Internet publication of this work was made possible with the
generous support of Misty and Lewis Gruber

LOST EGYPT

VOLUME II

The Epigraphic Survey

The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago
Chicago · Illinois

The Epigraphic Survey gratefully acknowledges the assistance of

The Friends of Chicago House Egypt Tour of November 1988
The Getty Grant Program of the J. Paul Getty Trust
Jill Carlotta Maher

Printed: Two hundred copies

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 92–61603
ISBN: 0–918986–89–3

The Oriental Institute, Chicago

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 *Déscription 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. Temple of Abu Simbel
Silver gelatin on glass, 29 × 40 cm

Abu Simbel is on the west bank of the Nile, 280 km (180 miles) south of Aswan, in the ancient and now submerged land of Nubia. The area of the temple was called "the Domain of Ramesses-Beloved-of-Amun." Built by Ramesses II, it was rediscovered for the western world by Ludwig Borchardt in 1813. The colossus to the left of the central portal probably broke apart due to seismic activity already during the second half of the reign of Ramesses II. Of the features of the colossi, Amelia Edwards wrote:

> A godlike serenity, an almost superhuman pride, an immutable will, breathe from the sculptured stone. He has learned to believe his prowess irresistible, and himself almost divine. If he now raised his arm to slay, it would be with the serene placidity of a destroying angel.

Beginning in 1963, the temple of Ramesses II and the smaller neighboring temple to his wife, Nefertari, were cut into blocks and removed to higher ground to save them from the rising waters of Lake Nasser, the huge reservoir behind the Aswan High Dam. This photograph was taken after Alexandre Barsanti completed his restoration work on the temples in the years 1909–1910.

2. The Nile during Inundation
Silver gelatin on glass, 29 × 40 cm

Bathing was important to the ancient Egyptians, and according to Herodotus intolerably important to their priests. When the Nubian pharaoh Piye was preparing to enter the temple complex at Karnak, the king instructed his troops:

> When you arrive in Thebes, in front of Karnak, enter into the water and purify yourselves in the river (Nile). . . .

This photo appears to have been taken during the time of the Nile's annual inundation. Rains in the highlands of Abysinnia swelled the Blue Nile, which met the White Nile at Khartoum and sent the rising, silt-laden waters north to cover the fields of Egypt. During the summer months Egypt disappeared beneath the brown waters, the whole of the land a vast sheet of water stretching from desert to desert, with the villages protruding like islands from the flood. In antiquity this was a time of increased navigation, festivals in honor of the inundation, booths and bowers on the edge of the swollen river, and festooned boats upon the waters. Since the building of the High Dam, the inundation no longer occurs in the Nile valley north of Aswan.

3. Femme turque, by Zangaki
Wet collodion on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm
Signed at lower left "Zangaki"; caption at lower right "Nr. 805 Femme turque"

Through her transparent veil, a purported "Turkish lady" gazes coyly past the camera. Studio portraits were often carefully staged, the models wearing an assortment of their own clothes combined with costumes and props belonging to the photographer. In one instance, the Khedive Ismail gave the Viennese painter Carl Huber the old Musaffir Khan palace in Cairo as a studio. Huber and his friend then proceeded to employ female Egyptian street vendors as models. Their special interest was creating photographs that gave life to Western harem fantasies, and one of Huber's guests noted that the women soon ran about the palace dressing and behaving just as a fancier of the *Arabian Nights* would wish. All of the surviving studio portraits by Zangaki are considerably more tame.

4. Tomb of Sety I
Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

The tomb of Sety I lies in the Valley of the Kings. In this sculpted detail, the king offers wine to the goddess Hathor. Often called a goddess of love, Hathor can also represent seductive danger. This scene suggests the worship of the eye-lioness-uraeus forms of the "distant goddess," whose myth is perhaps best attested by the "Story of the Departure of Hathor-Tefnut out of Nubia." Known since the New Kingdom (c. 1560–1085 B.C.), the story tells of the angered eye of the sun, described as the daughter of Ra, a violent goddess in lioness form (Tefnut). Retreating into Nubia, she is recalled by Ra, and after she is enticed back to Egypt, she becomes once more the benevolent and happy Hathor. Nonetheless, she requires constant attention, in the form of wine, music, dance, and offerings of desert game, lest she become angry and leave Egypt again.

