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# LOST EGYPT

VOLUME III

## The Epigraphic Survey

The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago  
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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 *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. TOMB OF RAMOSE

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Ramose was vizier during the reign of Amenhotep III, and perhaps for a time under his successor, the religious zealot Amenhotep IV, who was to change his name to Akhenaton. Ramose’s tomb shows a clear transition from the artistic standards of the reign of Amenhotep III to the yet more mannered art of the Amarna period, and its carved walls are widely and justly admired for the exquisite beauty of their reliefs. The scene pictured here, in the more restrained and elegant style that predates the Amarna period, depicts two close relations of Ramose—the Overseer of the Horses of the Lord of the Two Lands, the Royal Messenger in All Countries, May, and his wife, Werel. Particularly noteworthy is the contrast between the gem-like cutting of the wig curls and the uncarved swelling of the orbs of the eyes, which are highlighted only in black paint.

## 2. VOILIERS ARABES DANS LE NIL, BY ZANGAKI

Wet collodion on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Signed at lower left “Zangaki”; Caption at lower right “Nr. 411 Voiliers arabe [*sic*] dans le Nil”

With the annual fluctuations in the level of the Nile due to the inundation, the prime sailing time for large vessels was—before the construction of the High Dam at Aswan—limited to the six months between July and December. For this reason, a year-round use of small boats was often preferred. During the reign of Ramesses II, the fleet that carried sandstone blocks from the quarries of Gebel Silsila (near Kom Ombo) to Thebes for the construction of the Ramesseum, the king’s mortuary temple, consisted of small craft, each of which carried only 5 to 7 blocks, about 15 tons. Attested already in antiquity, the triangular lateen sail was to become during Byzantine times and the early Middle Ages the most important sail of the Mediterranean world. The tall, narrow lateen—perhaps derived from a braided-up square sail with a slanted yard for sailing close-hauled in a hard wind—is well suited to catching the breezes skimming above the Nile between the looming desert escarpments.

## 3. EGYPTIAN FARMERS

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

A group of Egyptian farmers, or *fellaheen*, stand below a palm tree at the edge of the cultivation. In the Egyptian Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom (c. 2060–1785 B.C.), the image of the soul of the dead taking its leisure beneath a tree is inimical, for danger lurks in the shadows. By the time of the New Kingdom (c. 1560–1085 B.C.), however, this had changed, and the soul of the dead is often shown drinking water in the shade of a palm. The goddesses Hathor and Nut, providing food for the souls in the Hereafter, were at times depicted as trees, and the dead man could desire a metamorphosis into a dom-palm—a manifestation of the potent fertility god Min. The fruit of the date palm was one of the chief sweeteners of the ancients, and, as in antiquity, all parts of the palm tree are still used by the Egyptians.

## 4. TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT AT DEIR EL BAHRI

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

The sprawling mortuary temple of Hatshepsut at Thebes, called the “Holy of Holies,” dominates the impressive cliff-rimmed bay at the foot of the Libyan plateau on the west bank of the Nile. The terraced design of her temple copies and elaborates upon the design of the earlier temple to the left, belonging to Mentuhotep Nebhepetra, the Theban king who finally defeated the Heracleopolitan rulers of Middle Egypt, reuniting the country and founding the Middle Kingdom (c. 2060–1785 B.C.). Immediately to the south of Hatshepsut’s temple, and attached to it, is a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Hathor. This shrine is a hemispeos, as the inner rooms are partially cut into the rock, an elaborate architectural image of the far-wandering goddess Hathor, eye of the sun, coming out of the desert back into the land of Egypt. Hathor herself is commonly represented in the tombs of western Thebes as the head and front of a cow emerging from the western cliffs.

## 5. A LADY FROM THE TOMB OF USERHAT

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

A priest of the royal *ka*-spirit of the Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh Thutmosis I, Userhat flourished during the reigns of Ramesses I and Sety I at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty. The lady shown in this photograph was apparently the second wife of the tomb owner, but for some reason her name appears never to have been inscribed into the space provided. Her title, however, is preserved: “Chantress of Amun,” and she holds up a jangling sistrum, by whose soothing sounds the gods were pacified. She is bedecked for a banquet with a heavy curled wig and an elaborate floral collar. The tomb of Userhat has suffered from spiteful vandals in modern times; the lady’s face is more damaged around the eye, all of her eyebrow having fallen away.



