

INTRODUCTION

A nation is defined by its material culture. The more distinctive the objects, the better it is able to distinguish itself from other nations. Images of the Eiffel Tower evoke France just as much the Statue of Liberty signifies America. I argue that nations also express themselves through the collection and display of foreign objects. The purpose of this thesis is to prove how nineteenth-century England asserted its identity through the collection and display of ancient Egyptian material culture. This thesis discusses issues of collecting, national identity and their connection to the concept of the gaze.

My discussion of the gaze focuses on how the English viewed themselves through the material culture they sought to possess. This thesis devotes a chapter each to the British Museum, David Roberts (1796-1864) and Francis Frith (1822-1898) as they were known to be effective collectors and interpreters of ancient Egyptian imagery. Each collector embodied Victorian England's efforts to assert the perception of itself as, among other things, wealthy, cosmopolitan, cultured and divine.

My methodology is historiographical. Each collector represents a specific phase of the nineteenth century. I give a brief background for each collector. A discussion of the gaze follows. I address how each collector viewed the material culture. The gaze of each collector determines how it would shape the perception of its publics through display or distribution (in the case of the artists).

First, the role of the British Museum as England's national museum is discussed. Of the three collectors studied in this thesis, I believe that it had the strongest influence over its objects and publics. This thesis addresses how this institution viewed the material culture displayed in its ancient sculptural galleries. Moreover, the British Museum chapter analyzes the methods administrators employed to construct the gaze of visitors. Subsequent chapters discuss artists David Roberts and Francis Frith as collectors of ancient Egyptian imagery. As with the British Museum, each artist was subject to the

gaze. The Roberts and Frith chapters analyze the personal visual encounters experienced with the subjects they portrayed. The artists, in turn, controlled the regard of their consumers through composition, exhibition and distribution. Although both Roberts and Frith yielded an impressive amount of control over the objects as artists, they also signal the lessening of control toward the mid and late nineteenth century.

The theory of the gaze sustains the theme of control through possession throughout the thesis. The writings of Jacques Lacan dominate discussions of the gaze. Scholars often cite his text, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, when discussing issues of viewing art.¹ His work attempts to explain what occurs when the viewer gazes upon his or her surroundings. I find that the true significance of Lacan's work lies in its frequent use as a model for current research.

The gaze, in art historical terms, considers the binary relationship between the object and the viewer. Although scholars have written a lot on the subject of collecting and the gaze, I believe that they have overlooked a specific relationship between England and its Egyptian antiquities.

Margaret Olin explains how the gaze determines how one entity interacts with another. She writes, "the gaze colors relations between the majority and the minorities and between the first world and the third world, whose inhabitants can be the object of the gaze because they are viewed as exotic and as living in a timeless presentness outside history."² When applied to nineteenth-century England and Egypt, the former is the majority and the latter is the minority.

Scholars generally believe that the viewer has the power to animate objects with his or her gaze. As in Norman Bryson's text *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, objects have the ability to reciprocate the gaze of the viewer.³ Scholars, while acknowledging the full and active participation of objects in the viewing process, tend to

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).

² Margaret Olin, "Gaze," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 215.

³ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 91.

regard them as being more passive. In other words, the viewer must see the object before invoking a response, whether positive or negative.

One response provoked by viewing an object can be a desire to possess it. This reaction, I believe is at root of collecting. Some authors use sexual terminology to emphasize the connection between sight and desire. As David Freedberg writes, “there is a cognitive relation between looking and enlivening; and between looking hard, not turning away, concentrating and enjoying on the one hand, and possession and arousal on the other.”⁴

Some scholarly writing focuses on how a viewer from one culture can transform the meaning of another culture's art objects. This transformation happens when the viewer approaches the art with his or her own experiences and ideas thus altering the meaning of the art. For example, Jas Elsner in *Art and the Roman Viewer*, writes how early Christians claimed existing Roman imagery as their own.⁵ It is in this context that the relationship between the gaze and the concept of identity becomes apparent.

