

Zarafa

Michael Allin

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A giraffe named Zarafa and the amazing men who were part of her story are chronicled in this incredible historical journey from the French Revolution to the time of Charles X. Just as Allin describes how the shallow Blue Nile and the deeper White Nile merge into the Nile, so, too, does he describe the ruthless personalities—barbaric and civilized—that came together around Egypt's gift of a giraffe to King Charles X of France in 1826.

Napoleon, who brought intellectuals with him to study a conquered Egypt, showed an illiterate Albanian mercenary, Muhammad Ali, what Egypt could become through modern technology. Ali, rising to lead Egypt as its Ottoman viceroy, ruled and modernized Egypt by using European men such as Bernardino Drovetti, tomb robber extraordinaire and the one who proposed the gift of a giraffe. Linked to these great men, Zarafa's story is told. From her capture to her journey from central Africa, down the Nile and across the Mediterranean to France, Zarafa is surrounded by her champions. Etienne Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, who founded the Paris Zoo with animals rescued from the mobs of the French Revolution, marched Zarafa from Marseille to Paris; Atir, one of her Arab handlers who stayed on to care for her in Paris, lived in a raised apartment in Zarafa's enclosure.

For his first book, Allin has created a wonderful work by combining historical facts with storytelling into an absolutely engrossing and entertaining tale.

NELLY HEITMAN (July / August 1998)

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