PICTURING ANNIE'S EGYPT.
TERRA DI CLEOPATRA BY ANNIE VIVANTI

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Summary: Her readers would not have found the Egyptian adventure portrayed in *Terra di Cleopatra* to have been too unusual or exotic for Annie Vivanti, a world traveller who had already described countless foreign locales and adventures in previous works. Some of these were presented as fiction; others were understood as autobiographical, especially because she was usually her own protagonist. My study shows that Vivanti's account of her visit to the land of Cleopatra, was highly compromised by her political allegiances, despite the impression given to readers, including by the publisher, that her book was a reliable travelogue.

The 1920s were years of intense writing activity for Annie Vivanti (1866-1942). In 1921, she had published her first openly anti-British novel, *Naja tripudians* (Firenze: Bemporad). In addition, she had written various articles and some of the short pieces that would eventually comprise the anthologies *Gioia* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1921) and *Perdonate Eglantina* (Milano: Mondadori, 1926). Furthermore, she had also published a children's book, *Sua altezza, favola candida* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1923).¹ As always, she produced bestsellers that resonated with her numerous readers, partially for their content and, especially, for her witty, polyglot and uniquely effervescent style.

Naja tripudians had occasioned her unexpected problems when she was sued for plagiarism by Anglo-American author Elizabeth Robbins. The novel, eventually followed by a sequel (*Salvate le nostre anime*, Milano: Mondadori, 1932), recounted in some chapters a most unusual foray into Africa, natural habitat of the terrible venomous viper which gave its name to the title. Those pages have since become an often cited staple of the horror story genre, as even a quick internet search will show. Consequently, Vivanti's readers would not have found any additional similar adventure too unusual or too exotic for her. She was, after all, the peripatetic writer who had shared so many foreign settings and escapades with her readers, sometimes as fiction and sometimes, as in the case of her stories about her life in the American wild west, as apparently autobiographical. Usually she enhanced their plausibility through the literary trope of using herself as the

¹For an excellent discussion of this book, including its renamed editions published by Mondadori (*Il viaggio incantato*), see Truglio, "Annie in Wonderland."

protagonist. Thus it seemed most credible that she would write about her travels to Egypt. My study will show, however, that Vivanti's account of her visit to the land of Cleopatra was highly compromised by her political allegiances at the time of writing, and that this was so despite the impression given to her readers that the book was an objective travelogue.²

Six of Vivanti's travel accounts first appeared as articles in *La Stampa*, between 14 January and 5 March 1925.³ To this original collection were added another sixteen; thus, in book form, the articles became a coherent travelogue with a homogeneous and logical topography as Vivanti explored Cairo and the marvels of the desert. To enhance her work, she also included thirty-nine photographs, which will be discussed later in this article.

When, in 1925, Mondadori announced *Terra di Cleopatra*, the publishing house assigned the book to the category "Viaggi." That Mondadori should do so is fundamental to how the publishers wished the book to be received. Previously, Annie Vivanti had written of her travels to other countries, including several in Europe, and especially the USA. Her story, "Il fascino delle solitudini", found in her earlier anthology, *Zingaresca* (Milano: Quintieri, 1918) had been accepted critically as a humorous and mostly autobiographical account. Even as late as 1972, it had earned her a place as a writer of memoirs in the study *Memorialisti dell'Ottocento* (edited by Carmelo Cappuccio, Tome 2, Milano: Ricciardi). Close scrutiny of the chapter, however, has exposed its mostly fictional underpinnings. As a result, the story rightfully takes its place in an anthology categorized as "Novelle" by the publishing house. However, the rubric "Viaggi" implies a different relationship with the reader, one where the implicit contract between author and reader is that the former will provide for the latter a documentary account of her travels through Egypt, one that is both veritable and, to some degree, even able to be replicated if the readers should wish to follow in her footsteps. The photographs emphasize this unwritten understanding. The contract remains between reader and travel writer despite the phenomenon that critic Loredana Polezzi, writing about travel accounts, identifies as 'the hybridity of the text'. By this Polezzi intends a text which is "held together by the voice and persona of the travel writer, his or her different kinds of authority, stemming from his or her position

²Cristina Lombardi-Diop also discounts the posited objectivity of the work, but she reads it predominantly from the perspective of contemporary developments in the Italian Fascist regime; see Lombardi-Diop, "Writing the Female Frontier."