In this thesis, I define “identity” as a condition of being autonomous. The term implies a state of being distinctive from a perceived other. In global terms, a nation creates its identity to set itself apart from other nations. When applied to my analysis of nineteenth-century England, identity is the implied “oneness” of the many expressed by the empowered few. This minority includes those citizens gifted with land, wealth and political power. In my thesis the institutions serve the interests of this group.

The relevance of national identity as a topic is evident in the availability of a substantial number of books, journal articles, web sites and other resources. For instance, the journal *National Identities* made its debut during the writing of this thesis. Keith Cameron, one of the more prominent scholars in the field of national identity, edited two anthologies *The Nation: Myth or Reality*⁶ and *National Identity*.⁷ Both books feature chapters that address an array of issues concerning identity in Europe and Great Britain.

⁴ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 325.

⁵ Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 4.

⁶ Keith Cameron, ed. *The Nation: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1994).

Keith Robbins in his text, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, outlines the development of British identity from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.⁸ Robbins not only writes about Great Britain, but also analyzes England as a nation in its own right. Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* thoroughly chronicles the early decades of Great Britain.⁹

Museums and the Making of Ourselves, edited by Flora Kaplan, is one example of books addressing national identity in terms of museum display.¹⁰ This anthology presents chapters that discuss how different cultures assert national identity through the display of indigenous material culture in museums. The bulk of the chapters involve how a nation struggles to assert an identity that was previously taken by others.

Dominant collecting cultures, like those mentioned in Kaplan's anthology, are often in competition with one another. During the nineteenth century, France and England sought to possess the most impressive ancient artifacts to display in their national museums-the Louvre and the British Museum respectively. In an *Art Bulletin* article, Frederick Bohrer, discusses how France and England made the acquisition of Assyrian artifacts a matter of national pride.¹¹

England's relationship with Egypt is a common topic in the field of orientalism-western scholarship on the East. In his text *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes about of the nineteenth-century perception of the East. He explains that nineteenth-century orientalists only considered India and the Biblical lands in their studies.¹² Said also implies that western scholars applied a cookie-cutter logic to their studies. He states, "so

⁷ idem, ed. *National Identity* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1999).

⁸ Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998).

⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Flora Kaplan, ed. *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The Role of Objects in National Identity* (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1994).

¹¹ Frederick Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France," *Art Bulletin* 80 n. 2 (June 1998): 336-56. This article is a good resource for studying the reception of ancient Middle-Eastern material into Western Europe

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 4.

far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘The Mysterious Orient’.”¹³ In the nineteenth century, England’s relationship with Egypt was not an equal partnership. Said looks to nineteenth-century scholar Arthur James Balfour to prove this point. Balfour claims that Egyptians “are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves.”¹⁴ Balfour’s comment, I argue, gives one of the motives one country would have to usurp the material culture of another. Western countries justified their aggressive removal of foreign material culture by claiming benevolent stewardship. In other words, England believed it knew what was best for the Egyptian objects it claimed.

National museums attract the interest of many scholars. I believe they are drawn in by the idea of nations spending the resources needed to collect and display objects, whether indigenous or foreign, manmade or organic. Carol Duncan, a leader in the field of museum studies, advances the idea of the museum as a ritual space in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*.¹⁵ Her text includes a chapter on the transformation of a private princely collection to that of a public museum.

Since the 1700’s the British Museum in London has housed the prizes of England’s collecting efforts in Egypt. The Museum’s collections have been fully documented beginning with its own *Synopsis* publications. For years, the British Museum Press has offered books featuring their collections written by gallery keepers.¹⁶

Comprehensive texts about the British Museum include *The Story of the British Museum* and *The Collections of the British Museum*, respectively by Marjorie Caygill¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 26, 1979.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5, 1979.

¹⁵ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁶ In the British Museum the curators are referred to as keepers. From here on out I will use the term keeper.

¹⁷ Marjorie Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1981).

and David Wilson.¹⁸ Caygill wrote her text during her tenure as an assistant keeper. I have found it to be a brief and concise history of the Museum. The text is rich in illustrations and photographs of the British Museum building and collections throughout its entire history. Wilson divides his text into chapters focusing on each collection.