## 6. THE COLOSSI OF AMENHOTEP III

Silver gelatin on glass, 29 × 40 cm

This pair of colossal statues stood before the entrance to the mortuary temple of the pharaoh Amenhotep III. The structure was the largest of any of the mortuary temples of the New Kingdom, but it was somewhat hastily built. Over time the extensive mudbrick elements of the structure melted, and later rulers quarried away what stone they found. During the Graeco-Roman Period, the northern statue of the group (to the right) came to be known as the Colossus of Memnon. Memnon was a warrior who led the Ethiopian allies of the Trojans against the Greeks during the struggle for Troy. Because the prenomen of Amenhotep III, Nebmaatra, was pronounced as Nimmaria or Mimmaria, his name was conflated with that of the Memnon of the Trojan War. The colossal statues of Amenhotep III were damaged by an earthquake in 27 B.C., and the northernmost colossus began to make a “singing” sound, probably caused by the night dew sublimating in the rising heat of morning, which was interpreted as the voice of Memnon calling to his mother, Aurora, the dawn. The Roman emperor Septimius Severus repaired the singing colossus, and it has ceased to sing down to the present day.

## 7. QUEEN NEFERTARI AT LUXOR TEMPLE

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Nefertari was the chief consort of Ramesses II until her death around his regnal year 24, and she figures prominently alongside Ramesses II on many of his monuments. Ramesses dedicated to her the small temple of Abu Simbel in Nubia, the first cult of an Egyptian queen in Nubia since the one that Amenhotep III established for his wife, Tiye, at Sedeinga. In this photograph, a diminutive Nefertari is depicted behind the leg of her colossal husband in the first court of Luxor Temple, tenderly touching his calf. A graffito in the same court suggests that at least one visitor considered the beautiful Nefertari to be at least as comely as the fabled Helen of Troy, for he carved and captioned a figure of Paris on a neighboring pillar opposite her figure.

## 8. TEMPLE OF LUXOR

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Beyond the southern side of the first court of Luxor Temple, the columns of the Colonnade Hall rise in the background. The ruined portico shelters standing figures of Ramesses II, and to the left of the central portal is a seated colossus, worshiped in ancient times as a deified statue of the divine king. Through this court, festal processions wended their way to the inner sanctuaries of the temple, particularly during the annual Festival of Opet, when the portable barks of the divine triad of Karnak were carried south for the celebrations at Luxor. The walls of the Colonnade Hall, now much destroyed, originally extended up to the height of the architraves atop the fourteen massive columns. The inner thicknesses of the doorway into the Colonnade were originally recessed to receive the leaves of a giant door carved from Lebanese cedar. The photograph was taken about 1920: the huge cornice block in the center of the court and the lower walls of later buildings to the left have since been cleared away.

## 9. THE MOSQUE OF ABU’L HAGGAG AT LUXOR TEMPLE

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Viewed from the tops of the architraves in the Colonnade Hall, the mosque of Abu’l Haggag dominates the first court at Luxor Temple and aptly demonstrates the continuing adaption of ancient monuments to modern use. Luxor remained very much intact during the Roman Period, when the monument was incorporated within the Roman camp and devoted to the cult of the Roman emperor. Later, the temple was surrounded by churches, and by the late sixth century A.D. one had been constructed within the first court itself. Nestled within the ancient walls of the court of Ramesses II, and built on the ruins of earlier Christian basilicas, the mosque of Abu’l-Haggag represents a tradition of continuous worship at Luxor Temple for almost thirty-five centuries. During the festival of this modern Muslim saint, boats are paraded around the temple, perhaps an echo of the ancient procession of the barks of Amun, Mut, and Khonsu during the Festival of Opet.

## 10. TWO EGYPTIAN WOMEN

Silver gelatin on glass, 23.5 × 29.5 cm

Standing by the Nile, two women in local dress display their water jars. Of the women of rural Egypt, Edward W. Lane, in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) wrote:

The women of the lower orders seldom pass a life of inactivity. Some of them are even condemned to greater drudgery than the men. Their chief occupations are the preparing of the husband’s food, fetching water (which they carry in a large vessel on the head), spinning cotton, linen, or woollen yarn, and making the fuel called “gelleh,” which is composed of the dung of cattle, kneaded with chopped straw, and formed into round flat cakes. . . . They are in a state of much greater subjection to their husbands than is the case among the superior classes.

