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LOST EGYPT

VOLUME I

The Epigraphic Survey

The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago
Chicago • Illinois

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IMAGES OF A LOST EGYPT

ON JANUARY 7, 1839, François Arago, a member of the French Chamber of Deputies, rose before a distinguished audience at the Académie des Sciences in Paris to announce officially the invention of photography by Louis Daguerre. Almost in the same breath, Arago voiced the implications the new technique would have for the documentation of Egyptian monuments, asserting that a single individual, armed with a camera, would be able to record the myriads of hieroglyphs covering the ancient walls of the temples at Thebes and Memphis, far outstripping the abilities of illustrators to record the same by hand.

That one of the first applications envisioned for such a revolutionary discovery should be the documentation of ancient ruins in Egypt is not as strange as it may sound to modern ears. In 1839 fascination in things pharaonic was at its peak in Europe. For one thing, the key to understanding the Egyptian language was well in hand, thanks to the decipherment of hieroglyphs by another Frenchman, Jean-François Champollion, in 1822. For another, the long-hidden wonders of pharaonic civilization had been thrust upon the European imagination by the publication of the compendious *Description de l'Égypte*, the extraordinary scientific product of Napoleon's ill-fated military campaign to Egypt in 1798. The mandate of the savants and artists who accompanied the army of Napoleon was to record not only the antiquities of Egypt, but also its flora, fauna, geography, and contemporary architecture and customs, thus encapsulating all vital information about the modern state that one might need for scientific—or martial—purposes. But the gargantuan chore of publication was finished only in 1830; what better way to hasten the task of documentation than through photography?

The first practitioners of the new science were soon in the field. From 1849 to 1850 Maxime Du Camp photographed monuments along the Nile in the company of Gustave Flaubert. He conceived of his oeuvre as documentary, measuring his monumental subjects and making scales to accompany his photographs. In 1852 Du Camp published actual prints of his negatives in the first photographically illustrated travel book about the Near East. Another early pioneer, Francis Frith, combined all of the impulses that propelled mid-nineteenth century photographers in Egypt—a personal interest in the country, a desire to document the monuments, and a pecuniary interest in meeting a growing demand by travelers for views of the land of the Nile. He was a travel writer, an entrepreneur, and an educated layman with an Egyptological conscience, who decried the increasing deterioration of the monuments. The seminal work of Du Camp and Frith, as well as that of John B. Greene and Félix Teynard, brought numerous photographers to Egypt on a permanent basis, especially as tourism increased the demand for souvenir photographs. And beginning in the 1850s, photography became a growing component of archaeological expeditions.

But the urge to document Egyptian antiquities during the nineteenth century, either by hand or by camera, was only one aspect of a far more general European interest in things oriental, an interest that spanned numerous interrelated spheres: cultural, artistic, scientific, and political. European intervention in the Orient during the nineteenth century was also colored by the waning of Ottoman hegemony over its provinces; and it was this apparently irreversible dissipation of the East that pointed up the lassitude of the Orient in contrast to the imperialist aspirations of the West.

Since photography was strictly a western invention, the early photographic records that are preserved—with only rare exceptions—were taken by western, Christian photographers. Moreover, most of those images, including the ones reproduced in this portfolio, were taken for commercial purposes, for the delectation of European visitors to the Nile valley and—despite the portability of camera equipment after the 1880s—as convenient souvenirs of their journey. Understandably, photographers strove to satisfy their customers by providing them with appropriate memories of their eastern travels.