5. Bishareen Family Portrait, by Zangaki
Wet collodion on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Though many early travellers encountered the Bishareen in Nubia, none wrote a detailed account of them. The Bishareen appear once to have had a fair idea of their own history, and there are reports that before the time of the Mahdi in the 1880s, they possessed some written accounts of their traditions. They lived in an area stretching from Aswan southward to Berber on the Nile River and Kassala on the Atbara River. Perhaps descendants of the earlier nomadic Bedja and Blemmyes, their legendary birthplace was Gebel Elba, near Aidhab; their name is traced to an eponymous ancestor "Bishar." Armed with broad swords, large round hide shields, at times caparisoned in chain mail passed down

from the Middle Ages, their camel-mounted warriors were visions of the Prophet's own men. During the Mahdist wars in the Sudan, they were of somewhat divided loyalties: some followed the Mahdist chief Osman Digna, others annihilated Mahdist raiding parties, and some served as native irregulars with the British. Following the defeat of the Khalifa by the Anglo-Egyptian forces at Omdurman, the Bishareen declined. Although this group portrait bears no signature, the two women reappear as models in at least one other photograph signed "Zangaki."

6. Tomb of Sennofer
Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Mayor of Thebes during the reign of Amenhotep II, Sennofer built his tomb on the west bank of the Nile, on a high point of the hill of Sheikh Abd-el-Gurna. The burial chamber is remarkable for its roughly hewn ceiling, an undulating surface painted to resemble an arbor with vines and clusters of grapes. Depicted on a pillar in the tomb, Sennofer's wife Meryt presents to her husband a basket containing a golden collar. The accompanying text describes the gesture of her right hand, "making fast the double heart (amulet)," referring to the decoration in the shape of two stylized hearts which hangs from Sennofer's neck. Within the hearts are written the prenomen and nomen of Amenhotep II. A number of the cracks visible in this photo have since widened, and portions of Meryt's arm are now lost.

7. Ptolemy VIII at Kom ombo
Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Horus presents an ornate scimitar of victory and palm staffs of long life to Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and two queens named Cleopatra. This serene religious genre scene belies the often turbulent events of the king's life. Ptolemy VIII was called, among other things, *Physkon*, "pot-belly," and classical authors described him as physically and morally disgusting. He was apparently corpulent and fond of gauzy garments that openly displayed his bloated and degenerate physique. He reigned initially with his brother Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II, but he soon chased his brother out of Egypt. Ptolemy VI eventually returned from exile in Rome, and Ptolemy VIII retreated and ruled as king in the Libyan coastal city of Cyrene. On the death of his brother, Ptolemy VIII married Cleopatra II, had his nephew Ptolemy VII killed, and resumed ruling as king in Egypt. This time he was crowned in the traditional pharaonic manner, and married his niece and stepdaughter, Cleopatra III. As a result of this, Cleopatra II chased both Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III out of Egypt, and the pair ruled for a while in Cyprus. Ptolemy VIII finally won back the throne and achieved a reconciliation between himself and his queens.

8. The Ozymandias Colossus at the Ramesseum
Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

This is a photograph of the second, or "festival," court of the Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Ramesses II, called by the ancient Egyptians "The Temple of Millions of Years United with Thebes." Classical travellers referred to the temple, already much quarried away, both as the "Tomb of Ozymandias" and as the "Memnonium." It was Jean-François Champollion who correctly identified the ruins as those of Ramesses's mortuary temple and coined the name "Ramesseum." On the right lies the toppled torso of a seated colossal statue of Ramesses II carved in red granite, called the Ozymandias colossus, originally about 20 meters high and weighing roughly 1,000 tons. Ozymandias is a Hellenized form of the prenomen of Ramesses II, Usermaatra. Shelley's famous poem "Ozymandias" appears to have been inspired by Diodorus Siculus's description of this Ramesseum colossus.

9. Temple of Amun at Karnak
Silver gelatin on glass, 29 × 40 cm

The enormous ruin field of Karnak consists of several connected enclosures, each containing a number of temples. In the center is the great Amun temple complex, with its intersecting avenues of courts and pylons. This view of the Temple of Amun looks westward from the entrance of the fourth pylon through the central aisle of the great Hypostyle Hall, whose roof slabs were supported by one hundred thirty-six columns. The obelisk in the foreground is that of Thutmosis I. The tips of obelisks, and at times even portions of their sides, were originally sheathed in polished metal, reflecting the rays of the sun. Erected by pharaohs of the New Kingdom (c. 1560–1085 B.C.), this monumental processional avenue witnessed numerous alterations and renovations down through the Roman Period—as well as the disastrous sack of Karnak by plundering Assyrian armies in 663 B.C.

10. Colossus of Ramesses II at Luxor Temple
Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Hemmed in by massive papyrus-bundle columns, this granite colossus was originally carved for Amenhotep III and two centuries later was recut for Ramesses II. Standing by the left leg of the king is Queen Nefertari. Of the eleven surviving standing colossi in the first court at Luxor Temple, five are statues of Amenhotep III that Ramesses II "renewed" for his courtyard. The reuse of the monuments of an earlier ruler was not always a hostile usurpation or the outcome of *damnatio memoriae*, but could also be a recutting of an ancient monument in order to renew the creative powers of the temple.

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.

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Portfolio Number 24