

**More Usefully Employed; Amelia B. Edwards, writer, traveller and campaigner for ancient Egypt.
Moon B. 2006**

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This is a lovely looking volume in a vibrant fuchsia pink cover with a watercolour of an Egyptian scene. The book is comprised of 12 chapters, each with an extensive note section providing further reading. It is also interspersed with photographs and a colour plate section of some of Edward's watercolours.

The opening chapter discusses Amelia's early life and her passion for art in the form of drawing and painting. However, despite this she had decided to pursue music as a career. She studied the piano, musical theory and composition. She was employed to sing in Brentford and in Exeter Hall although the latter was cancelled due to ill health. She decided health-wise it was easier for her to teach rather than to perform. Throughout this time she was also writing a number of short stories, poems and novels and a number of publications between 1853-9 saw her career as a writer take off in leaps and bounds. She was first published in a penny journal when she was 9 years old and the publications continued until her death.

She travelled to Italy in 1857 perhaps with her cousin Matilda Betham-Edwards whom it would appear she felt was young and immature for her age. In later years Matilda also became a writer and Amelia was somewhat irritated by the fact that they were often confused with each other. In 1860 Amelia's parents died within a week of each other, and as an only child she was left distraught.

In 1862 Amelia may have travelled with the Braysher family to Switzerland. In 1864 following the death of Mr Breysher and their daughter, Amelia moved from London to Westbury-on-Trym to stay with Mrs Breysher. The two women became very good friends despite Amelia being considerably younger, and they remained companions for thirty years.

The late 1860s were the least recorded time of Amelia's life although a number of letters indicate she spent a great deal of time and effort collecting autographs of eminent writers and actors as well as pursuing her writing career. It was during this time that she became good friends with Marianne North. Marianne's letters have survived to Amelia but not from Amelia to Marianne. It would seem that the two women were very close and one letter Marianne comments on a house in Camden "that would suit you & me some day". Another letter indicates that Amelia had offered to buy Marianne a gold ring to which she was refused saying "I have not the slightest intention of marrying you or anybody else". Although this hints as a homosexual relationship the author insists that this was not the case. Marianne left shortly after to travel and they saw little of each other for the next twenty years. Not long after Marianne left, Amelia travelled to Germany, Bavaria, Tyrol and Italy where she recorded her trip in great detail.

Amelia's second trip to Italy in 1872 was with a new travelling companion, Lucy Renshaw where they embarked on another standard tour of Italy visiting the sites of Rome, Venice and Naples where she witnessed the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Lucy was an active companion and they decided to travel north to the Dolomites, a difficult but ultimately rewarding mountain trek which resulted in Amelia's

book *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: a midsummer ramble in the Dolomites* the first of her travel books.

The author indicates that Amelia's relationship with Lucy was quite intense, even suggesting some love sonnets written by her may have had Lucy in mind. However, she negates her own suggestions of an intimate relationship by adding the disclaimer that there is no evidence of a lesbian relationship.

In 1873-74 Lucy and Amelia embarked on another trip starting in France and continuing to Egypt, Amelia's first trip here and one that resulted in her book *A thousand Miles Up the Nile*. They were accompanied by a different servant than the one who travelled to the Dolomites, a woman called Jenny Lane, who kept a detailed diary of the trip which supported and corrected some of the details in Amelia's record. The journey was a typical one of the time starting in Cairo and travelling via Dahibeya to the cataracts and then returning north again. Amelia turned her hand to sketching, writing and archaeology whilst on the trip in addition to vandalism as she and her companions carved their names onto the wall at Abu Simbel. They then travelled on to Damascus and Trieste before returning to France and home.

An entire chapter is dedicated to the production of *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* which Amelia hoped would be a combination of popular travel book and scholarly text. In her research we learn of her 'pestering' Egyptologists. In particular we hear of her constant letters to Dr Samuel Birch from the British Museum, where she not only asks for help but also offers advice to him. This may have been viewed as rather forward, and may have irritated the scholar.

When the book was published it received mostly good reviews but the most important result of its publication was Amelia's campaign to protect the monuments which she felt were being threatened by travellers and locals. This led to the founding of the Egypt Exploration Fund (now the Egypt Exploration Society). There is a chapter which gives a very detailed history of the early stages and how much work Amelia put into the Fund, in the form of canvassing for subscriptions and support from eminent scholars. Once more she contacted Birch at the British Museum who was rather scornful about the project.

Initially the 'selling' point of the Fund was for excavation of the Delta in the hope of finding artefacts and cities associated with the Bible. Fundamentally the Fund was an information hunting organisation although it was not long before negotiations were made for artefacts to be brought from Egypt to be distributed to museums in the areas where there were 'pockets' of subscriptions.

Amelia made a number of very good friends with eminent scholars during her work at the Fund including Flinders Petrie. Even when he resigned from the Fund they remained good friends and in her will Amelia left the means to set up a chair of Egyptology at University College London designed specifically for him.

In the late 1880s Amelia was able to delegate enough of her Fund related tasks to enable her to go on an American lecture tour, one with a very gruelling schedule. Her new friend and travelling companion was Kate Bradbury, who was later to marry Francis Llewellyn Griffith. Kate was younger than Amelia but theirs was a very close relationship with Kate nursing Amelia through a number of ailments which included a broken arm after a fall. After returning to England Amelia had another fall,

and in 1890 was diagnosed with breast cancer. Whilst recovering from that she was left weak and helpless and relied on Kate to care for her. Although she continued to work after convalescing, Amelia's health never returned to full strength. She travelled to Europe on doctor's orders but her health only recovered in spates. Amelia had been plagued with poor health throughout her life. She died in April 1892 and was buried in Henbury near Westbury-on-Trym.

This book was well written and an enjoyable read with that elusive combination of scholarly research and a "right riveting read". The appendices at the back of the book include a timeline of Amelia's life, a list of her published works running to more than twenty pages, as well as a summary of her fiction tales accompanied by some of her illustrations.

Moon's book gave me enough detail about Amelia's personality, work and difficulties to enable me to form an opinion of who she was as a woman and an interest to pursue the subject further. This book is a reasonably priced book which means anyone interested in the history of Egyptology and Egyptologists this should be an essential on the bookcase.