Thus it is a peculiarly western viewpoint that one notices above all in early photographs of Egypt, which reveal several quite ambivalent attitudes toward the Orient. One attitude is typified by the same strident urge that brought Napoleon's scholars to Egypt: to catalogue and categorize the unfamiliar architecture and landscapes of the East, occasionally lending to the camera an objective, documentary eye that creates somewhat bleak and lifeless images, usually devoid of human presence. Another was a more romantic intent: to emphasize the picturesque aspect of eastern lands, where crumbling mosques and more ancient ruins lay partially buried in the desert sands, still awaiting discovery. A third was to illustrate with human subjects the sensuous, bizarre side of the Orient, no doubt mildly titillating to stifled Victorian sensibilities, by which the East was revealed as a place of exotic custom and relative squalor, where the inhabitants practiced an ethical code quite distinct from (and by implication inferior to) established western mores. Photographs of Europeans and natives grouped together invariably show the former in positions of social dominance, confirming the general impression of the East as an area inhabited by a somewhat naive population that welcomed the paternalism of enlightened occidental powers. It was the artificial production of images representing this expected Orient that was often the goal of nineteenth-century photographers.

Portraits of contemporary Egyptians and Nubians reveal a certain amount of commercial cynicism on the part of the photographer. Occasionally the same individuals are used as models for different studio poses, and they are identified as different people. In addition, there is a voyeuristic element. To western buyers, portraits lent an illusion of proximity and intimacy with Oriental peoples, without demanding the least comprehension of the subjects as individuals, or of their way of life.

Taking into account the preconceptions and predilections of nineteenth-century photographers and their audience—many of which attitudes have survived into the twentieth century—what remains is nonetheless an astonishing visual feast. The views of the ancient monuments are, in many cases, the same views one might wish today, but captured with far greater clarity than is possible with common modern methods. The chief interest to students of archaeology and Egyptology is the irreplaceable record left in these glass plates of the gradual uncovering of temples and pyramids, showing the monuments partially unveiled in the long process of exploration, a process that continues even today. Moreover, the temples and tombs in these images have yet to fall prey to the devastating deterioration caused by modern tourism and the demands of a growing population. Other views, depicting village scenes or family groupings, shed light on the social status and costumes of contemporary Egyptians. The rarer landscapes and river scenes throw the countryside into focus, depicting a land identical to that which exists today—and which existed a thousand years ago—along the banks of the Nile.

For the most part, however, these portfolio prints reproduce images of an Egypt that vanished decades ago, and which can only be enjoyed today by virtue of the extraordinary skill and persistence of the early practitioners of photography.

PLATES

1. DAME TURQUE SUR DIVAN, BY ZANGAKI

Wet collodion on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Signed at lower left “Zangaki”; caption at lower right “Nr. 800 Dame turque sur divan”

This salon view reveals a carefully staged and costumed odalisque, in a photograph taken by two brothers of Greek nationality known only as G. and C. Zangaki, who lived and worked in Egypt and Palestine beginning around 1870. Like Hippolyte Arnoux, who documented with his camera the construction of the Suez Canal, the Zangakis worked out of Port Said. Photographs like this answered a popular demand for the odalisque, a purported glimpse inside of the fabled harems of the Orient. Such disparate literary sources as Sir Richard Burton’s translation of the *Arabian Nights* and travelers’ descriptions of the *Almées*, or dancing courtesans of Egypt, blended together in the Western imagination, blurring the line between lascivious courtesans and the sequestered inhabitants of the harem, resulting in coquettish images such as this one.

2. THE GREAT SPHINX AT GIZA

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Carved from limestone bedrock during the Old Kingdom (c. 2800–2350 B.C.) as an image of Harmachis, the rising sun, the Sphinx was from time to time buried up to its neck by the encroaching Libyan sands. During the New Kingdom (c. 1560–1085 B.C.) it became popular for royal princes holding military posts in Memphis to ride their chariots across the ancient pyramid fields, perhaps in ritualized exhibition of their martial prowess. The stela of Thutmosis IV, visible in this photo between the front paws of the Sphinx, tells of how the prince Thutmosis was accustomed to drive his chariot round and round the Sphinx. One day he went to sleep in the shadow of the Sphinx, and the god Harmachis himself appeared to the young man in a dream, complaining of the sand which burdened his colossal image and promising the throne to the prince if he would clear away the sand. Evidently both Thutmosis IV and Harmachis kept their word. This photograph was taken after Émile Baraize completed his excavations of the Sphinx in 1934 and before Selim Hassan began new work on the site in 1936. The pyramid of Khafra (Chefren) is visible to the right; those of Menkaura (Mycerinus) and one of his queens to the left.