The keepers of the British Museum also produce books that study individual collections. T.G.H James and W.V. Davies, former keepers of the Egyptian Antiquities, in *Egyptian Sculpture* present a loving story of the collection. From the very first sentence, the reader is made aware of how high they place Egyptian sculpture over the other art forms. They write, “Sculpture in stone is the finest manifestation of Egyptian art. The artists of antiquity developed great skills in the working of stone...”¹⁹ James and Davies make certain the reader is aware of the British Museum’s accomplishments in obtaining and displaying one of the most complete records of the Egyptian sculptural development in the world.²⁰ They also discuss the constant struggle the museum building had with accommodating the accession of sculptures during the nineteenth century.

Most of the British Museum’s expansion took place in the nineteenth century. *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, penned by Ian Jenkins, discusses the balance of influence between archaeologists and designers in the British Museum during the building years of the museum.²¹ Jenkins, keeper of the Greek and Roman antiquities, focuses on the acquisition and the arrangement of ancient sculpture including work from Greece, Rome, Assyria and Egypt. This text is the primary source for my discussion of how an evolutionary theory was applied to the arrangement of the ancient sculpture galleries. Jenkins provides the reader with substantial illustrations including archival floor plans and photographs.

David Roberts and Francis Frith have inspired a wealth of scholarship. Roberts, along with the lithographer F.G. Moon, published a series of prints from his travels in

¹⁸ David Wilson, ed., *The Collections of the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1989).

¹⁹ T.G.H. James and W.V. Davies, *Egyptian Sculpture* (London: British Museum Press, 1983), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum 1800-1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992).

*The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia: From Drawings Made on the Spot.*²² James Ballantine, a friend of David Roberts, wrote *The Life of David Roberts*. Ballantine used personal experience and excerpts from Roberts's journals as sources for the biography.²³ An example of books that pair Roberts's art and words together is the copiously illustrated *From an Antique Land*.²⁴ The text is organized chronologically by the dates of his journal entries and letters.

Scholars casting David Roberts as a mouthpiece for England's perception of the East include J. Harris Proctor and Kenneth Bendiner. Proctor analyzes Robert's eastern imagery in his article for *Muslim World*.²⁵ He finds the lithographs to be indicative of England's imperialistic interests in the East. Bendiner, in the journal *Art History*, discusses how Roberts's work can be interpreted to reflect the disdain in which Victorian England regarded the Near East.²⁶

As a Royal Academician, Roberts exhibited in annual exhibitions. Books that recount the founding and development of the Royal Academy include W.R.M. Lamb's *The Royal Academy: A Short History of its Foundation and Development to the Present Day*²⁷ and Sidney Hutchinson's *The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968*.²⁸ Even though they are not current, they provide useful information about this institution. Chapters in *Art on the Line*, edited by David H. Solkin, provide invaluable studies of the exhibition practices of the Royal Academy.²⁹

²²David Roberts and David Croly, *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia: From Drawings Made on the Spot* (London: F.G. Moon, 1840).

²³ James Ballantine, *The Life of David Roberts, R.A.* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1866).

²⁴David Roberts, *From an Antique Land: Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land* ed. by Barbara Culliford (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989). Includes a forward by Helen Guiterman.

²⁵ J. Harris Proctor, "David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism," *Muslim World* 88 (Jan. 1998): 46-66.

²⁶Kenneth Bendiner, "David Roberts in the Near East: Social and religious themes," *Art History* 6 (March 1983): 67-81.

²⁷W.R.M. Lamb, *The Royal Academy: A Short History of its Foundation and Development to the Present Day* (London: Alexander Maclehose & Co., 1935).

²⁸Sidney Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1968).

