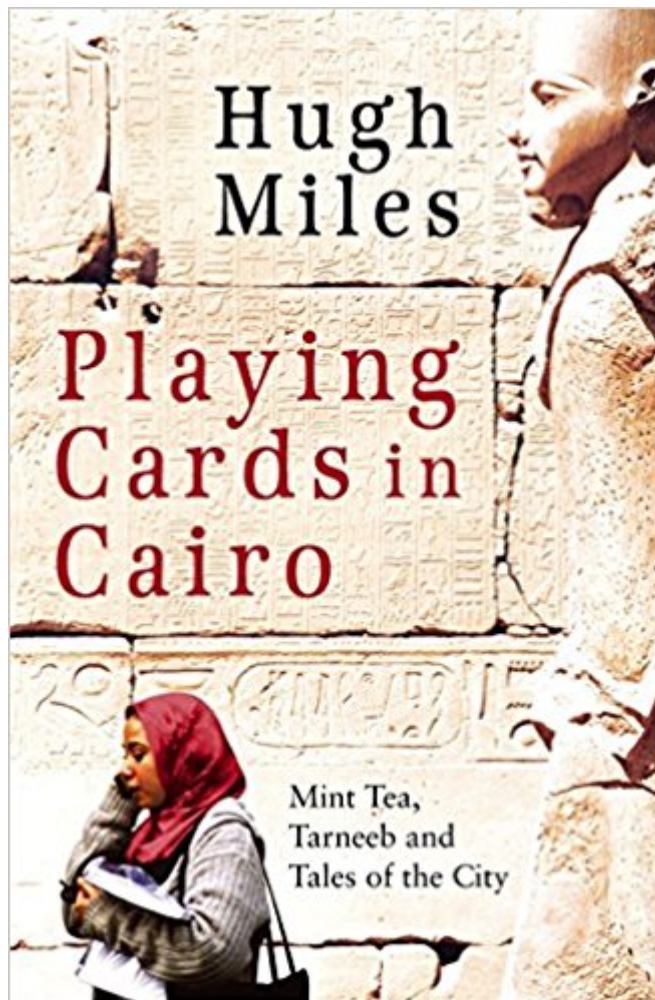


The book was found

Playing Cards In Cairo



Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Abacus (2008)

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Customer Reviews

I especially enjoy learning about several aspects of social life in Cairo.

I really enjoyed this book and gave insight to areas don't always see or hear about often. I have spent time in Egypt and really had me think I must go back and spend more time there. It is however one man's point of view and Egypt really is a place to experience, it is amazing along with scary and full on but well worth taking time there.

Hugh Miles is a British freelance journalist whose work took him to Cairo in 2004. There he met a young Egyptian woman, here called Roda. A group of Cairene ladies met regularly in Roda's home to play cards, and Roda invited him to join these parties, where he was often the only man present. This gave him the rare opportunity for a foreigner to enter the world of these women, and the book pivots around what he learnt about their lives. They are all modern in their attitudes; but however modern they are, they are all under the control of male members of their families, husbands, fathers and even of younger brothers. Their lives in Roda's apartment are kept secret from their menfolk - for example, most of them smoke at these parties, but before they return home they take precautions that their breath no longer smells of tobacco. One of them accepts being beaten up by her husband occasionally; another loves her tyrannical younger brother; they all complain, but do not or cannot openly rebel. A few years earlier they had all been a little freer, but in recent years, despite Mubarak's crackdown on the militant Islamists in Egypt, the conservative and religious

influences had become stronger and more difficult to resist. One of the women is in an urfi marriage (that is an unofficial marriage which is sanctioned by Islam, but which would be frowned upon by her respectable family if they knew about it.) Though in this way or another many modern young women secretly have sexual relationships with men, they often have their hymens sewn up again before a regular marriage, so that the wedding sheets can become bloodstained. And apparently, despite the Egyptian Constitution stipulating the equality of all citizens without distinction of religion or creed, if a Christian man wanted to marry a Muslim woman he would first have to convert to Islam; if he did not, he would have to leave Egypt and would not be allowed back. Incidents that happen around the women in this group become the hooks on which Hugh Miles can hang accounts of other aspects of Egypt and of Cairo life which he has covered as a journalist. So, for example, the reference to one brother, a policeman who has been sent to work in a prison (where he actually respects the pious and educated Islamists who are often held for months or years simply on suspicion) leads to a description of the horrific conditions in Egyptian prisons. The horrors of compulsory military service are hardly less: "the military regards fewer than one in four men killed in training as an acceptable fatality rate." There are descriptions of the huge difficulties of many people, even educated ones, have to find jobs, even though the Egyptian civil service is massively overmanned, with four or five people doing jobs which could easily be done by one person. He is fond of the women he meets in Roda's home; but, not surprisingly, he is not fond of Egypt.

When my Kindle died, I picked this up at the bookstore as something to read while awaiting my new Kindle. I'm so glad I did. I just returned from a brief trip to Egypt for the holidays and found myself confused, fascinated, and a bit unnerved by the culture, particularly as it pertains to women. This book didn't answer all of my questions but it did provide great insight. Reading this 2008 publication in 2012 is also particularly interesting as several of the author's comments and predictions have come to pass in recent events. I think that gave even more legitimacy to his perspective and account as I was reading it.

I grasped this book randomly and on a hunch from a local bookstore, I am not sure if it is an autobiography or fiction as I am still half way through the book. This book is a painful yet accurate analysis of the sad pathetic state we Egyptians have turned into during the past few decades. Though it might seem like a simple superficial tale some of the arguments in this book are very deep. for example the author describes the 1967 defeat as THE event that sliced our once great people wide open to wahhabi influence when we realized that arabism/nationalism failed. In short,

this is the British version of Naguib mahfouz and Alaa Alswany. You could almost see the characters in the story right in front of you. Definitely a must read for any Egyptian or a foreigner who is looking for the true essence of modern Egypt. Should be converted to a movie. Hatem A Tawfik, MDCairo, Egythatem35@gmail.com

Bought this book on my last day of a two week trip to Egypt and found it to be a look at every-day life in Cairo. A tour gives you so much history but almost nothing about how people live. This answered so many questions about the place of the veil, the role of women, the lack of personal privacy, bureaucracy all in a very readable format. I am about to e-mail everyone on the tour to personally recommend it! Granted, it is not a great work of literature but it accomplishes its goal and is a charming and delightful read.

Informative and objective yet sympathetic view and analysis of educated middle class Egyptians. Refreshingly, this enlightened expat exhibits sincere intent on understanding Egyptian culture rather than criticizing or denigrating it. He expends real effort in putting behaviours and observations in a meaningful context. Entertaining and occasionally funny reading..... but would have benefited from a better editor and an intensive lesson on the importance of commas and sentence structures.

This book is as cliché-full as an essay written by a sad teenage student spending a couple of summers in Egypt. A confusing mix of semi-fictional autobiography and shallow comments about Egyptian women who, according to the author, are obsessed about the most petty of things. The repeated profane use of terms pertaining to back-door sex were also inappropriate and out of place and context. It is sad that the author only met such a self-centered, pathetic, group of women in Cairo- and missed out on all the great self-assured and actualized ones. Horribly written. No insights whatsoever and could bore you to death. Stay away from this book!

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