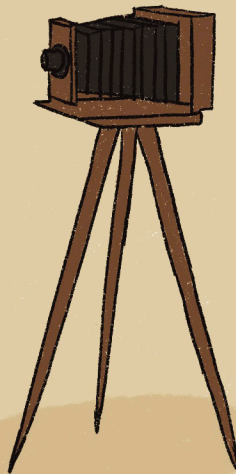
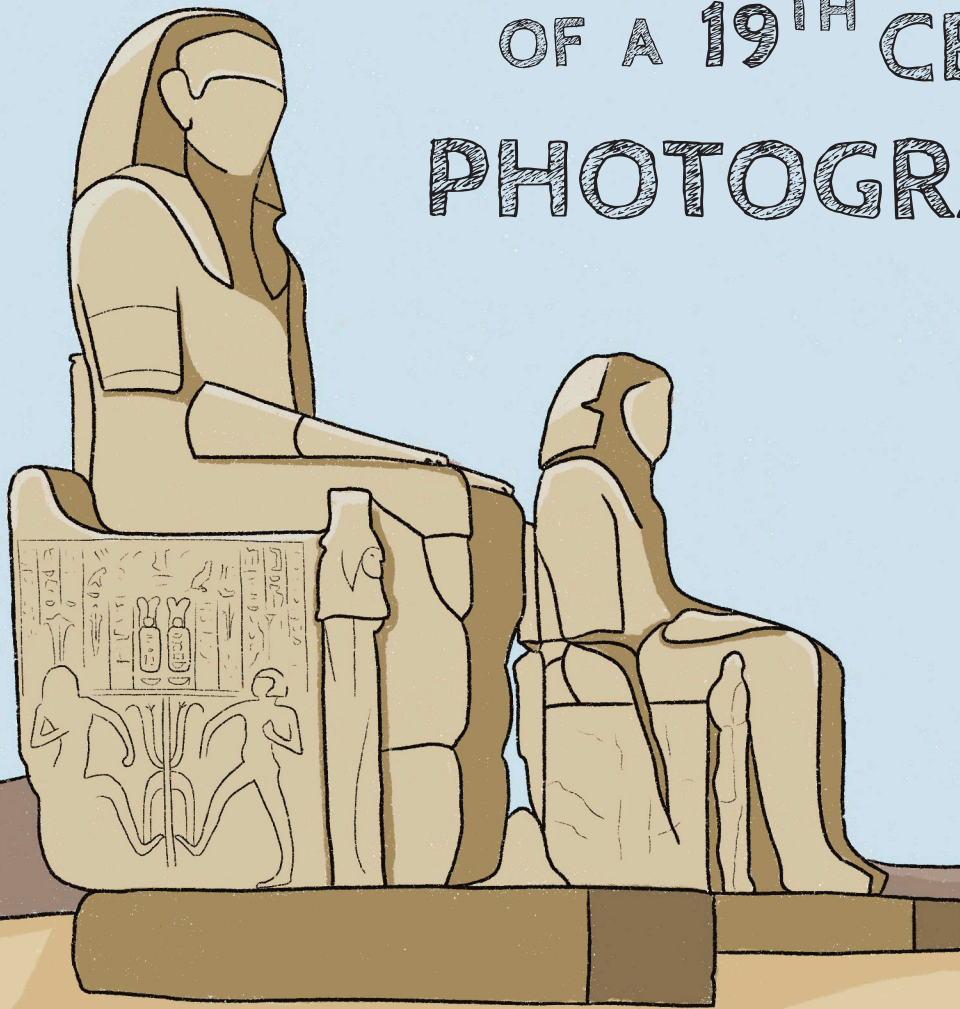


A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A 19TH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHER



Created for the ISAC Museum special exhibition

Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections

April 17–August 17, 2025

isac.uchicago.edu/stagingtheeast

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A DAY IN THE LIFE
OF A 19TH CENTURY
PHOTOGRAPHER



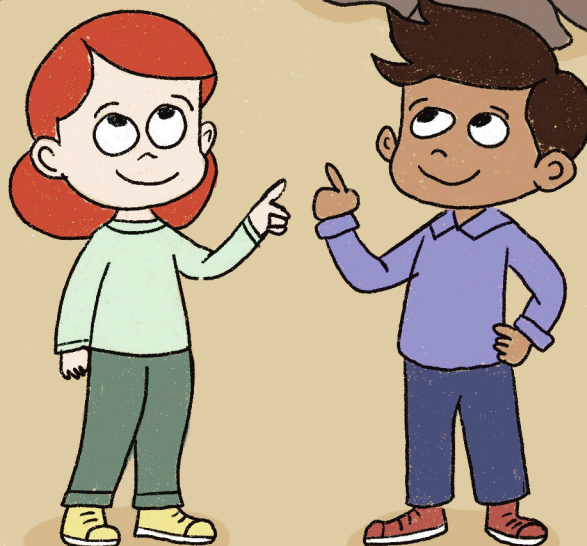
ISAC
MUSEUM

I'm Dana, and I study people who lived in the past!

To do that, I record and study objects and monuments.
I am a survey photographer.

Today, a photographer is present in all
archaeological missions. Recording sites started
as early as 1839, when photography was invented.

Hello! we are Libby
and Ahmad, what are
you doing?



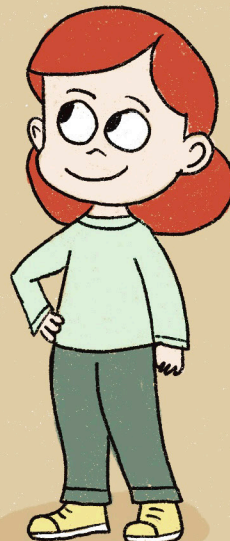
Taking the picture was not enough, you also needed to be careful when developing the image.

Let's start by learning the process.

In the 19th century, a print was made by soaking a sheet of paper in salt solution and then coating sides with chemicals to make it light sensitive.

After drying, the paper was put beneath a negative and exposed to light.

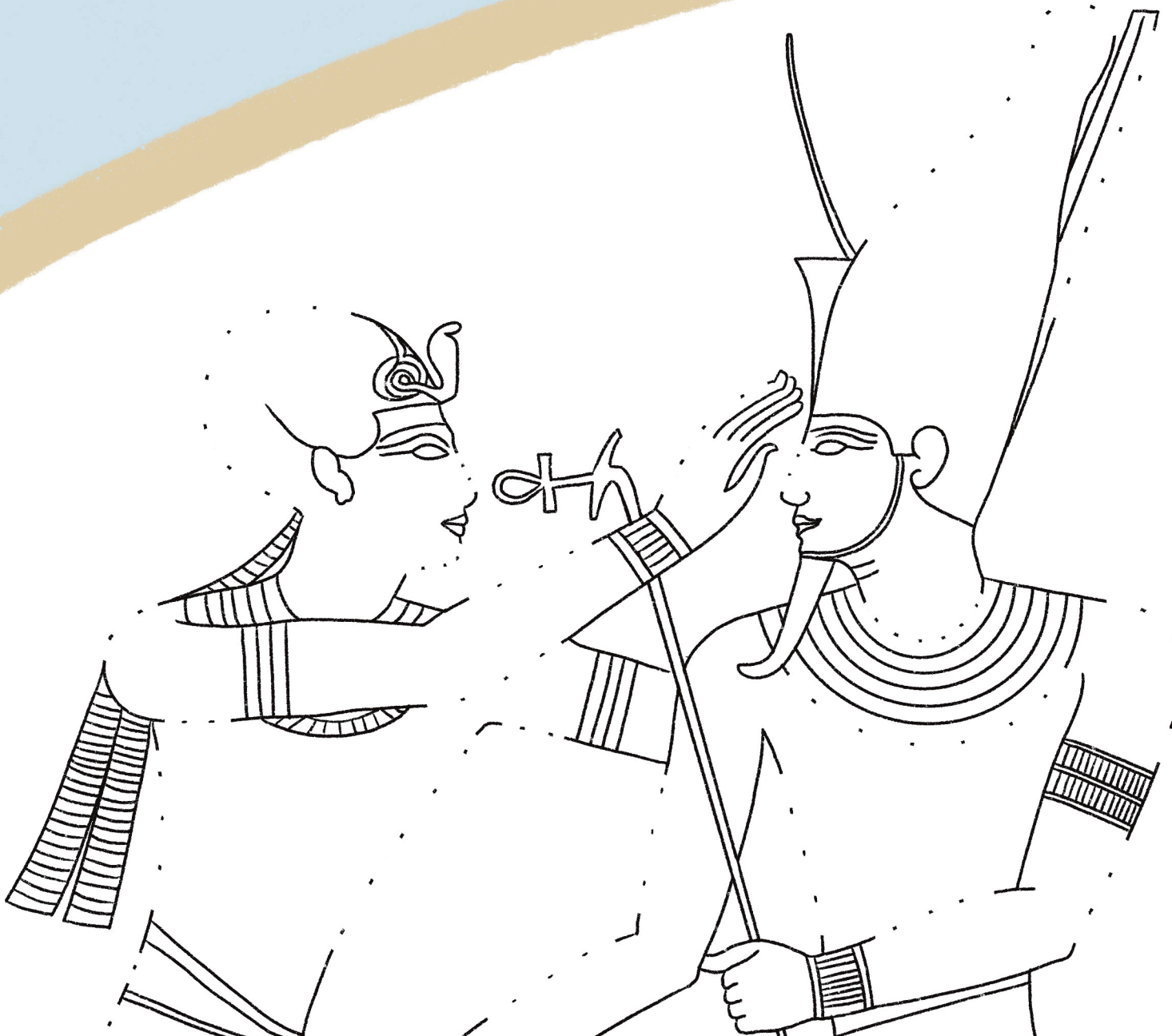
That's how you got a print.

