concubines in the harem are not the images of sexual seduction that the words “harem” and “concubine” invoke for the Occidental ear. Instead, all women in the harem wear the look of melancholy respectability.

Wharton clearly dislikes the form domestic life takes in the harem. She ([1920] 1996) points out that despite the local women's focus on domestic life, these women do not toil, nor spin, know little of cooking and needlework or of other household arts, they do not know how to heal and are ignorant about hygiene, too. One can say that as far as Wharton sees it,

their idea of domesticity is quite different from Wharton's late nineteenth-century idea of it, which would require all the above skills. Last but not least, the case of treating children is offered. Many petted Moroccan children are not educated properly; they are kept in unhealthy conditions and are initiated into sexuality very early (194). The sentimentalized admiration of Western authors of inert men and women's love of their children is to be reinterpreted, Wharton concludes, the relation is not admirable at all (194).

Wharton's dual discourse of history and mystery is modified in her representations of Moroccan harems. Her reports start out with girls from the Arabian Nights in labyrinthine interior spaces, yet the accounts end with descriptions of the present unrelated to dreams and the miraculous past. The inert, passive women provoke Wharton's direct criticism of Moroccan sex life in the harem, and, more importantly, that of Moroccan ideas of domesticity. There are no enchanting features to the harem: it is not a space of seductive sexuality, neither is it a place of sentimental parental love for children, but rather a pathetic prison for women with shallow uneventful lives whose destinies are determined by an unjust social system if it is looked at from the perspective of Occidental femininity. As a result, her account accommodates the male discourse of the Orient as inferior but is also "different" because her criticisms are formulated from the perspective of domesticity rather than sexuality. Her major concern is the lack of any form of social or cultural agency on the part of the women of the harem when seen from the perspective of Occidental femininity.

Wharton's architectural vision in her colonial war reports

Wharton's representation of exotic Oriental Moroccan scenes is foregrounded in the volume but in the background the Great War is going on. The Protectorate of Morocco constitutes one of the colonial home fronts of the Great War for France in which General Lyautey's policies of colonial administration play a pivotal "civilizational" role. This implicit concern with contemporary history forms an integral part of the volume, and it links the seemingly unrelated Chapter VI on "General Lyautey's work in Morocco" to the rest of the book. The architectural language of the volume connects it to Wharton's war reports in *Fighting France*, as we see destruction and military presence everywhere.

Although the volume's primary aim is to salvage a sense of an Oriental past in Morocco that is superior to Western vulgarity (Carr 2002, 82), there are also references to the contemporary war conflict and the ongoing war in it. Wharton and company travel by military motor on roads built by the military administration in a zone that has been closed to the public for years (Wharton 1989e, 400; 1989f, 402). The excavations at Volubilis

are on hold on account of the war, and Wharton converses with the Sultan's mother, the only Arab woman with a French sense of femininity that Wharton meets, about the war situation. However, it is the chapter on Lyautey that organically links the French war effort to the story of Morocco. The chapter informs us that the military conflict between France and Germany has been played out in Morocco twice, in 1912 and in 1914 and General Lyautey was instrumental both times in preserving the influence of France in the area. First, he led French troops against local forces attacking the sultan then during the war, he salvaged the protectorate and ensured it remained a useful and safe background.⁹

Wharton creates a parallel between the French military success at the Marne in the Great War and the French colonization of Morocco. The battle of the Marne meant a turning point in the history of the Great War, it stopped the initial quick German advance toward Paris. Its success was unlikely and it needed the personal heroism of French officers and troops, so it was generally referred to as "the miracle of the Marne" (Wharton [1920] 1996, 220) in the contemporary media. By analogy, Lyautey's success in Morocco is referred to as "the miracle of Morocco" (220) by Wharton to indicate its importance in saving the colony for France and the element of personal heroism involved in the enterprise. At the outbreak of the war Lyautey was ordered to withdraw from occupied internal Moroccan territories, keep his positions on the coast only, and send most of his troops back to the French war front with Germany. He obeyed and he also resisted the order: he sent the required troops back home but he did not abandon his positions inland. Instead, he ventured to keep them by the policy of business as usual rather than by a heavy-handed colonial presence and he also enlarged the territory by peaceful negotiations. Wharton compares Lyautey's decision not to withdraw in 1914 to Marshal Foch's decision to attack against all odds at the Marne at roughly the same time (215).