Simon Schama's *New Yorker* article, reviewing Egypt-inspired photography exhibitions, introduced me to Francis Frith.³⁰ Frith, like Roberts, traveled to Egypt and the Holy Land to view his subjects in person. He was part of a trend of British and European photographers traveling abroad to shoot landscape and ethnographic subjects. General texts concerning these artist-explorers include Robert Hershkowitz's *The British Photographer Abroad*³¹ and Yeshayahu Nir's *The Bible and the Image*.³²

Bill Jay provides the initial study of the life and work of Francis Frith in *Victorian Cameraman*.³³ The text is filled with illustrations including manuscripts in Frith's own handwriting. Julia Van Haafteen in collaboration with Jon E. Manchip White offer *Egypt and the Holy Land in Historic Photographs*.³⁴ After Van Haafteen's introduction, White describes over seventy reproductions of Frith's photographic prints. Douglas R. Nickel published the most recent and, I believe, most comprehensive study of Frith in the East: *Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine*.³⁵ Of course the best source for Frith comes from his own hand. All three texts quote heavily from his unpublished biography *A True Story of My Life: A Biographical, Metaphysical, and Religious History*.

This thesis contributes to the current trend of applying the Lacan's concept of the gaze as it relates to art historical topics. A consideration of the gaze of nineteenth-century England can illustrate the concern to assert its identity. I want to strengthen the connections already suggested between the gaze, collecting and national

²⁹ David H Solkin, ed., *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780-1836* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Simon Schama, "New Light on Old Stones: Two Egyptiana Shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2001, 81-83.

³¹ Robert Hershkowitz, *The British Photographer Abroad: The First Thirty Years* (London: Robert Hershkowitz, Ltd., 1980).

³² Yeshayahu Nir, *The Bible and the Image: The History of Photography in the Holy Land 1839-1899* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

³³ Bill Jay, *Victorian Cameraman: Francis Frith's Views of Rural England 1850-1898* (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1973).

³⁴ Julia Van Haafteen and Jon E. Manchip White, *Egypt and the Holy Land in Historic Photographs: 77 Views by Francis Frith* (New York: Dover Publications, 1980).

³⁵ Douglas R. Nickel, *Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine: A Victorian Photographer Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

identity. Most important, I seek to encourage scholarship that addresses collecting across borders.

CHAPTER 1

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The British Museum as a national institution asserted English national identity by the manipulation of the display of objects. In this chapter I focus on how museum administrators used the Egyptian sculptural collection to shape the perception of the British Museum's public. I believe that the British Museum, using contemporary scholarship as a model, endeavored to present the image of England as the inheritor of a prestigious ancient tradition. Administrators manipulated the gaze of the public through admissions policy, architecture and subsequent arrangement of the ancient sculpture in the Museum. At the British Museum, the Egyptian sculpture does not stand alone. In addition to addressing the Egyptian collection independently, I look at its role within a system of statuary from other cultures such as Greek, Roman, and Assyrian.

Brief History

Since its founding in 1753, the British Museum has operated under a set of objectives that include "making the collections available to the general public as widely as possible" and "providing a source of knowledge and entertainment."³⁶ These objectives demand the display of a comprehensive visual record of the world's preeminent cultures. The British Museum then and now serves as a vehicle for the comparative study of cultures. As Geoffrey Grigson explains, "the scholarship required for one's national antiquities benefits from the scholarship directed within the same building upon the antiquities of other nations."³⁷

³⁶British Museum, *Statement of Service*, July 1996.

³⁷ Geoffrey Grigson, *Art Treasures of the British Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1957), 38.

The English seized the bulk of the British Museum's Egyptian sculpture collection from the French in 1801. Many historians credit Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) with the reintroduction of Egyptian culture to the West. His scheme to conquer Egypt and establish a French colony was accompanied by a desire to study their ancient monuments. At the age of twenty-nine, the ambitious general believed that his fate mirrored that of Alexander the Great who conquered the East at an even younger age.³⁸ In 1798, an army of scholars of the arts and sciences accompanied Bonaparte on his journey to Egypt. In the light of strained relations with the French, the British Empire viewed this as a threat. Napoleon's actions encroached upon their interests in the East.

Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), then a Royal Navy admiral, represented England's interests in Napoleon's activities. A young Nelson set sail to intercept Napoleon and his fleet after receiving intelligence about his operations. On the night of June 22, 1798, English and French fleets narrowly passed each other off the coast of Crete. The greater speed of Nelson's fleet enabled him to outdistance Napoleon. Consequently, Nelson arrived in Alexandria one day ahead of Napoleon.³⁹ Two months after the near miss, Nelson reclaimed England's fortune at the Battle of the Nile by destroying the French fleet. In 1801, English troops confiscated the objects collected by the French.⁴⁰ George III (1766-1820) presented the spoils to the British Museum trustees in the summer of 1802. Among these, the most celebrated is the Rosetta Stone, which today occupies a place of honor in the Egyptian gallery. The Rosetta Stone and the other Egyptian antiquities influenced a hesitant Parliament to approve funding for the British Museum officials to expand their building.⁴¹

By the early 1800's, England and France engaged each other in a race to collect antiquities. In this war, scholarly battles were fought over which country's national

³⁸ Christopher Lloyd, *The Nile Campaign: Nelson and Napoleon in Egypt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), 8.

³⁹ Ibid. 25-26.

⁴⁰ T.G.H. James and W.V. Davies, *Egyptian Sculpture* (London: British Museum Press, 1983), 5.

⁴¹ John David Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology 1549-1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 51.

museum displayed the best and the most numerous Egyptian antiquities. This competition between the two old enemies resulted in the acquisition of numerous bas-relief slabs, obelisks, sculptures and other artifacts by both countries.

Henry Salt was one of the more celebrated figures in the early years of England's excavation of Egypt. In 1816, Salt was appointed Consul-General in Egypt.⁴² Using his prominent connections, he sent the Italian-born field-worker Giovanni Belzoni (1778-1823) out to retrieve objects for sale to the British Museum. The partnership proved successful. Salt sold his first collection of Egyptian antiquities to the British Museum for £2,000. Although museum-funded excavations proved successful, the majority of the collection came from donations made by collectors.

How the British Museum Asserts National Identity

Primarily, the contents of the British Museum signify England's role as the center of an empire. It seems that British Museum administrators made every effort to acquire and display objects from all countries held by the British Empire. Tim Barringer, writing about the South Kensington Museum in the nineteenth century, suggests that "the acquisition of objects from areas of the world in which Britain had colonial or proto-colonial political and military interests, and the ordering and displaying of them by a museum which was a department of the British state, formed... a three-dimensional imperial archive."⁴³ Although Barringer may not agree, I believe that the British Museum constructed an imperial archive out of the objects that it acquired.⁴⁴

By displaying art from outside England's borders, the British Museum also identifies England as an intellectually cosmopolitan nation. The impressive variety of the collections promotes the idea of England as a nation savvy enough to interpret the objects from foreign lands.

The British Museum as a national institution not only reflects England as wealthy but also ambitious. Its appetite for the artifacts did not seem to be limited to their size or

⁴²Jean Vercoutter, *The Search for Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 66.

⁴³Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 11.

⁴⁴Barringer writes, "...South Kensington's presentation of the world (unlike that of the older British Museum) enshrined a uniquely modern world-view, that of Victorian imperialism" (11).

value. The fact that the British Museum could acquire and display pieces ranging from pottery shards to colossal statues testifies to English wealth.

The British Museum, as a powerful collector, used parliamentary funding to cement its role as an institution capable of providing culture and education to its publics. Unfortunately for British Museum officials, Parliament was not as forthcoming with funding as they would have hoped. It seems that there was always much bickering over the price of artifacts before their purchase was approved. For instance, in 1816 the Elgin Marbles were purchased for £35,000. Elgin considered the sum to be half of the total cost he spent excavating and shipping the marbles.⁴⁵ Henry Salt faced similar problems when he offered his first collection of over twenty Egyptian sculptures to the British Museum trustees. He was offered only £2,000 in 1823. Like Elgin, Salt's earnings did not cover overhead costs.⁴⁶

In the course of the negotiations for the purchase of Salt's collection, the trustees refused to purchase the Seti I alabaster sarcophagus. This impressive piece was sold to Sir John Soane for his private collection.

