



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Relation d'Un Voyage Dans la Marmarique, la Cyrenaique et les Oasis d'Audjelah et de Maradeh* by Jean-Raimond Pacho

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"It must be clear to all of us that the period of transition from our Revolution to a State, inspired by the principles of the Revolution, will necessarily last for about ten years" (p. 152).

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RELATION D'UN VOYAGE DANS LA MARMARIQUE, LA CYRENAÏQUE ET LES OASIS D'AUDJELAH ET DE MARADEH. *By Jean-Raimond Pacho*. Reprinted after the original edition of 1827, with a preface by François Chamoux. Paris: Editions Jeanne Laffitte, 1979. Volume I, Text Pp. viii, vi, xxxii, 404, viii. Volume II, Plates: iv, c.

Jean-Raimond Pacho was an unsuccessful painter and writer who had already squandered away a sizable inheritance and dropped out of law school when in 1822, at the age of 28, he joined his brother who was pursuing the family *métier* of merchant, in Alexandria, Egypt. Attracted to the land, Pacho spent most of his time travelling about sketching ancient monuments and "objets d'histoire naturelle": from December 1822 to April 1823 he journeyed through lower Egypt, and from November 1823 to August 1824 he made an extended trip from Fayum to Siwa Oasis and from upper Egypt to the oases of Kharga, Baris, Dakhla, and Farafra. By November 1824 he had arranged the finances for a journey to eastern Libya which was to take him from Alexandria along the coast as far as Benghazi, and from there inland to Ajedabiya, Augila, Siwa again, and back to Cairo, where he arrived in July 1825. Upon his return he went immediately to Paris and gave a report of his last trip, but not of his earlier ones, to the Société de Géographie, which on the advice of Malte-Brun awarded him its prize for 1826 and encouraged him, in association with the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, to write up a complete account. This Pacho did in the later months of 1826, and his text was published by Firmin Didot et Fils with a dedication to Charles X and the sponsorship of the Ministry of the Interior in 1827. Distribution of the book was held up for several years, however, probably by difficulties in engraving the 100 plates of the second volume, and before the work could be submitted to the public Pacho had taken his life, in a period of "noire mélancolie," on 26 January 1829.

The Centre de recherches sur la Libye antique of the Sorbonne, of which François Chamoux is the director, has chosen Pacho's work as the first publication in what is apparently to become a collection of studies on Libya. The volumes are beautifully produced, in a somewhat smaller format than the original edition, but with fine-quality paper and sturdy leather bindings enclosing an excellent reimpression of the 150-year-old text. It is, one might say, rather curious to find so much attention lavished on the *Relation*, which although rare is still easily enough available in the first edition and is, moreover, of quite limited interest. For Pacho's overwhelming concern was with Greek ruins and ancient history, fields to which he made novel contributions in 1827 but which today have broadly passed him by, and his occasional remarks about the Libya of his own day are few and frustratingly short. Thus the archeologist or historian

of ancient Cyrenaica is faced with outdated theories and incomplete descriptions of sites, while the historian of nineteenth-century Libya is tortured with passages such as the following one on Benghazi:

Puisque je ne retrouve que de rares et insignifiants vestiges de l'ancienne Bérénice, m'arrêterai-je long-temps dans les murs de la ville moderne? Dénumbrerai-je ses maisons plates et bâties sur le sable; ses habitants, Juifs, Mograbins et Arabes? Parlerai-je de son commerce de bestiaux, de miel et de laine? Ferai-je la description des jardins de la ville, de ces petits champs dans le sable, dont le pourpier et le poivre-long font ordinairement les honneurs, et qu'ombragent quelques palmiers aux maigres panaches battus par les vents? ... peindrai-je le souverain de la moderne Cyrénaïque, entouré de sa cour d'Arabes déserteurs, et tenant nonchalamment son divan dans une mesure délabrée, décorée du nom de château?... Mais à ces divers propos, il me semble entendre mon lecteur, justement fatigué de mes prolixes récits, se récrier et me dire qu'il est temps d'y mettre un terme. Tel est aussi mon dessein (pp. 265-266).

True, Pacho reveals valuable information, almost in spite of himself, in texts such as this and in others even more instructive in the book - for example, the pages on Augila - and archeologists can derive some benefit as well from his descriptions and drawings of sites as they existed in the early nineteenth century. It was ostensibly for this latter reason, which corresponds with the research goals of his Centre, that Chamoux selected Pacho's work for republication. But one suspects that another reason at least as strong was the romanticism of the book - both the romanticism of its author's life and the romanticism of its literary style, which is in the best tradition of nineteenth-century French orientalism. In the six-page eulogistic preface Chamoux, who has not found it appropriate to provide a critical annotation of the text, admits that "la sensibilité qui s'y manifeste ... peut être à juste titre qualifiée de romantique," but for him "cela ajoute au charme de l'ouvrage" and he quotes admiringly a long passage on the catacombs near Derna which he finds reminiscent of Chateaubriand. All of which may indeed be reason to provide Pacho with a wider audience, but historians in reading the passages on an emotion-filled council of blood-vengeance (pp. 166-168) or on a "school of the stars" held by an old caravan leader (pp. 276-277), which Chamoux finds so evocative, must be all the more aware that the book is not so much a first-hand historical document as an example of a specific genre of early nineteenth-century French literature.

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