



The Travels of Ludovico Di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, 1503 to 1508 (Classic Reprint)

Lodovico de Varthema

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World travellers and armchair explorers will be thrilled by Ludovico de Varthema's captivating travelogue, *The Travels of Ludovico DI Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, 1503 to 1508*. It contains first-hand observations of pre-colonial Asia in the 16th Century, as Varthema describes the daily lives, religious rituals, eating habits, marriage rites and other cultural practices among the people he encountered.

The book contains first-person observations of ancient cultures from a European's point of view. Some of Varthema's stories seem so incredible that the reader wonders about their accuracy. The translator provides helpful footnotes discussing the accuracy of Varthema's observations. The footnotes suggest sources for further reading and help the reader to make up his or her own mind about what is in the text.

One controversial story involves Varthema's travels in Siam (modern Burma). Varthema's travelling companion was asked by a local man to deflower his wife, and the companion agreed. Other rituals of Tarnasarri in Siam are revealed, including the tradition which mandates widows be burned alive after their husbands die. Although the translator could not find absolute confirmation of these controversial practices, he does not dispute Varthema's veracity on the matter. Another absorbing chapter discusses Javanese cannibalism.

This is exactly the kind of book which is important to preserve. Varthema's *Travels* provide so much more than the dry history of a textbook. Varthema was the first non-Muslim European to enter Mecca as a pilgrim and his description of the Hajj is comprehensive and richly detailed. Varthema the man is as mysterious as the cultures he visited. Almost nothing is known about the traveller outside of what is revealed by his books. Thankfully readers have his experiences to help them recreate a historical era about which little is known in the Western world.

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