³The articles appeared under titles differing from those in the book in the following issues of *La Stampa* (all on p. 3): 14 Jan. 1925, 23 Jan. 1925, 29 Jan. 1925, 7 Feb. 1925, 17 Feb. 1925, 5 March 1925.

as at once the protagonist, the narrator and the author of the travel account" (Polezzi, "Travelling," 188).⁴ This means that we do not protest when, in a travelogue, we discover idiosyncratically constructed sites and personal representations and, quite likely, misrepresentations.

In Vivanti's writing, this phenomenon becomes all the more complicated because we know that, while preparing *Terra di Cleopatra* for publication, she was also considering a new work of fiction, *Mea culpa* (Milano: Mondadori, 1927). Since she was always willing to recycle and adapt her previous material, it comes as no surprise that *Mea culpa* also makes its setting in Egypt. While the fictionality of *Mea culpa* is never in doubt, the possibility that *Terra di Cleopatra* is fiction is, on the other hand, not usually a consideration that readers make.

Mea culpa belongs to the genre of *romanzo rosa*. It is the story of Astrid O'Reylley who travels to Egypt accompanied by her aunt and cousin, in anticipation of the wedding of the latter. On the ship, she initiates a friendship with Saad Nassir, eventually becoming his not-so-secret lover. In the meantime, her own "official" betrothal and imminent marriage to an Englishman is announced by the aunt who warns Astrid that her affair with the young Arab must never be referred to. Soon after her wedding, Astrid realizes that she is expecting a child. To her relief, her baby, a little girl named Darling, is blonde and blue-eyed. Astrid's relationship with the Egyptian, however, returns to punish her at the birth of her grandchild, for Darling's son resembles the dark-skinned Saad Nassir. Darling dies in childbirth and Astrid, now abandoned by her British family, flees to Egypt with the unwanted baby. There Saad Nassir welcomes her with open arms.

The exaggerated tropes of this intensely melodramatic love story require no critical comment here. On the other hand, the anonymous contributor who wrote a brief presentation of *Mea culpa* for the *Nuova antologia* (Anon., Review, 271), recognized immediately the ulterior, non-fictional political motives behind Vivanti's novel:

Il tono di questo romanzo, l'attitudine che vi hanno i diversi personaggi, gli episodi che vi si narrano, l'ambiente—soprattutto—dove essi si svolgono lasciano chiaramente intendere che l'A[utrice] non ha voluto soltanto narrare l'avventura di una bionda Miss, ma spezzare anche una lancia a favore della — come dire? — autodecisione dei popoli ... (271)

[The tone of this novel, the deportment of the diverse characters, the events narrated, and above all the setting where the latter unfold, leave us to understand clearly that the A[uthor] had not intended only to nar-

⁴Polezzi bases her observations on those of critics P. Fussell, M.L. Pratt and A. Pasquali.

rate the story of some blonde young lady, but that she had wished to come to the defense of, how shall one say?, self-rule....]⁵

What the contributor did not note was the parallelism between Vivanti's account of Egypt's attempt to shake off British imperialism and that of Ireland to do the same in those same years. We should bear in mind that Vivanti was personally implicated in the latter movement through her husband, John Chartres, a Sinn Féin member and Irish patriot. Fellow member and Irish patriot Michael Collins welcomed Vivanti's pro Irish sympathies.⁶ Her opposition to British imperialist ideology was well known and had informed the plot and character development of other works as well, principally the novel *Naja tripudians*.⁷

The political motivation for writing *Mea culpa* was already present in *Terra di Cleopatra*, published two years earlier. Vehement and violent in *Mea culpa* in the fictionalized Egypt depicted by Vivanti, it was much less so in the documentary travelogue, despite the contemporary journalistic accounts of events in Egypt reiterating every day the hostile volatility of the situation. That the fictional Egypt could represent more reliable documentary evidence than the purported testimonial travelogue is due to Vivanti's manipulation and practice of space.