3. THE TEMPLE OF HORUS AT EDFU

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

This view shows the outer hypostyle hall of the temple of Horus at Edfu. The area was called in Egyptian the “hall in front of the sanctuary,” the equivalent of the Greek *pronaos*. Massive columns, their capitals decorated in florid composite styles that represent the lush growth of the swamps, hold up the colossal roof slabs. On one side of this hall is a small room, a symbolic representation of the *purgatorium*, where the king was ritually purified before entering the temple proper. On the opposite side of the hall, pendant to the *purgatorium*, there is a small room representing the temple library. Visible on the column in the right foreground is a figure of the king with his arms raised in the *tw3-p.t* pose, in which he is depicted reenacting the instant of creation when the god Shu lifted the heavens up from the earth, bringing into being the ordered world and thrusting aside unformed chaos.

4. STATUE OF HORUS AT EDFU

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

The granite statue of the falcon god Horus of Edfu stands in the court of Edfu Temple at the entrance to the pronaos. The well-preserved Ptolemaic temple of Horus was established during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–222 B.C.) on the site of earlier temple constructions and worked on later by Ptolemy X Alexander I (107–88 B.C.) and Ptolemy XII Auletes (Neos Dionysos, 80–69/8 B.C.) Edfu (in hieroglyphs *Db'*, in Coptic ETBO, from which the modern name derives) stood on the southern border of Egypt at the beginning of recorded Egyptian history. Its original situation as a frontier settlement is reflected in the cultic name of the city, *Bḥd.t*, meaning “place of the throne.” The chief deity of the city was Horus *Bḥd.ty*, “Horus of Edfu,” commonly represented as a falcon, or as a human figure with the head of a falcon. This local Horus was believed to have come to Edfu from Nubia in the south. In later times the ancient Greeks equated Horus with their god Apollo, and called the city Apollinopolis megalé, “Great City-of-Apollo.”

5. SETY I AND IOUSAAS

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

In the Temple of Sety I at Abydos, a scene from the west wall of the second hypostyle hall shows the pharaoh Sety I together with the goddess Iousaas. Sety I began this large temple and the associated cenotaph of Osiris (the “Osireion”), located near the cemetery of the first kings of Egypt and the legendary tomb of Osiris, but it was left to Sety’s son Ramesses II to complete the monument. In the scene shown here, the goddess Iousaas cradles the king’s head and presents to his nostrils the sign of life, flanked by two signs representing dominion. Iousaas was a consort of Atum, and she personified the desire that acted upon the mind of Atum and led him to begin creation through masturbation.

6. VILLAGE SCENE, BY ANTONIO BEATO

Silver gelatin on glass, 29 × 40 cm

Signed at lower left “A. Beato”

The location of this quiet village scene cannot be identified. Of Egyptian dwellings, E. W. Lane wrote in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836):

Very few large or handsome houses are to be seen in Egypt, excepting in the metropolis and some other towns. The dwellings of the lower orders, particularly those of the peasants . . . are mostly built of unbaked bricks, cemented together with mud. . . . The chambers have small apertures high up in the walls, for the admission of light and air—sometimes furnished with a grating of wood. The roofs are formed of palm branches and palm leaves . . . laid upon rafters of the trunk of the palm, and covered with a plaster of mud and chopped straw. . . . Most of the villages of Egypt are situated upon eminences of rubbish, and are surrounded by palm trees, or have a few of these trees in their vicinity.

The signature of the artist has been partially scratched out of the negative, a not uncommon result of one photographer having purchased the plates of another.