There are several reasons why the Museum trustees would have rejected the sarcophagus. I believe that the primary reason was economic. The trustees, no matter the true value of the work, did not want to budge from their initial offer to Salt. Inadequate space was also a factor. By the 1820's, the British Museum infrastructure was overwhelmed by its existing collection of ancient sculpture. The Museum was in the midst of new construction to keep pace. This construction included a new Egyptian gallery.

The Museum officials may have thought that they had enough examples of Egyptian sarcophagi on display. A surplus of any type of sculpture would have disrupted their presentation of Egypt. Ian Jenkins mentions that the trustee W.R. Hamilton had two sarcophagi given to him by Henry Salt. Jenkins writes, "Hamilton was no doubt concerned that when [Robert Smirke's] new Egyptian Sculpture Gallery was ready to receive the contents, his [second] sarcophagus would become confounded with the rest of

⁴⁵ Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum*, 20.

⁴⁶ Vercoutter, *The Search for Ancient Egypt*, 66.

the collection.”⁴⁷ So, the fact that the Museum did not purchase the Seti I sarcophagus is indicative of the British Museum desire to both preserve space and present an uncluttered display of Egyptian sculpture. I suggest that to the trustees and keepers, coherence within the ancient sculpture galleries was necessary in enforcing an evolutionary view of art.⁴⁸

The British Museum as the Viewer

In the nineteenth-century, British Museum officials viewed its Egyptian acquisitions as a marker or a placeholder in a system including the Assyrian, Greek and Roman sculpture collections. The gallery keepers employed the ancient sculpture collections to forge a link between the artistic traditions of the unfamiliar Middle-Eastern tradition with the one of well-known classical Greek. This link is part of the “chain of art” concept adopted by the British Museum.⁴⁹

The idea of the “chain of art” is a metaphorical construction based on an evolutionary concept. Nineteenth-century scholars understood that civilizations progressed along a chronological time-line with England as the zenith. The material culture of ancient Middle-Eastern cultures such as Egypt and Assyria were considered to represent the beginnings of artistic expression. Thus, the “chain” is a strict construction of links intended to illustrate the progression of art.⁵⁰

James Stephanoff illustrates the “chain of art” in his watercolor *An Assemblage of Works of Art in Sculpture and Painting* (Fig. 1). This work, first exhibited in 1845, terminates the series of six paintings Stephanoff displayed at London’s Old Watercolor Society. In *Assemblage of Works of Art*, the arts of the West seem to rise from those of the East and the Americas. In the lower left and right corners at the groundline, Stephanoff includes examples of Mayan art.⁵¹ Their elaborate jewelry and headpieces are

⁴⁷ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum 1800-1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 112.

⁴⁸ This and other aspects of gallery arrangement are discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁹ J.J. Wincklemann led the argument for the chronological progression of ancient art from one culture to the next. His text *A History of Ancient Art Among the Greeks* (1764) outlines his main points.

⁵⁰ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 60.

characteristic of this style of relief. A group of Hindu and Javanese figures stand in the middle of the groundline. Noticeable attributes of these figures are the hand gestures. Assyrian scenes inspired by palace wall stele follow. This section, including images from court life and hunting, is surmounted by an Egyptian vista. On this level, examples of three-dimensional sculpture flank a central panel of a pharonic-style chariot painting. The painting continues with a representation of Etruscan art dominated by a wall painting of a banqueting scene and figural sarcophagi.

Finally, Stephanoff's interpretation of the west pediment of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina introduces the Greek level. The fragmentary pedimental sculptures, excavated in 1811, are housed at the Glyptotek in Munich.⁵² The British Museum's fragments of the Parthenon temple including metope and frieze relief sculpture complete this section of the painting.