The practice of space has been theorized by Michel de Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*. What he means by this phrase is that we appropriate geographical or topographical realities, assigning them our own meaning. The first, or denotative meaning, is taken in and superseded by the second, or connotative meaning. The Egypt of cartographers or historians, therefore, was not Annie Vivanti's Egypt of *Terra*, and even less, her Egypt-with-sex-and-romance of *Mea culpa*, where in fact that country also stands for Ireland. We quickly recognize how Vivanti practices the Egypt-as-Ireland space in *Mea Culpa*. It is more difficult to recognize this same trope when, in *Terra*, she provides photographs of a verifiable Egypt to corroborate her story. Furthermore, she distracts us even further by mischievously revealing, as she does in the latter, that her trip to Egypt has a legitimate medical, not political, motivation. It has been undertaken on doctor's orders to relieve the stress of her usual life. Her medical prescrip-

⁵Here and elsewhere, all translations are mine.

⁶"Michael Collins [of Sinn Féin] described her at the time as a 'brilliant writer' who 'has been a great accession to our cause in France as well as her native Italy'" (Murphy, *John Chartres*, 26, quoting a letter from Collins to D. Hales, 15 Feb. 1919). Murphy indicates that on 13 Sept. 1919, Annie wrote to Sean T. O'Kelly [of Sinn Féin] "offering to work anywhere in the Irish cause" (27).

⁷For a more detailed discussion, see, Urbancic, "Plagiarism or Fantasy."

tion, forbidding her from writing, reading, visiting and speaking, ironically provides her with the justification to produce a book about Egypt (*Terra*, 13). Within days of her physician's diagnosis and prescription, she has packed her bags, told her friends (several of whom decide to accompany her) and has boarded the S.S. Helouan at Trieste for "silenzio e solitudine per due mesi" [Two months of silence and solitude] (*Terra*, 13). The *aporia* between what the doctor advises her to do and what, in fact, she will do (i.e. intense observation, exploration, annotation, conversation) in order to achieve the more healthy condition and attitude she desires, is not only a source of humor and irony, but is also indicative of how she will 'practice' her Egyptian space.

I should like to elaborate further. De Certeau has described what he calls an "identification of places" and an "actualization of spaces" (118). The two terms are not fixed and their parameters continue to change through stories. A map identifies a place, but does not reveal what that place is "actually" like. And even a map can change. Think of a restaurant map of a city that identifies the restaurants as being of equal importance to civic monuments and cultural buildings. Vivanti chooses the cartographical reality 'Egypt' and provides us with pictures to look at. All the while, and paradoxically, she warns us from the start that she has constructed a completely different reality:

Io certo sogno. Non è possibile che sia vero tutto quanto m'accade! ... Mi pare ch'io stia facendo uno di quei sogni stravaganti e pazzeschi che, al mattino, quando si vorrebbero ricordare e raccontare, sfumano, si diffondono, dileguano nella più insensata incoerenza. (*Terra*, 9)

[Certainly I am dreaming. It's not possible that what is happening to me is real!...It seems to me that I am in one of those outlandish and crazy dreams that, upon waking, when you'd like to remember and recount them, disappear, dissipate, dissolve into a nonsensical incoherence.]