It will not seem an exaggeration to speak of General Lyautey's achievement during the first year of the war as the "Miracle of Morocco" if one considers the immense importance of doing what he did at the moment when he did it [...] it is only needful to reckon what Germany could have drawn in supplies and men from German North Africa, and what would have been the situation of France during the war with a powerful German colony in control of the western Mediterranean.

(Wharton [1920] 1996, 220)

The key difference between the Marne and Morocco is the kind of fighting performed. Lyautey's efforts at stabilizing the area result not from active fighting but are attributed to his peaceful methods of carrying on

everyday economic and cultural activities. In general, the peaceful life of the colony provided meat and wheat for France during the war and also prevented Germany's advance into West Africa. In particular, Lyautey's colonial policy of the smile (222) involves the work of specialists: roads and ports are built, commercial relations with France are enlarged, annual exhibitions of European products are organized (219). The lists at the end of the chapter indicate that between 1912 and 1918, three ports were modernized, about 2600 km of roads, 622 km of railways were built, commerce doubled, cultivated land grew exponentially, French jurisdiction was introduced, and 152 schools and 113 medical centers were established (222–5). Simultaneously, Wharton contends that Lyautey's administration respects "the traditions, habits and tastes of the people" (221) and the beauty of Arab architecture and decorative work (221). He assists the preservation of monuments and native folk-art industries, by allowing these a place at the annual exhibitions and encourages the rebirth of old Moroccan rites like the killing of the sheep, which Wharton was invited to visit. Carrying on "business as usual" represents everyday life from before the war economically and culturally and promotes the continuity of pre-war methods. Nancy Bentley (2005) has shown how Wharton performed an "aesthetic revisioning of the facts of empire" (238) in the book, and that "military occupation figures as aesthetic preservation" (239) for her in contrast to destructive colonialism, European bad taste, and their recreational manifestation, tourism. The war context underlies this aestheticization of empire. Wharton refers to Lyautey's preservation of continuity as the result of the French colonial influence in the region that is akin to the French war effort back in France in that it also maintains civilization. For Wharton, both French colonial influence and the French war effort represent miracles of a specifically French cultural perseverance and continuity at the time of war.

In Morocco the feat of French cultural perseverance is accomplished against the backdrop of an Oriental lack of care for change and renovation (22) and in the face of a German will for local influence. This means that for Wharton there are not only different kinds of Oriental settings but variations of Orientalism as well. The same way that Morocco is "Tunisia by moonlight" (16), a less colorful Orient of unknown Africa than the coastal regions, Lyautey's French colonial administration in Morocco is a better organized, cultured and art-loving form of colonialism (20) than either the heavy handed French colonial administration in Algeria (222) or the badly governed Spanish zone and the confused international administration of Tangiers (213, 218). Wharton's colonial oppositions are not based on a simple Orient versus Occident contrast. Instead, she is interested in transitions and variations in the context of the colonial theater of war. Lyautey's French colonizing effort is presented as one that

attempts to preserve traditional Moroccan culture rather than harsher forms of colonialism that destroy traditional local cultures elsewhere in Africa, also practiced by war enemies. For Wharton the representation of colonial practices is deeply influenced by the war context.