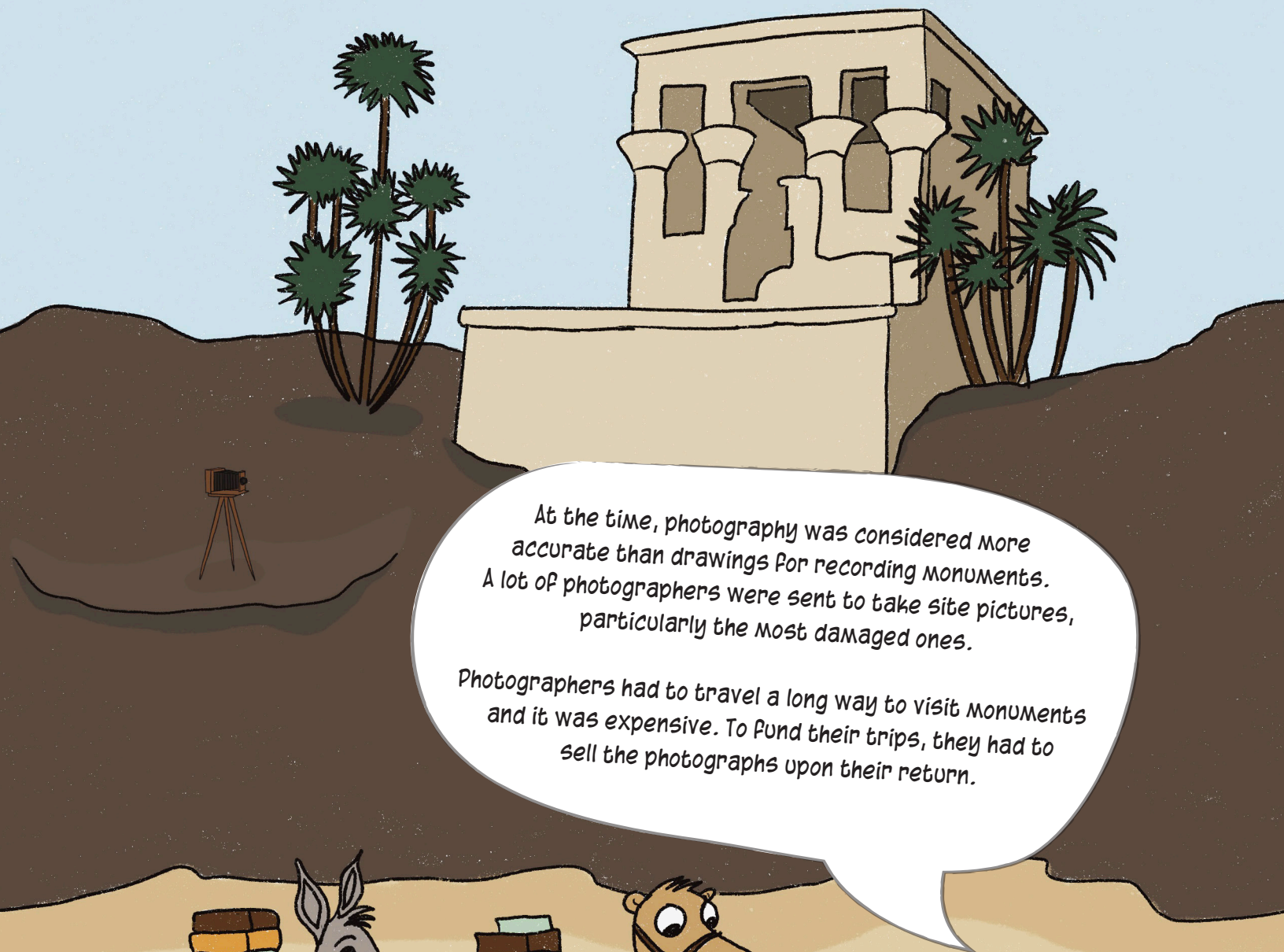


During travel, some photos were damaged. Some lines could be hard to spot, so we have to use our eyes to retrace the photographer's shot. Can you help trace the main lines of the picture?

Help us finish this scene by penciling in the dotted lines.