Employing the same trope of the dream that marked the fictionalization of her accounts of life in the American Far West,⁸ Vivanti introduces Egypt or, rather, the dream of Egypt:

Sono nel deserto libico, issata su un cammello, e mi avvio verso la tomba di Tut-Ankh-Amen. Davanti a me, sopra un altro cammello, dondola un arabo alto e solenne; ... Appaiono, in fila cupa sullo sterminato oro del deserto, delle figure femminili, altre, misteriose, ammantate di nero. ... Passano mute ... Una di esse stacca dal suo polso un amuleto e me lo getta in grembo. ... Ben presto le nere bibliche figure non sono più che una

⁸See Urbancic, "L'America di Annie Vivanti."

sottile striscia scura sulla dorata pianura. Poi spariscono in un nembo di sabbia. L'arabo, il negro ed io proseguiamo silenziosi ... Il vento del deserto ci turbinava d'intorno (*Terra*, 11)

[I am in the Libyan desert, mounted on a camel, approaching the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen. Before me, on another camel, a tall, solemn Arab sways as he rides... In single file on the endless gold stretch of the desert, there appear female figures, tall, mysterious, wrapped in black... They pass silently... One of them takes an amulet from her wrist and throws it to me... Soon the black biblical figures are no more than a fading dark trail on the golden plain. Then they disappear in a cloud of sand. The Arab, the black man and I continue silently... The desert wind swirls around us.]

Then, immediately, she jolts us back to what appears to be reality:

Non è un sogno, questo?

No. Me lo dicono gli otto piccoli gatti di giada verde [dell'amuleto] che tengo nelle mani. (*Terra*, 11)

[Is this not a dream?

No. The eight little jade cats [of the amulet] I hold in my hands tell me it is not]

Vivanti was well aware that she had much room for play between documented testimonial and obvious invention. At the time she was writing, Egypt was very much a part of the acknowledged reality of her readers, but for the overwhelming majority of them it remained an imagined space. The building and opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869 had brought Egypt closer to the European mindset. Particularly after the tour company Thomas Cook and Sons was entrusted with transporting British forces up the Nile in order to rescue General Gordon in Khartoum (1884), Egypt became a desirable travel destination. By the late 1880s, about 10% of the profit enjoyed by Cook and Sons came exclusively from tours to Egypt where Thomas' son, John Mason Cook, was even given the soubriquet "King of Egypt" and known everywhere as *Cook Pasha*. A contemporary pundit described Egypt as the land of four seasons: first, flies; second, mosquitoes; third, flying bugs and fourth, Cook's tourists.⁹ Shephard's Hotel and the Mena-House Hotel were so well known that Vivanti could use both names in her book, confident that the sites would be recognized by her readers. Cultural instantiations of Egypt were numerous in contemporary media. The herculean Italian-cum-Arab (actually Carthaginian) named Maciste, the great saviour of women in the film *Cabiria*, and later the cinematic saviour of all of Italy, was well installed as an Italian cultural and

⁹Williamson, *The Golden Age of Travel*, 52.

political icon as early as 1914. The sultry Italian-*cum*-Arab named Rudolph Valentino, the great seducer of the silent movie *The Sheik*, had appeared on screen in 1921, well before Vivanti started her book.¹⁰ Furthermore, the discovery by Howard Carter in November 1922 of the tomb of Tutankhamen had brought the awed attention of print and visual media to Egypt. Then, when Carter's colleague and financier, Lord Carnarvon suddenly succumbed to septicemia in April 1923, providing fodder for the myth of the curse of King Tut, the event became still another 'real' media story about the fantastical exoticism of Egypt. In that same period, the country was also making headlines because of political unrest. By the time of Vivanti's visit, perhaps in 1924, the political drama there had increased greatly in complexity and in intensity. Consequently, Annie Vivanti could recount her private interview with national hero/villain Zaghloul Pasha without having to go to great lengths to explain who he was.

Paradoxically, however, too much detail might earn her the contempt of the well informed reader who would spot the gaps and contradictions of her constructed Egypt. Vivanti, of course, is not the first travel writer to have manipulated a geographical reality. However, I think that it is worthwhile to scrutinize the literary tropes she used to create a clever spatial syntax convincing enough to allow her book to be categorized as a travel book and not as fiction.