The book relies on the language of architecture familiar from Wharton's previous travel writings in presenting Lyautey's civilizational achievements in Morocco. Towns, buildings, houses are shown, approaches to towns are arranged in lavish scenes to reveal more about the culture that inhabits them, like a mysterious gateway "the architectural expression of the tortuous secret of the land" (Wharton [1920] 1996, 17). Another example of the presence of the past in Morocco is illustrated by the legacy of the 1000-year-old layout of the Arab house. The typical centralized layout is shown to form the basis of the arrangement of Medersas and harems as well (106–7). Similarly, a contrast of two cities serves the purpose of staging cultural differences. When the ruined Roman city, Volubilis, is compared to Moulay-Idriss, the Moslem sacred city, Volubilis is described as alive and partially restored while the streets of Moulay-Idriss are shown to be dead (45). Salé the white forms a visual and cultural opposition with Rabat the red. Salé the old Moslem town of pirates is described as dead, while the new French capital, Rabat is showcased as a town full of life (15–17).

This pairing even works for a historical comparison between Meknes and Versailles. The capital and palace complex, Meknes built by sultan Moulay-Ismaïl in Morocco in the seventeenth century, was as spacious and luxurious as Louis XIV's palaces in France built roughly at the same time and with the same symbolic function in mind. The Moroccan palace complex is now in ruins; the dynasty never started out, unlike the French version (58, 67). The reason for this was that in true Moroccan fashion, when the sultan died, the construction of his city stopped, and palaces started to crumble. In Wharton's mournful architectural language: "when the tyrant's heart stopped beating, at that very instant life ceased to circulate in the huge house he had built, and in all its members it became a carcass for his carcass" (74). So it is not only that the town and the palaces symbolize the sultan, the buildings themselves stand in for his body specifically. While the sultan is alive, the buildings grow and strive, and are alive as well. When he dies, the lifeless body of the sultan is likewise symbolized, this time by the instantaneous neglect of the buildings. Buildings in Meknes function as ghostly presences, carcasses of sultan Moulay-Ismaïl.

In Wharton's rendering, Roman Volubilis is nobler than the Moslem Moulay-Idriss and the new French Rabat more vigorous than old Arab Salé; so, too, Versailles naturally outdone the imperial Meknes. In other words, the architectural language communicates the dominance of the French Occidental tradition over the Moroccan Oriental one.

Wharton describes colonial Morocco in scenes of architecture and landscape similar to those of her war reports in *Fighting France* (1915). In *Fighting France*, two main attitudes are present: a pro-war propagandistic tone is mixed with a wearier outlook on war as a source of anxiety. On the one hand, the war effort is celebrated as the defense of civilization, and US readers are shown why the United States needs to join the conflict. Wharton's reports from behind the lines focus on ruined architecture rather than human suffering. The level of architectural and cultural devastation is appalling and cries out for intervention. On the other hand, the less propagandistic aspect of Wharton's war reports originates from a sense of anxiety or disorientation concerning the extent of wartime cultural destruction. Traveling around behind the lines, Wharton realizes that war destroys not only actual material structures, but also pervasively engulfs the peaceful scenes seemingly undisturbed by war. Wharton (1915) refers to this sense of anxiety in impressions of "unreality," for instance when watching a quiet field for the sign of the enemy (200). The general sense of loss connected to war in scenes of unreality is shown to be the most pervasive effect of the Great War in *Fighting France*. Similarly, *In Morocco* (Wharton [1920] 1996) presents scenes of anxiety which are connected to the threat of being immersed by a Medieval Oriental past (85), the Maghreb of the Middle Ages (18), and an unknown Africa beyond (3).

In Wharton's descriptions of war scenes and colonial life the notion of "unreality" gains a similar menacing tone. An oft-cited passage from *Fighting France* is Wharton's reflection on her experience of a temporary return of the pre-war order of life at Châlons where an old acquaintance arranges accommodation for the travelers. Wharton formulates the sense of unreality as an affect when "for a blissful moment the whole fabric of what I had been experiencing, the whole huge and oppressive and unescapable (sic!) fact of the war, slipped away like a torn cobweb, and I seemed to see behind it the reassuring face of things as they used to be. The next morning dispelled that vision" (Wharton 1915, 88–9). In this instance, "the sense of unreality" is a feeling or impression of being connected to the past that comes together with an apprehension of the inappropriateness of the connection perceived. The impression passes but, surprisingly, leaves a sense of disorientation behind that William Decker (2009) associates with the sensibilities of Modernist travelers (132).

