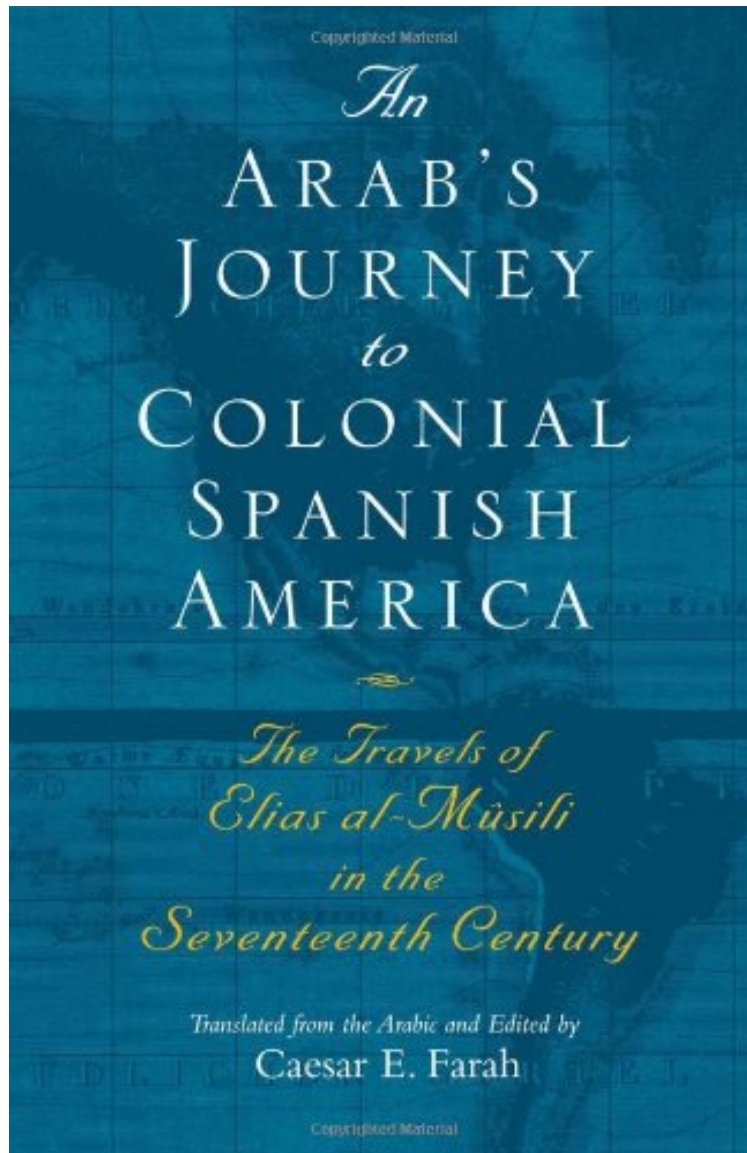


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An Arab's Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Elias al-Msili in the Seventeenth Century (Middle East Literature In Translation)

Caesar Farah, Elias Al-Musili
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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *An Arab's Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Elias al-Msili in the Seventeenth Century* (Middle East Literature In Translation):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. All That Glitters By Robert Lebling This curious little travelogue contains scant information on the Middle East but it is an interesting look at early Spanish America through Arab eyes. In fact, it purports to be the first account by an "Eastern" traveler to the New World. It was written by an Iraqi Chaldean priest from Aleppo, Syria, who visited South and Central America in the late 17th century, barely a century and a half after the Spanish conquests. In those days, non-Spaniards could not travel to the conquered "Indies" without permission from the king of Spain. Thanks to a recommendation from the Pope, Al-Msili was able to secure the needed permit. He appears to have been traveling throughout Europe in search of funding for his clerical activities in Iraq, and in the process was handed an opportunity to sail aboard a Spanish galleon to Venezuela. He ended up traveling from there to Colombia, Panama, Peru and other Andean lands, followed by adventures in Central America and Mexico. Al-Msili was not a great writer; his Arabic style was said to be weak. But he was adept at recording what he saw - wildlife, native peoples, Spanish overlords, the ever-present Jesuit missionaries - and supplemented his accounts with local lore and legend. He was fascinated by glittering gold and silver - perhaps due to responsibilities as a fund-raiser - and made sure to visit every mining operation he came across. These mines were restricted Spanish government sites, and could only be visited by someone with high-level "clearances." Somehow he managed to secure at least one mule load of silver and perhaps other treasures before he left the New World. In fairness, it should be said there is no evidence that Al-Msili misused the funds he raised. Eight years after starting out, he returned to his diocese in Aleppo, and there he finished his memoir, which remained in a single manuscript copy until it was discovered in that city in the late 19th century.

In 1905, the Jesuit scholar Antn Rabbt discovered the writings of Elias al-Msili in a Jacobite diocese in Aleppo, Syria. Al-Msili, a seventeenth-century Arab and a priest of the Chaldean Church, traveled widely across colonial Spanish America, becoming the first person to visit the Americas from Baghdad. Rabbt transcribed into Arabic and published those portions relating to al-Msili's travels. Acclaimed Middle Eastern historian Farah is the first to make these writings available in English translation.