First, as I have already pointed out, she adopted a dream framework within which to tell her story of Egypt. As the book begins, so does it end with a nebulous oneirism:

Con questa visione, in questi sogni, io ti lascio, Egitto, terra di splendore. ... Come un immenso susurro [sic], come un gigantesco fruscio d'ali sorge il vento del Sahara e passa turbinando sopra le sabbie. È forse lo spirito del Deserto che mi saluta? (*Terra*, 187)

[With this vision, in this dream, I leave you, Egypt, land of splendor.... Like an immense whisper, like the beating of giant wings, the wind of the Sahara rises and passes swirling above the sands. Is it perhaps the spirit of the Desert that bids me good-bye?]

Her rhetorical question as to whether or not the spirit of the desert bids her leave has two answers. If it is indeed the spirit of the desert that

¹⁰By the time she was preparing *Terra* for publication, there had also been several movies about Africa by Italian film-makers. See Brunetta and Gili, *L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano. 1911-1989*, and Harris, "Nero su bianco." I am grateful to Prof. Sante Matteo for his additional information, both generous and valuable, regarding the career and filmography of Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano).

salutes her, then we can accept that this same spirit has informed and authorized the rest of her story of Egypt. If, on the other hand, there is no spirit of the desert encouraging her to write of her adventures, then her tale is all a product of her dreams, even as she had warned us from the outset it might be. If so, we may still wish to give credence to the manner in which she retells her dream of the story of Egypt. In either case, no fact checking is allowed to corroborate what she has written: how could we, after all, verify the approval of a spirit, the “spirito del Deserto che [la] saluta” [spirit of the Desert that greets her]?

However, if her readers should be suspicious of her version of Egypt, Vivanti resorts to another literary ruse. She provides enough verifiable information to give her story documentary credibility. For example, the ship on which she sailed, the S.S. Helouan, did indeed make regular runs from Trieste to Cairo, docking at Alexandria. There, as Vivanti indicates, passengers were transferred to the train to Cairo, where late in the evening, they were taken to Shephard’s Hotel. Howard Carter was in fact a passenger on that ship as his diaries show.¹¹ In addition, several other characters named by Vivanti in the book were prominent personages of the time, including Zaghloul Pasha.

Should her readers still not be convinced by her inclusion of information already within their frame of reference (real places and real people), Vivanti also employs a rather sophisticated and always highly descriptive and precise language to help us in our visualization of her Egypt. Her linguistic dexterity in the use of numerous and highly visual descriptors (adjectives, adverbs, neologisms) is a regular feature of all of her writing. Nor does she restrict herself to only one language. A polyglot herself, her prose is strewn with foreign words and phrases. One can imagine her delight at the opportunity of including Egyptian Arabic in *Terra*. Often, those characters (and also readers, I think) who do not understand her foreign expressions, pay the price of being ridiculed by her, much to her amusement, and to that of her linguistically gifted audience. But here, in a

¹¹Howard Carter’s diaries are available electronically at www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk/gri/4sea2not.html. Carter was a detailed diarist; he chronicles his trip on the S.S. Helouan in his diaries, telling us he departed on Friday, 5 October 1923. He does not mention meeting Vivanti, although he does note his encounters with others. If she did indeed depart on the same ship, then her interview with Zaghloul would have taken place some time in October or November of that year, since she tells us she was away for two months. Later on, however, she tells us that it took place after the assassination of Sir Lee Stack almost a year later, on 19 November 1924 (*Terra*, 42).

rare admission of linguistic fallibility, she allows us, for once, to laugh at her expense. Not only does she require the services of a *dragoman*, or interpreter, but she also permits us to see her making cultural and linguistic gaffes. For example, she responds inappropriately with a phrase she thinks means "I don't understand" when she is told that her pullman car is on fire; the expression actually means "Who cares?" (*Terra*, 34-36). She reacts culturally incorrectly when presented with a baby to hold (*Terra*, 129), and she shows total incomprehension at local funeral customs (*Terra*, 125-128). She allows herself to be corrected by her hosts, an attitude that in her fiction, where she is in solid control of the situation, she does not permit. This feigned deference to a higher authority gives her the opportunity to point out the ancient dignity of the traditions of a country relatively recently subject to British rule. And it allows *us* to learn about Egypt as well, thereby consolidating the verifiable, non-fictional aspects of *Terra*.