A similar mixed feeling of unreality appears in *In Morocco* (Wharton [1920] 1996), this time connected to the passing presence of an Oriental Moroccan past. The book refers to the air of unreality when the Western spectators watch the religious rite of Hamdchas sect (52), and the bloody scene is perceived as a symbolic repetition of a memorable event (the suicide of a slave for a master) going back hundreds of years (53). Second,

unreality is experienced as a vision when a flock of silent figures enter Wharton's private rooms at the Bahia palace of Marrakech. The scene appears as a visit of ghosts from the past first, as if sultan Ba-Ahmed's executioners returned to a "scene of unavenged crime" (133), only in the morning can it be linked back to the present by a rational explanation, that the figures were the municipal lamplighters of the palace. The vanishing of the magic "unreality" means a return to the rational time of the present in both books, an experience of being released from an alluring but potentially dangerous embrace of the past.

The war context determines the way *In Morocco* represents colonial Moroccan life. The French colony of Morocco functions as a background of war effort, and Wharton's travel writing about Morocco relies on the architectural language of war she had used in her earlier reports already, replete with immersions in a potentially dangerous past that is also alluringly mysterious.

Conclusion

In Wharton's ([1920] 1996) book, Morocco's representation is connected to multiple Oriental stereotypes. In Morocco, oppositions work differently than in Europe. In Africa, the line between real and dream fluctuates the same way as the lines between past and present, fact and fiction do. This fluctuation is not only a Moroccan phenomenon but that of the unknown African Orient in general that Morocco is linked to. The idea of Oriental femininity is also scrutinized in the book. The space of the harem appears in a dual way as well, a mysterious space forgotten in the present from the past. Yet, as the shallow and limited social and domestic life of the harem is revealed, the presentation becomes devoid of references to magic. For Wharton, the limitations of the harem are linked not so much to the excess of sexual life but rather to its stagnant Oriental idea of domesticity, the lack of social life, and, in fact, the lack of domestic life in the Western sense of the term. This view matches the male-dominated Orientalist opinion of the inferiority of the life of the harem, yet Wharton's criticisms are made from the perspective of a nineteenth-century ideal of domesticity.

In addition to Wharton's reliance on a French Orientalist body of knowledge about Morocco, Wharton's architectural representation of war is also drawn on in her travel writing. For Wharton, elements of beautiful natural scenery and material culture are described and found to represent historical continuities in the life of the society that uses them. The effect that scenes of beauty make on the spectator constitutes an important emotional part of the experience of travel, a feeling of being connected to the culture of the past through the beautiful objects observed. Before the war, such scenes of beauty served to elevate the soul to the level of perceiving a

symbolic or moral order in them, for instance in *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908). During the war however, such moments of elevation and continuity were typically turned into moments of anxiety about the loss of the possibility of creating a contact with the past through aesthetic pleasure, as witnessed in *Fighting France. In Morocco* is related to both *Motor-Flight* and *Fighting France* not only in its architectural vision of beauty and Francophilia but also via the anxieties it represents in the enjoyment of architectural elements that provide access to an ambiguous feeling of rapport with the past.