# 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.

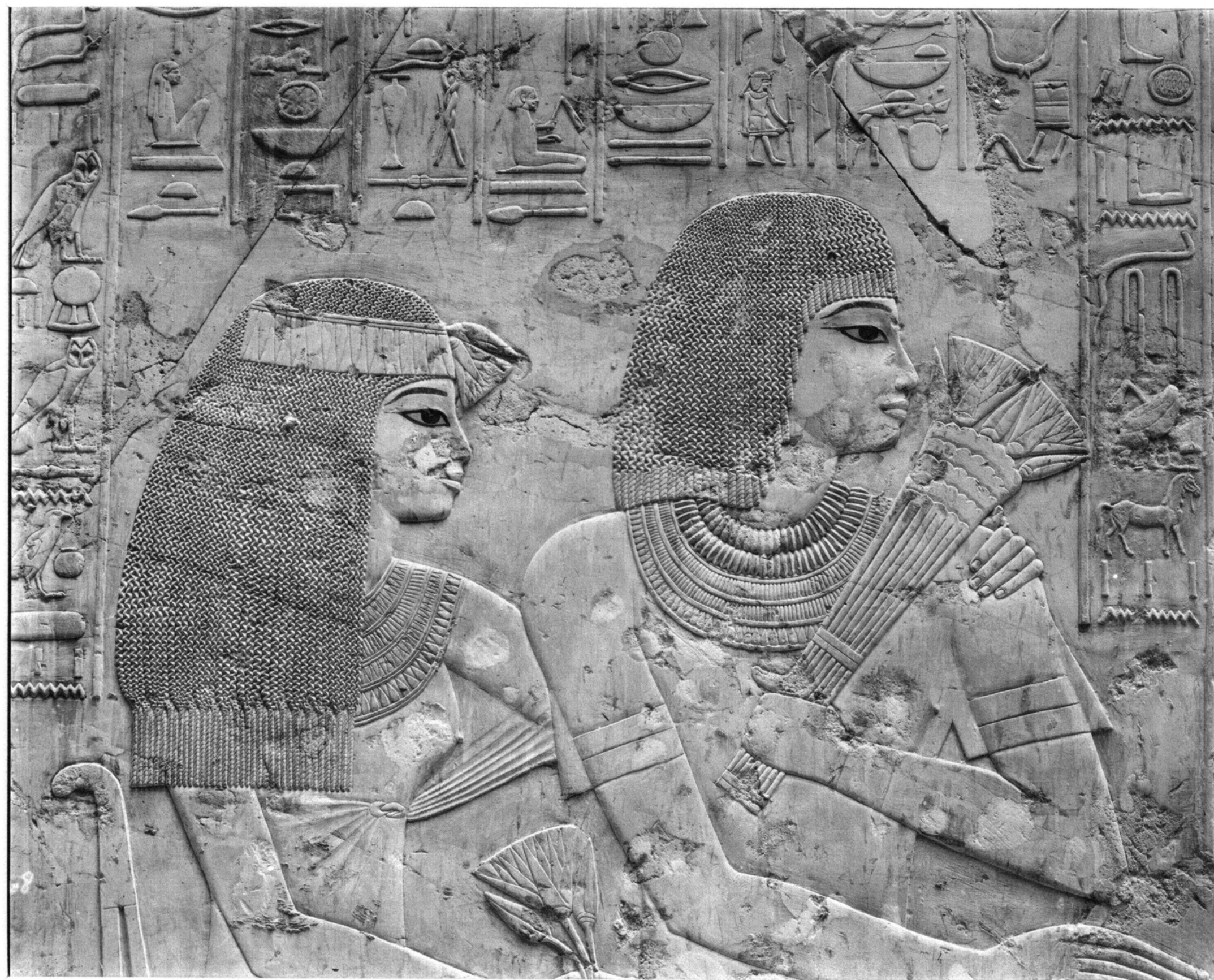
In the modern study of Egyptian monuments, older photographs are an invaluable tool. Often, with their help, the bubbles on the surface of a salt-encrusted block may emerge as the deformed but yet recognizable forms of a human head or a snatch of inscription. Even general views and landscape shots contain 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









*Leangute*

*N° 411 Voiliers arabe dans le Nil*