7. LUXOR TEMPLE ACROSS THE NILE

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Seen in this view from the west bank of the Nile, Luxor Temple was the goal of the yearly journey of the god Amun of Karnak during the Feast of Opet. Luxor Temple was one of the locations in Egypt believed to be the “Place of the First Occasion,” the primeval mound of creation; here Amun of Karnak and his earthly representative, the king, came for rejuvenation. Luxor Temple was also linked to the Eighteenth Dynasty temple across the Nile at Medinet Habu, the traditional burial place of the Ogdoad (four male and female pairs of deities who assisted the creator god), and of a primeval, serpentine, creative form of Amun himself. The southernmost portions of Luxor Temple were built by Amenhotep III; the northern court and its great pylon, with scenes commemorating his Pyrrhic victory at Kadesh, are the work of Ramesses II.

8. OFFERING SCENE OF SETY I

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

In another scene from the Temple of Sety I at Abydos, in the shrine of Isis in her small chapel, the king offers a tray of food to the goddess. Among the foodstuffs can be seen two plucked and drawn ducks, several figs, a pomegranate, a bowl of round fruits or berries, slabs of fresh meat, and round cakes or bread loaves. Below the king’s elbow is the beginning of the hieroglyphic label to the scene, the verb *f3i.t*, “raising, lifting.” The lowest sign in the group, the determinative of the verb, is a reduced image of the scene itself, a small figure of the king lifting up a miniature tray of food. In Egyptian decoration, scenes and inscriptions are inextricably intertwined, and often interact with each other.

9. THE MUMMY OF AMENHOTEP II

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Amenhotep II was the paragon of the athletic kings of the early Eighteenth Dynasty and boasted of physically Homeric deeds. Victor Loret found the king’s mummy in 1898, still resting in his own sarcophagus in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. At that time, before the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, he was the only pharaoh whose mummy had survived the vicissitudes of continued robbery and defilement and remained in his own sarcophagus in his own tomb. Amenhotep II lay there, wrapped, until local thieves plundered the tomb in 1901. Howard Carter tracked down the latter-day robbers, using, among other clues, the imprints of their feet in the dust of the tomb. The mummy, exposed from the waist up by this desecration, was returned to the sarcophagus, and a lamp was placed at its head. In 1931 the mummy was removed for safekeeping to the Cairo Museum.

10. DAHABIYEH AT LUXOR

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

This unsigned plate is attributed to Antonio Beato. The dahabiyeh, a “house barge,” was recommended by Baedeker’s *Egypt* guide as late as 1929 as the perfect accommodation for “travellers to whom independence of action and economy of time are more important than economy of money.” The vessels rode low in the water, with passenger rooms, a dining salon, a library, and even a piano, located aft. The raised deck was reserved for the use of the passengers, and the lower deck was frequented by the crew of the craft. Dahabiyehs were slow-traveling vessels, and men and animals had often to tow them against the current of the Nile. As temperatures rose in the spring, the demand for the boats decreased, and most of the crews returned to summer farming until autumn again brought the return of tourists.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE EARLY DOCUMENTATION OF EGYPTIAN MONUMENTS

WITHIN TEN MONTHS of the official announcement of the invention of photography in 1839, two Frenchmen, Horace Vernet and Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, were making daguerreotypes in Egypt. Their image of the harem gate of Mehmet Ali at Alexandria is probably the first photograph made in Egypt and caused a sensation when exhibited in Paris, due to its suggestive subject matter. Thus opened a remarkable chapter in the documentation of the monuments of Egyptian civilization.

Early photographic processes were laborious and not at all suited chemically to the climate of Egypt, requiring unusual dexterity and patience; all of them had limitations. Daguerreotypes were positive images on copper plates; publishers issued collections of engravings and aquatints based on them, but the daguerreotypes themselves could not be mass reproduced. As a result of his experience with the daguerreotype in Egypt, for example, one photographically inclined traveler expressed his relief that several of his friends were artists. After 1850, most of the photographers working in Egypt made use of the wet collodion process. Using this method, the photographer spread collodion evenly over one side of a sheet of glass, dipped the glass in silver nitrate in order to coat the surface with photo-sensitive silver salts, hurriedly exposed the wet plate, and developed and then fixed the glass negative. To this frenetic and closely paced process, the Egyptian climate often added the horrors of boiling chemicals, pouring sweat, desiccating heat and blasting sand. The necessary materials required a wagon which the photographer dragged with him everywhere—some of the Egyptians imagined with admiration that Francis Frith's photographic wagon housed his gorgeous wives, whom he jealously and watchfully brought with him on all his photographic excursions. In the 1850s and 1860s, Louis de Clerq used the outmoded calotype process instead of glass plates, perhaps in the interest of travelling light.

