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THE FALCON DIARIES

An American in Jordan

Emily Lodge

CreateSpace (304 pp.)

\$24.99 hardcover, \$19.95 paperback, \$14.99 e-book

ISBN: 978-0-692-10011-0; May 1, 2019

BOOK REVIEW

In this memoir, Lodge (*The Lodge Women*, 2014) recounts her immersion in the culture and politics of the Arab Middle East during a year in Amman, Jordan.

In 2006, Lodge, scion of the famous Boston family of politicians and diplomats, was invited to join her husband, Bob, in Amman. For the past three years, Bob had lived in that city serving as a consultant for a European electrical consortium operating in Iraq. Despite the dangers—Bob had only recently survived a suicide bombing at an Amman hotel—Lodge decided to make the move: “I felt it would be better to worry with him than without him,” she writes. Although the author and her husband would remain in Jordan for eight years, it was the first year that affected her most profoundly, exposing her to a cosmopolitan Arab society that she’d never known in the West. While Bob concentrated on his work in Iraq, Lodge took Arabic lessons and made friends with her neighbors in Jordan, many of whom were Palestinians whose families were displaced during the conflicts of 1948 and 1967. Her book is a month-by-month account of that first year from the spring of 2006 to the spring of 2007, recording her travels and encounters with Jordanians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and others, learning their family histories and their perspectives on contemporary politics. During a trip to Jerusalem and Ramallah, Lodge was able to witness how different religions, cultures, and governments interacted at checkpoints, in temples, during holidays, and in different languages.

Lodge’s narration is characterized by a clipped, somewhat scattered prose style, typical of a diarist, as she recounts anecdotes from journeys and conversations: “Lebanon is in many ways the sister country to Jordan, with most of the elite here, all my female friends, having gone to the American University of Beirut. I celebrate when they celebrate. I mourn when they mourn.” Along the way, Lodge’s memoir interpolates numerous bits of history that illuminate the backstories of the places she goes and the people she meets. The book concludes with a pair of interviews that she conducted at the time—one with the King of Jordan’s uncle, Prince Hassan; the other with the Israeli Ambassador to Jordan, Jacob Rosen—and she effectively highlights their divergent views on the history and future of Arab-Israeli relations. Although she addresses topics that have already inspired a vast library’s worth of volumes, Lodge’s clear interest in the Arab side of the story—as an American civilian who was previously unfamiliar with that perspective—helps this work to stand out in that crowded field. It’s clear that the author is passionate about her subject, rooted as it is in her personal life. Although the book has some inherent limitations, given the author’s perspective as an outside observer, it offers many insights into the Jordanian point of view that readers may not have encountered elsewhere.

An illuminating memoir of an American abroad that captures Arab and Israeli relations at a particular moment in time.

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