Take a black pen and draw over your pencil lines so that they match the other lines on the page.





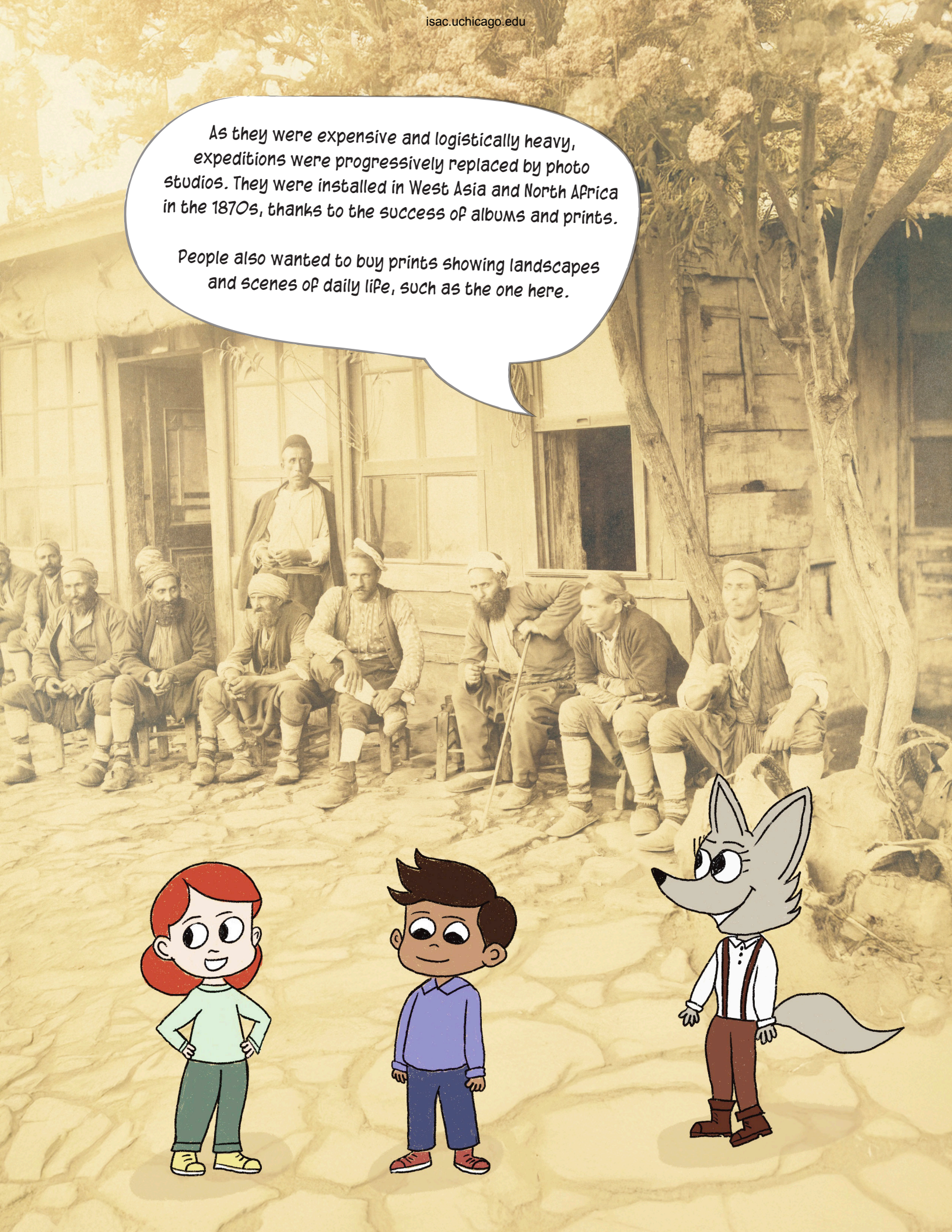
At the time, photography was considered more accurate than drawings for recording monuments. A lot of photographers were sent to take site pictures, particularly the most damaged ones.

