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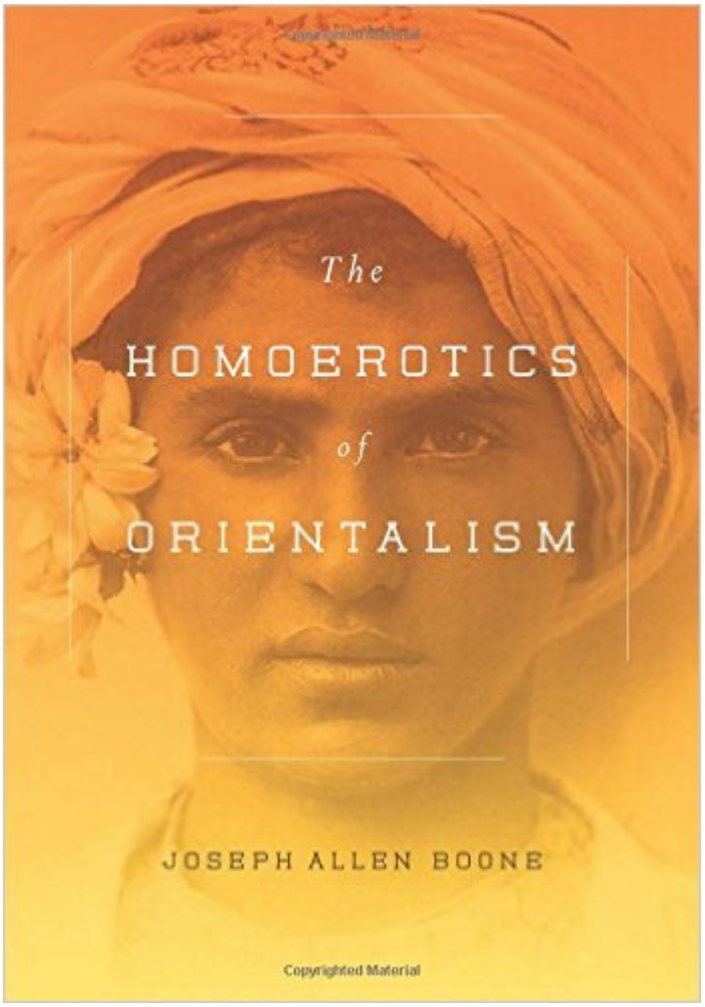
The Homoerotics Of Orientalism



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Synopsis

One of the largely untold stories of Orientalism is the degree to which the Middle East has been associated with "deviant" male homosexuality by scores of Western travelers, historians, writers, and artists for well over four hundred years. And this story stands to shatter our preconceptions of Orientalism.To illuminate why and how the Islamicate world became the locus for such fantasies and desires, Boone deploys a supple mode of analysis that reveals how the cultural exchanges between Middle East and West have always been reciprocal and often mutual, amatory as well as bellicose. Whether examining European accounts of Istanbul and Egypt as hotbeds of forbidden desire, juxtaposing Ottoman homoerotic genres and their European imitators, or unlocking the homoerotic encoding in Persian miniatures and Orientalist paintings, this remarkable study models an ethics of crosscultural reading that exposes, with nuance and economy, the crucial role played by the homoerotics of Orientalism in shaping the world as we know it today. A contribution to studies in visual culture as well as literary and social history, The Homoerotics of Orientalism draws on primary sources ranging from untranslated Middle Eastern manuscripts and European belles-lettres to miniature paintings and photographic erotica that are presented here for the first time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fascinating, scholarly study of neglected aspects of Western eroticism influenced by the East. If it doesn’t read like a detective novel, that’s not because it isn’t the result of solid detective work, sound reasoning, and acute sensitivity to the meaning of the information. This is a real study for serious folk to consider, and to be brought into closer understanding of its most interesting subject.

A century ago, an Orientalist would have been a European savant who had deeply studied the cultures of Asia and North Africa. Since 1978 or so, an Orientalist is now a European bigot with a load of misconceptions about the Islamic (or, as Boone puts it, the "Islamicate") world. I am an elderly gay man who lived in Morocco in the 1960s, so this world is not simply something that I have read about, it is something that I experienced -- and no, not as a sex tourist. I am very widely read, and yet Boone taught me a thing or two. He has certainly done his homework, and he cast his nets wide. So far, so good; but I am no friend of academic jargon or of trendy leftism. Here Boone and I part ways. I don't like people who use silly words like "heteronormativity." I have no use for feminism or Queer Theory. I don't believe in equality of any sort. I think that Gerome's painting 'The Snake Charmer' is a masterpiece and not something to dissect or complain about. There is the usual padding of the text with surplus wordage, a common fault among people who write 250-page books and then fatten them up like geese until they reach 500 pages. A book is all the better for being lean and mean. I liked the section on Safavid miniatures, but what has this to do with Orientalism? The black-and-white pictures tended to be difficult to examine. Oh, and Thesiger wrote to me long ago and ranted about how much he despised gay men. The Suaid boy whose picture graces page 391 was in fact a skilled dancer and catamite, as one might glean from Thesiger's 'Marsh Arabs' but Boone missed this one.

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