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Luxor

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Luxor* (2020) directed by Zeina Durra.

Keywords

Egypt, Spirituality, PTSD

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



Luxor (2020), dir. Zeina Durra

Hana is a physician on leave from the war in Syria, who has clearly seen terrible things, and apparently suffers from PTSD. She has chosen to spend her leave in the ancient city of Luxor, Egypt, and there meets by chance an old lover from years ago, Sultan, who is an archeologist. Together, they visit the sites of the past of Egypt, confronting their memories as well as the history of a place steeped in time and spirituality.

The film has a deliberate pacing and little detail about their personal history or Hana's job; this is not necessary, as we get the idea that she is seeking healing for herself on this trip, and the graves and temples of long dead kings seem to provide her some of this. People they meet are entranced with Egypt and its mystery, and even though they laugh at those who believe they are reincarnated or in touch with spiritual forces there, Hana finally consents to go to a Muslim spiritual healer who causes her to have a dream that somehow gives her peace. The director, Zeina Durra, said that she was actually inspired to make the film by a similar dream that she had herself

about a way to find peace in a world full of violence and hatred: in the film, white-clad children run playfully through a sacred temple site, expressing both the depth of transcendence and simple joy. In some way that cannot be put into words, this gives Hana the courage to accept love with Sultan and embrace hope in life. We don't know if she returns to a war zone, but she has had a glimpse of some transcendent reality that helps her to go on, and we get to share in a part of her transition, vicariously. The filmmaker and actors said that they wanted to create space for the unknown in the film, so not all is explained; the setting is in some ways outside of time, and the characters make reference to what lies beneath the surface of the earth in the archeological digs, or hidden within their psyches. I didn't expect spirituality to be such a big part of this film, actually, as I really expected more of a standard love story—but I was rewarded with this atmospheric meditation on spiritual seeking and finding, and visual representation of a peace that passes understanding and lies beyond verbal expression.