Vivanti's Egypt is also actualized through her technique of placing her persona in situations where there are no witnesses to challenge or change what she writes, forcing her readers to accept unquestioningly whatever she includes and excludes. For example, although she has arrived in Egypt with several friends and relatives in tow, she leaves them to their own devices as they visit typical monuments recommended to tourists. She feigns a headache in order to avoid them and goes alone to converse with Zaghloul Pasha, the former prime minister of Egypt now under house arrest on suspicion of having fomented the assassination of the British Sirdar, Sir Lee Stack, in late November 1924. When she is received by the statesman and his wife, it is as an old friend because she had met him previously at a private luncheon at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 where, she reveals, she had been the only woman at the table, together with twelve male diners, all dignitaries representing states like Egypt seeking freedom from British rule. Since her friends are off on tourist jaunts, there is no one to witness her interview with Zaghloul. There is no one who might corroborate her account. More importantly, there is no one to deny it. Similarly, there is no witness to her trip into the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Nor does she herself tell us what she saw, because her lamp just happened to extinguish itself the very instant she stepped into the tomb. She is rescued by a noisy group of Cook's tourists; it is from her reporting the words of their guide that we learn what she would have seen—and what she would have seen were items described in any tourist guide. Her coy silence leaves us wondering about the extent to which she has personally experienced what she describes. To say the least, it perplexes the reader at every occurrence in the text. In fact, whenever Vivanti's spatial syntax comes to the point where more corroborative detail is required, she simply withdraws into silence.

The interview with Zaghoul, given the heightened political situation and his own difficult status at the time, would warrant greater credible documentation for it to become an accepted reported event. Because she is unlikely to admit that she merely invented it, she defers instead to respectful confidentiality: "Non so nè voglio ripetere la nostra conversazione di quel giorno" [I wouldn't know how to repeat our conversation that day, nor would I wish to] (*Terra*, 64).¹² At the Valley of the Kings also, instead of corroborative detail, we have her silence (*Terra*, 157).¹³

The leitmotif of silence and withheld information is a curious one in a book meant to reveal Egypt. Nevertheless, silence is fundamental to *Terra*. The first section of the book is entitled, in fact, "Verso gli inviolati silenzi del deserto" and opens with a photo of the Sphinx that bears the caption: "L'eterna silenziosa." The first sentence, "Io certo sogno" (*Terra*, 9), reinforces silence, for our process of dreaming is, to all outward appear-

¹²For the record, Zaghoul's diaries do not mention any interview with Vivanti. See Aqq-ad, 'Abb-as Ma.hm-ud. *Sa'd Zaghul-ul:za'im*. I am grateful to Ms. Mona Fanous of the University of Toronto for so kindly translating diary entries from Arabic. The diaries also show a photograph with the caption "Party at the House of Ahmed Shafik Basha" taken around 1919 in which 12 men and one woman are shown seated at dining tables. The woman, however, is not Vivanti. On the other hand, Murphy does place Vivanti in Paris with her husband, John Chartres, at the time of the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919). Murphy, *John Chartres*, 26.