Notes

- 1 Margaret Toth (2016) investigates Wharton's orientalist consumers whom she calls "Orientalist loving aging women in Wharton's late fiction" (235). She claims that Wharton ridicules "modern gender performances" (235) and younger females whose Orientalism appears menacing and destructive. In *The Age of Innocence*, Gary Totten (2023, 21) reinterprets Archer's fascination with Ellen and her foreign mysterious flat in New York City as an act of othering quite similar to Wharton's attraction to Moroccan mysteries and further points out that despite repeated attempts at comprehension by Archer and Wharton, both Ellen and Morocco remain ineffable.
- 2 Susan Goodman (2013) discusses Wharton's edited volume *The Book of the Homeless* (1916) as directly related to the popular initiative to defend French civilization in the face of German barbarism performed in the war. Similarly to other gift books at the outset of the war like *Princess Mary's Gift Book*, *The Queen's Gift Book*, *The Land of My Fathers*, *King Albert's Book*, *The Book of France*, it aimed both to raise money for war charity and to "defend an imperiled culture" (88).
- 3 See my Chapter 6 for more detail on this text as Wharton's first Aegean cruise.
- 4 For discussions of Lyautey's strategy of colonial rule and its aftermath, see Alan Scham's (1970) *Lyautey in Morocco*, David Rivet's (1988) *Lyautey et l'initiation du protectorat français au Maroc, 1912–1925*, and Moshe Gershovich's (2000) *French military rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* as some examples.
- 5 Frederic Wegener (1998) recovered from the archive and published Wharton's essay "Les Oeuvres de Mme Lyautey Au Maroc" (1918) on Mme Lyautey's charitable works in Morocco that openly celebrates the work of French colonialism in the country. This piece, Wegener comments, could have become part of the string of articles that were eventually published under the title *In Morocco* in 1920. Wegener (1998) argues that the fact it was not incorporated into the book directs attention to Wharton's distaste toward organized beneficence "traditionally dominated by members of her sex, whose role along such lines are often burlesqued in Wharton's fiction" (17).
- 6 The four issues of *Scribner's Magazine* are available from the *Modernist Journals Project*. The extent to which the war occupies the attention of the authors of the

issues is quite telling and orients readers of Wharton's articles to the immediate war context, too see: <https://modjourn.org/journal/scribners-magazine/> You will note capt. E. C. Peixotto's article "A hill town of old Castille" illustrated by himself in the same fashion he had illustrated Wharton's *Italian Backgrounds* in 1905.

- 7 The four articles in *Scribner's Magazine* contain 30 illustrations, the book contains 34, of which 22 photos were provided by the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc, a cultural institution of Lyautey's colonial administration, five derive from *France-Maroc*, four were contributed by army officers, one comes from de Segonzac, and one is derived from Chevrillon's book. The map is not identified. The book version carries all 30 images from the articles distributed into chapters and contains four extra photos of the Sultan's ceremonies, drawn from *France-Maroc*.
- 8 Critical accounts of travel writing by women have been preoccupied with the way feminine voices are constructing a discursive space different from the one created by male travelers (Mills, 1991; Smith 2001; Peat 2011; Yeğenoğlu 1998). Lucas Tromley (2009) distinguishes the "essentialist" and the "post-modern" feminist approaches to orientalist writing by women (240). Sara Mills' approach typifies the former: Mills (1991) argues that British women travelers in the age of the British Empire struggled with the legacy of Oriental discourse and represented their experience as more personalized, one directed at persons as individuals (3–4). The second, so called "postmodern" approach "examines ways in which women's writing is imbricated in colonial ideology" (Tromley 2009, 240), for instance in Meyda Yeğenoğlu's (1998) work, which shows how men incorporated women's reports of harems into scholarship.
- 9 In his article in *Scribner's magazine* May 1916, Fredrick Howe analyzes the fight for colonial influence in North Africa among France, England, and Germany leading up to the Great War. Howe's thesis is that "since the British occupied Egypt in 1882, the Mediterranean has been the storm center of Europe" (Howe 1916, 621–2). Lyautey's campaign in Morocco was one of the preliminary conflicts in the Mediterranean Howe enlists, his invasion of Morocco in 1912 almost triggered the World War two years before it actually started because it threatened the status quo of colonial powers in the Mediterranean (622).

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