At first glance, one can conclude that *Assemblage of Works of Art* is only a chronological arrangement of art of several cultures. Ian Jenkins disagrees with this limited interpretation. Jenkins argues that Stephanoff employed a "system based on analogous styles. Thus, the Hindu gods of Java and India are assimilated with the Mayan culture of Central America."⁵³ According to Jenkins, additional evidence of an analogous style can be seen in the combination of reliefs from the Harpy Tomb of Xanthos⁵⁴ and the Etruscan material.⁵⁵ Stephanoff also enforces his artistic license by rearranging the composition of the Aegina pediment. I agree with scholars who argue that the writings of Hegel and Winklemann influenced Stephanoff's composition.⁵⁶ I add that Stephanoff, by not presenting a scientific tableau, is making his own associations among the cultures he

⁵¹For the Mayan figures, Stephanoff quotes images from J.L. Stephens's *Incidents and Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* originally published in London in 1841. The Smithsonian Institution of Washington republished *Incidents* in 1993.

⁵² John Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 156. I used a reconstruction from Boardman's text as a reference. See figure 206.

⁵³Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 61.

⁵⁴The Harpy Tomb is part of the British Museum's collection.

⁵⁵Ian Jenkins, "James Stephanoff and the British Museum" *Apollo* 121 (March 1985): 180.

depicts. Stephanoff, in his own way, binds them together to shape the viewer's perspective. In an exhibition catalog caption, Stephanoff eschews his methodology and focuses only on the painting's content.⁵⁷ I suggest that Stephanoff in exercising control over the viewer's perception or gaze mirrors the efforts of the British Museum to control its publics.

The British Museum as the Controlling Agent

Throughout the nineteenth-century, the British Museum sought to shape the public's perception of England through its admissions policy, overall architecture, and gallery arrangement. Tony Bennett reminds us that although the British Museum is "acknowledged as one of the first public museums, its conception of the public was a limited one."⁵⁸

The Museum, I argue, wanted to cling to a tradition developed by a landowning elite. A gentleman would have his collection arranged not scientifically but rather in the order that best suited his personal interests. He would allow access only to those he believed would appreciate his efforts. These would include the privileged few who had the leisure and funds to travel and collect curiosities.⁵⁹ To me, collecting and display in this manner is more about the collector and not the object itself. The collector seeks to control the perception of his intended audience by the display of exotic and expensive objects. Thus, the objects are transformed into attributes. Instead of acting solely as representatives of their cultures, they also stand for the image or identity their owners want to assert. This interaction between viewer and object happens in a gaze that is

⁵⁶See G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) originally published in 1835; and Winklemann, 1764.

⁵⁷For the text of the catalog caption, see Jenkins, "James Stephanoff and the British Museum," 179.

⁵⁸ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 70.

⁵⁹ Carol Duncan, in her text *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (1995), alludes to a tradition of restricted viewings in private English homes. Duncan makes a point to emphasize how intimate knowledge of the objects in a collection was not expected. She writes, "However shallow one's understanding of them, to display them in one's house and produce before them the right clichés served as proof that one was cultivated and fit to hold power" (38). Her discussion addresses transition from princely galleries of the eighteenth-century to the national collections of the following century.

rather lingering. It is not surprising that this attitude of exclusion was translated into a national institution.

The admissions policy is the primary agent of control in a museum. The British Museum operated virtually visitor-free until an act of Parliament in 1759 ordered the trustees and staff to admit “studious and curious persons.”⁶⁰ Museums have several methods of control. Some are more obvious such as opening times, admission fees and waiting lists. The opening hours are most powerful because they establish physical barriers. Locked doors and absent staff will make a visit to the museum impossible.

Oftentimes, class distinctions draw the boundaries between welcome and unwelcome. If a museum wants to exclude the working class, it would set its hours to open after the average person begins the workday and to close before the workday is over. Sporadic hours, weekend and holiday closures also restrict those who work weekdays.