¹³Vivanti's reconstruction of Egypt is focused on the visual, the sociological and topographical. Her downfall, and the point where the close observer might confirm the extent to which her Egypt is created as a fictional space, is in her chronological detail, despite her extreme care not to reveal dates. For example, Carter travelled on the SS. *Helouan* in October of 1923, but by spring 1924 he was embattled in the dispute with Pierre Lacau, Director General of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, that eventually saw his archeological sites closed. (Carter, *Tut Ankh Amen.*) If Vivanti travelled with him on that trip, planning to remain in Egypt for two months, as she claims, then she could not have interviewed Zaghoul Pasha in November 1924, after the death of Sir Lee Stack, as she writes. If she travelled in 1924, then, because of the Carter/Lacau disagreements, she would not have seen the tomb of King Tutankhamen as she claims. She also tells us that during that interview with the Zaghoul Pasha she kept from him the knowledge of Lord Meston's commercial contracts in the Sudan of which she had read the day before the interview. But, as the *Times* (London) reports, Meston's contracts on behalf of the English Electric Company were not undertaken until 2 February 1925. Vivanti's article about the interview with Zaghoul first appeared in *La Stampa* on 17 February 1925, just shortly after the Meston contracts were announced.

ances, a silent activity. Let us remember, too, that silence, prescribed by her doctor, also serves as the *raison d'être* for the trip to Egypt.

The frequency of the words of all discourse categories indicating silence is notable in this book. The single contemporary critique that I have found of *Terra* had also noted this trope. The writer, Pietro Pancrazi, ended his article by repeating the words of Vivanti's *dragoman*: "Discutere!... Meglio avere nel nostro giaciglio sette scorpioni che una donna che discute" [Argue! Better to have seven scorpions in your bed than one woman who argues] to which she had responded "Me lo tenni per detto" [I kept that in mind] (*Terra*, 124). But Pancrazi was aware that this was not the motto or dictum Vivanti claims; it was a literary game for her. He writes: "in Egitto le tombe buie dei Faraoni, tutto ciò e altro per lei è giuoco, non esperienza. Perché domandare di più?"¹⁴ [in Egypt the dark tombs of the Pharaohs, all this and more is a game for her, not an experience. Why ask for more?] However, he also points out that if we do insist on asking for more, we will be offered "nelle pagine sue più belle ... freschezza e malizia, impertinenza e candore, monelleria vera, e in più civetteria d'esser monella" [in her best pages...freshness and malice, impertinence and candor, true impishness on top of the flirty mischief] (Pancrazi, "Annie alle Piramidi," 3). Pancrazi warns us that we must not expect Vivanti to offer more substantial documentary or autobiographical evidence:

Ma il lettore vuol passare ... al viaggio nella Terra di Cleopatra ... e sorprendere Annie in vista delle Piramidi. Confesso d'aver nutrito anch'io questa curiosità. 'Ma che scorgo laggiù oltre il termine del viale? Con un tuffo nel sangue comprendo ciò che vedo. Sono le Piramidi'. Palmo di naso. Queste Piramidi sembran proprio sorgere nel giardino della scrittrice, a una svolta del viale San Vito" (Pancrazi, "Annie alle Piramidi," 3)

[But readers want to travel to the Land of Cleopatra...and surprise Annie at the Pyramids. I confess that I too held this desire. "And what do I see beyond the end of the road? With an excited feeling I understand what I see. I see the Pyramids." What disappointment. These Pyramids seem to belong in the author's own garden, around the corner from Viale San Vito.]

In Vivanti's commitment to silences, we find her practice of the space she calls Egypt. We interpret her reticence with our own actualization of her Egypt. But why the photographs then? If a picture is worth a thousand words, why this blatant dichotomy between textual silence and pictures?

¹⁴Pancrazi, "Annie alle Piramidi," 3.

