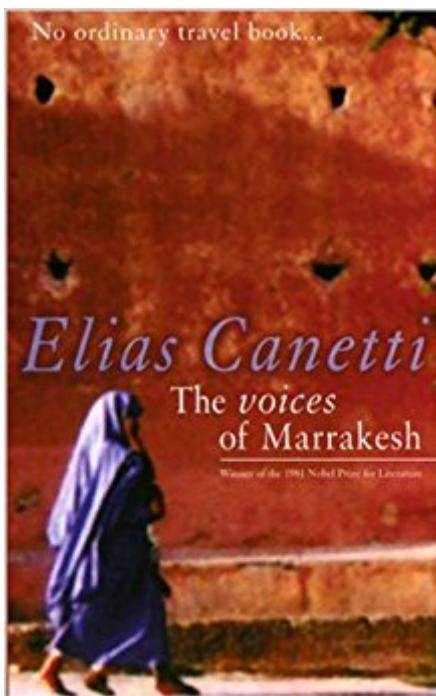


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# The Voices Of Marrakesh: A Record Of A Visit



## **Synopsis**

Winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature, Elias Canetti uncovers the secret life hidden beneath Marrakesh's bewildering array of voices, gestures and faces. In a series of sharply etched scenes, he portrays the languages and cultures of the people who fill its bazaars, cafes, and streets. The book presents vivid images of daily life: the storytellers in the Djema el Fna, the armies of beggars ready to set upon the unwary, and the rituals of Moroccan family life. This is Marrakesh -described by one of Europe's major literary intellects in an account lauded as "cosmopolitan in the tradition of Goethe" by the New York Times. "A unique travel book," according to John Bayley of the London Review of Books.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 104 pages

Publisher: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd (2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0714525804

ISBN-13: 978-0714525808

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.3 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,069,390 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #109 in Books > Travel > Africa > Morocco #821 in Books > Travel > Africa > General #2641 in Books > Travel > Reference > General

## **Customer Reviews**

Text: English, German (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"The voices of Marrakesh. A Record of a Visit" is one of the sharpest and most original accounts of the life in the Moroccan city written by a tourist. The 1981 Nobel Prize winner, and author of the famous "Auto da Fe", Elias Canetti, has described his impressions from the stay in Marrakesh. He was indeed a tourist, although the better word in his case might be "a visitor", and many of his observations are typical for such, but his language and style would make this slim book exciting anyway. His view makes the streets of Marrakesh interesting and mysterious, the camels have their own personal life, the donkeys accept their sad fate and the art of negotiation at the souk is a

starting point for the divagations on the human nature. There are, however, many chapters on not-so-touristically-obvious subjects. Canetti, being Jewish, was especially interested in the life of the Jewish minority and explored the Jewish quarter, which resulted in amazing observations, central to the book. His perception is acute and his opinion of people he encountered (he loved the native women!) are witty and deep at the same time. His voice is very fresh, the book does not sound like a guide, and one of the best points is that, despite his obvious fascination with his exotic surroundings, he can be very critical without being offensive and retaining the respect for the people he describes. His use of words is superb and the translation does not cause the loss of the flow and atmosphere he evoked. Although written more than 50 years ago, "The Voices of Marrakesh" did not lose the charm and magnetizing quality.

Even though this book is several decades old, its contents remain true to current Marrakesh. A sharply observed portrait, with each vignette, no matter how short, illuminating an aspect of this fascinatingly diverse and vibrant city and culture. The biggest change between Canetti's time and now, and the only "voice" of current Marrakesh absent from this book, is that of the tourist. But even in today's touristy Marrakesh, none of the voices Canetti describes are hidden or difficult to find. A lovely introduction to a lovely city.

This is a masterpiece and the best of story telling. Very inspiring to read. I gave many people this book as a present, even people who are not big into reading and they loved it.

Beautiful but disturbing images from a masterful writer and story teller. I can see why he received the Nobel Prize. His description of the poor in this exotic city remain strong in my mind.

Elias Canetti must be one of the more obscure winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1981). Also, one of the more eclectic. His most noted works are "Auto-da-FÃfÃ", his only novel and a modernistic, apocalyptic tour de force; "Crowds and Power", a treatise of political/sociological philosophy; and THE VOICES OF MARRAKESH, a travel book. Just as "Auto-da-Fe" and "Crowds and Power" are singular works, VOICES too is idiosyncratic, unlike virtually all predecessor works of its genre. The book was written, or at least first published, in the mid-Sixties, and it consists of impressions of a visit to Marrakesh from, it appears to me, just before Moroccan independence - in other words, the early Fifties. But details of time are not important in VOICES, and the book evinces a feel of timelessness. Camels, beggars, souk merchants, storytellers, street urchins, koubbas, the

Mellah (the Jewish quarter), scribes, marabouts, and more beggars. That is Canetti's Marrakesh, as sketched in limpid, minimalistic prose. Some of the incidents are so outlandish that I sense that Canetti is pulling the leg of his credulous reader. But there is no denying the charm, the mystery, and a certain otherworldliness of the book. THE VOICES OF MARRAKESH vacillates between the two themes of Canetti's overall work - humanism and the masses - and in the end seems to marry them in the bundle of rags that is plopped in the middle of the Djema el Fna emitting a deep, long-drawn-out, buzzing "e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-".

As a twelve-year foreign resident of Marrakesh, I read with interest this slim volume in about two hours. Before reading, I thought this was something written in the past 20 years. But I quickly discovered that the author's sejour in Morocco must have occurred in about 1959 (according to my Moroccan husband) due to certain events mentioned. (The book was first published in 1967.) The book takes place in the time when Morocco was still part of the French Colonial Empire, and when the French had placed a "puppet" sultan on the throne. The author speaks of camel markets in Bab Khemis, the camels having walked in a train of 105 animals from the Western Sahara. Those not purchased by butchers (yes, for eating) in Marrakesh were to continue walking north to Settat, the end of the line for the camel trains (just outside of Casablanca). This must have been before trucking was the common method of transport. Occassional "blue men" of the Sahara could still be seen in Marrakesh. This book will be of particular interest to any visitors of Moroccan Jewish origin who may be returning to visit the land of their parents. The author, we find out, is Jewish, and just happens to meet up with some members of the Jewish community. He gets pulled into their own little world (which no longer exists in Marrakesh, as most of that community emmigrated to Israel after 1967). He relates his experiences. If you are thinking of traveling to Marrakesh, or anywhere in Morocco, this little book will open your eyes to the sights, sounds, and smells of the city. Much of the city has changed, but the atmosphere has remained the same.

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