Photography was further revolutionized by the introduction of more accessible and more portable materials. Dry gelatin-coated glass plates entered the market after 1880, eliminating the need for a photographic wagon trade. At the turn of the century, roll film and hand-held cameras made every traveler his (or her) own photographer, at which point touristic and scientific photography took their separate ways.

Photographers of the nineteenth century were not bound to document monuments in a systematic fashion, but instead were making records of their voyages and experimenting with the infant camera. At times, however, a monument may still be available only through the work of early photographers. In order to get what information exists on the birth house of Cleopatra VII at Armant, one must consult the albums of Frith, for the small temple was torn down to build a sugar factory shortly after his visit. In 1859 Frith became the first photographer in Nubia. There he took views of the temple of Amenhotep III at Soleb, a monument that remains virtually unpublished. For Armant and Soleb, Frith's pioneering documentation is ineffably precious.

Although many archaeological expeditions of the nineteenth century included photography as an aspect of recording, graphic artists remained at the heart of expeditions dedicated to epigraphy, the recording of monumental scenes and hieroglyphic inscriptions. Partly this was due to the limitations of publication, but the technique of photography itself imposed its own strict bounds. The camera gives photography what Frith termed its "essential truthfulness," but it is a selective truthfulness, in epigraphy often deceptive and ultimately not truthful. A photograph necessarily shows a portion of a monument under a single set of lighting conditions. On a carved wall, for example, lines inscribed parallel to the angle of light will tend to disappear, while elsewhere, small scratches can cast dark and deceptive shadows. For this reason, interpretive drawings that emphasize the original decoration of the wall—and that artificially minimize extraneous damage—are the definitive documents, which photography can only complement.

In the modern study of Egyptian monuments, older photographs are an invaluable tool. Often, with their help, the bubbles on the surface of a salt-encrusted block may emerge as the deformed but yet recognizable forms of a human head or a snatch of inscription. Even general views and landscape shots contain decisive information. The pits, trenches, and debris dumps of archaeological excavations have altered the original terrain of Thebes and other sites. Wadis are filled in, and mounds stand where once none existed. Though even in the mid-nineteenth century the monuments and landscapes of Egypt were veiled beneath ruined architecture and medieval detritus, early pre-excavation photographs give us the best idea of the possible ancient topography of a site. This can assist in the interpretation of Egyptian texts, and in understanding the influence of the immediate landscape on the design and appearance of individual Egyptian monuments.

The glass plate collection from which these portfolio images were produced was purchased in Luxor in 1987 from a local vendor, with the purpose of augmenting the photographic archives of the Epigraphic Survey and its documentary record of Egyptian monuments, particularly those in the Theban area. The prints of the *Lost Egypt* portfolio series were produced at Chicago House, the field headquarters of the Survey in Luxor. Unlike other methods of reproduction, in which an artificial light source is used on a mass-production basis, the glass negatives have been exposed individually to direct sunlight on printing-out-paper, resulting in miniscule differences among the prints. Depending on the density of the negative and the strength of the sun, exposure times varied between five minutes and two hours. Each print was then toned in a gold chloride solution. This step determined the final color of the image. To insure the permanence of the image, the print was fixed in two separate sodium thiosulfate baths after toning, and finally the print was placed in a water bath. The dried prints were then mounted using archival materials. Great care has been taken to produce prints that would have resembled closely those that one might have purchased while journeying through Egypt in the nineteenth century.

Text written by Peter F. Dorman, John Coleman Darnell, and Susan Lezon
Prints made by Susan Lezon, James Riley, and Cecile Keefe
Traycases handmade by Claudia Cohen

Portfolio Number 24



N° 890 Dame turque sur divan



