Thirty-nine uncoloured photographs are included in *Terra*.¹⁵ They are inserted in groups of four at the end of each sixteen-pages folio, except for the first folio where there are only two photographs; the remaining picture is that of the Sphinx in the frontispiece that we mentioned previously. The pictures are professionally composed, generally of scenery; in twenty-nine of them the photographer is identified only by the superimposed initials LZ or ZL.¹⁶ Captions describe all of them; but only one caption is of an identified person (“il mio dragomanno, Yahia”, opposite p. 48). This photo is one of only two closeups of a person. Neither Vivanti nor any member of her travelling party nor any other person mentioned in the book, appears. The photos are similar in content and composition to those found in picture postcard shops, or tour guidebooks, or in histories of Egypt, of Cook’s Tours and of Shepherd’s Hotel.¹⁷ (Vivanti held the copyright for the book, but this may not have included the photos). In reality, the photos are empty signifiers as far as Annie Vivanti’s Egypt is concerned. Despite their number, they fail to support any attempt at objective *reportage*. Vivanti was not normally a writer whose work was illustrated by photographs; only in one previous article, published in 1907, had she used them.¹⁸ It is interesting, therefore, to consider why they were included in *Terra*. And, as a corollary, if providing an account of her travels in Egypt was not her motivation for writing *Terra*, despite Mondadori’s suggestion that it was a travel piece, then what was the motivation?

¹⁵The third edition of the book, published in 1943 (after her death), dispenses completely with the photographs. Nor is there mention that any photographic material had ever been included. The text is otherwise unchanged except for one interesting omission: opposite the frontispiece of the original edition the list of other works by Vivanti published by Mondadori lists *Terra di Cleopatra* under *Viaggi*. In the 1943 edition there is no mention of *Terra* nor the category *Viaggi*.

¹⁶The well-known Zangaki brothers had photographed tourist sites in Egypt from the 1860s on, but they signed their work with their full surname. Other contemporary photographers of Egypt do not have initials LZ or ZL. The Archivio fotografico (Prato, Italy) was unable to help identify the photographer; nor could Mondadori offer any information. My thanks also to photographer A. Burko for her valuable comments about the pictures.

¹⁷For further information, see Brendon, *Thomas Cook*; Nelson, *Shepherd’s Hotel*; Williamson, *The Golden Age of Travel*. I was especially struck by the similarities between Vivanti’s photos and those reproduced in the well-known anthropological study by Elizabeth Cooper, *The Women of Egypt*, (1914).

¹⁸Chartres, “My Diary,” 332-335. While the article is purportedly written by Vivanti’s daughter at the height of her performance career as a child violinist, the true author is beyond a doubt Annie Vivanti herself.

I would like to advance some suppositions on this matter, based on my studies of Annie Vivanti. First, we cannot discount a financial aspect. Reaction to the six original articles published in *La Stampa* must have convinced Annie Vivanti that a book elaborating her trip would be economically profitable. Of course, she was right, or she would not likely have followed up with *Mea culpa*. She knew the reading taste of her public and I doubt she was at all concerned with the mediocre reception of either book by literary critics. Pancrazi knew this when he wrote in his review that “alla Vivanti bisogna perdonare ogni cosa” [Forgive Vivanti for everything] (Pancrazi, “Annie alle Piramidi,” 3). Secondly, by 1925, Vivanti had already confirmed the fascist sympathies that would eventually isolate her from her friends. To write a book about Egypt, given Italy's own colonization agenda elsewhere in Africa, would complement her political position of the time and continue the pro-Italian attitude reiterated in her writings of the Great War and after. And, thirdly, Vivanti was much concerned in that period with her personal vilification of British foreign policy. It cannot be overstated that her Egypt symbolises Ireland. She manipulated the contemporary newsworthiness of Egypt to promote her pro-independence views and her sympathies for the Irish cause. This is not hard to see in the manner in which she ridicules her British characters in *Terra* while making the point of having her Egyptian characters both express their dissatisfaction with England and also show their welcoming attitude towards the French and Italians. This is especially clear in the interview she describes with Zaghloul Pasha.

If one uncovers these rather manipulative (on Vivanti's part) pretexts, then there is a certain delusion in recognizing her highly constructed practice of Egypt. Mondadori's implied promise of a fascinating account of ‘viaggi’ becomes merely narrative. On the other hand, her cleverness in making her spatial syntax so credible is the mark of a talented writer.

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