Photographers had to travel a long way to visit monuments and it was expensive. To fund their trips, they had to sell the photographs upon their return.



As they were expensive and logistically heavy, expeditions were progressively replaced by photo studios. They were installed in West Asia and North Africa in the 1870s, thanks to the success of albums and prints.

People also wanted to buy prints showing landscapes and scenes of daily life, such as the one here.

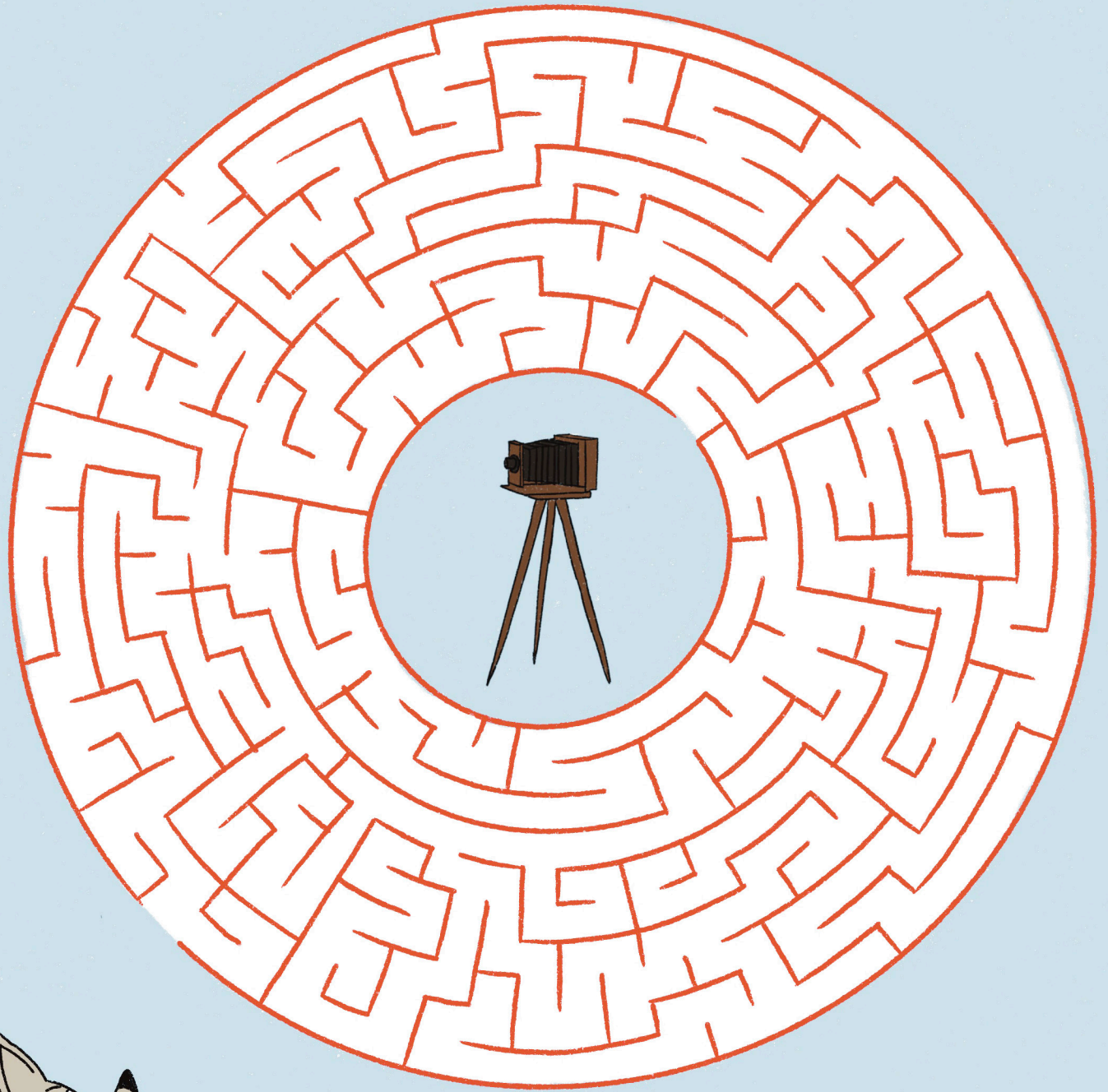


Unlike today, photos were only black and white, but some studios made a specialty of selling hand-colored pictures, with an artist coloring the photo negative after the picture was taken.

Now the color is missing, but like some photographers in the 19th century, you will have to pick which color is best suited to a photo studio print. Can you help us color the image?

Where you see a number, shade that part with a color you think people will like.





Dana lost her camera during the trip.
Can you help her find it?



Being a photographer at the time
was difficult, but exciting!

Most photographers had their work published
when they got back home, and prints of their
pictures were sold across the globe.

Photographs became an object of daily life,
even used in classrooms.



WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

This success of photo prints was obvious in Chicago during the World's Fair of 1893, called the Columbian Exposition. The organizers built replicas of an Egyptian temple and of a street in the city of Cairo, Egypt. Hundreds of pictures of them were taken for retail.

The replicas were displayed a block away from the ISAC Museum, on the Midway Plaisance, for half a year!





Survey photography continued after the end of the 19th century. In 1905, scholars from ISAC pursued the recording of monuments to save their images before they were too damaged.

This work continues today at ISAC, not only on the ground but also with aerial photography and satellite imagery.



GLOSSARY

ALBUM

A collection of a photographer's work that they can show to prospective clients.

APERTURE

The opening in a lens that controls how much light passes into the camera.

EXPOSURE

The amount of light that enters your camera, a combination of aperture and shutter speed. Overexposed photos appear very bright, while underexposed photos appear very dark.

BACKGROUND

The area behind the subject, farthest from the viewer.

FOREGROUND

The nearest part of a scene in front of the viewer.

CAMERA

The tool that you use to take photos.

LENS

A curved glass that light travels through before reaching the film inside your camera.

NEGATIVES

The film or specially prepared glass that your images are captured on, until they can be developed into positive prints or a photograph.

PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT

A picture made by using a camera that records an image on a surface that is sensitive to light.

SHUTTER

Like a curtain, this part of the camera opens and closes to let light in for a specific amount of time.

SURVEY

An archaeological survey is a search for archaeological sites. For photography it is the visual recording of these sites.

TRIPOD

A camera stand with three legs, for keeping the camera steady.





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ANCIENT CULTURES MUSEUM**
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