The cost of admission was never an issue with the British Museum because it was never charged.⁶¹ However, it was still difficult for anyone to gain access to collections. In order to gain admission hopeful visitors submitted their names to a waiting list for tickets. Ticket holders had little or no control over the time of their visit. The tickets were valid for only one appointment. During the tours, guides rushed small groups of visitors through the collections. Caygill writes “[groups] were not permitted to upset routine by gazing at the objects.”⁶² This continued for years until the Trustees began to allow more time with the collections. At one point, guides allowed groups to choose which department to visit during their block of time.⁶³

By the early 1800’s, the rising middle class demanded more access and control of the institution they believed was built by their money. In addition to this, they wanted the Museum to present its displays in a more logical manner.⁶⁴ Apparently, British Museum

⁶⁰Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum*, 12.

⁶¹Today, the British Museum prominently posts signs suggesting a £2 donation from each visitor. The practice of encouraging a donation is not exclusive to this museum.

⁶²Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum*, 13.

⁶³Ibid.,13.

officials did not have a great deal of faith in the manners of the working and lower classes. Bennett writes that they were, “apprehensive that the unruliness of the mob would mar the ordered display of culture and knowledge.”⁶⁵ I believe that the exclusion the Museum sought to enforce reflected the ideas of class.

After admissions, a powerful way for a museum to shape someone’s perception is through the environment. I believe that the architecture of a museum controls the entire visiting experience from the initial approach to the museum to movement through the building. Other factors like lighting play a role in a museum visit.

Current scholarship equates the visit to the museum as a religious experience.⁶⁶ I believe this idea is reinforced by the architectural style chosen for many museums. It is as if their architects rely on neo-classical formulas to trigger a reverent response from visitors as they encounter the buildings. Grigson, in his text, discusses how this response can affect how the visitor to the British Museum views the art. He writes, “walking into the British Museum, which can be an act of reverence if one’s senses are rightly tuned, does emphasize superiority of the best and better art to all of the nature it depends upon.”⁶⁷

Besides providing intellectual stimulation, a museum visit also offers physical challenges. Instead of freely meandering through the galleries of a museum, visitors often encounter obstacles that control their path. Using visual terminology, Victoria Newhouse explains that “by having to overcome obstacles (like the need to find the hidden treasures of ancient times), the viewer earns a privilege, something that is increasingly rare in new museums where escalators move people like packages and a combination of audio guides and labels tells them what they are supposed to be seeing.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴Ibid., 25.

⁶⁵Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 70.

⁶⁶See Carol Duncan's chapter “The Art Museum as Ritual” in *Civilizing Rituals*, especially pages 10 and 12; and Victoria Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 47.

⁶⁷Grigson, *Art Treasures*, 43. Note how a hierarchy is suggested in this quote.

⁶⁸Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 17.

In the context of the British Museum, as in other older museum buildings, these obstacles include monumental staircases, a maze-like gallery arrangement, and large doors.

In the case of a national museum, its architectural style and location is paramount to being a strong presence. If a building is supposed to show the best a nation can display, it should be impressive, if not grand. It should also be centrally located in a capital city. Above all, a national museum needs to be large enough to contain the ego of a nation.

Architecturally, the British Museum is a fitting representative of England as a cultural world power. Like the nation, it has a complex history that reflects the craftsmanship of different designers. For financial reasons, the British Museum's growth did not happen all at once. The British Museum buildings committee, organized in 1802, adopted a piecemeal building program. Each phase of the new British Museum replaced portions of the Old Montagu house as they were demolished.⁶⁹ It is not only an impressive structure, but it is also located in London's prestigious Bloomsbury section. The Museum property occupies a block on Great Russell street, not far from where British Museum founder Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) lived. A black iron fence, punctuated by guard stations, surrounds the complex.

The British Museum building was originally a private residence. In the same year as Sloane's death, Parliament passed the British Museum Act, establishing the first board of Trustees as the governing body. Their first project was to use lottery funds to purchase a building to house collections that already included Sloane's bequest to the nation. After considering several options, including the Palace of Westminster, the Trustees settled on the old Montagu house in 1754.⁷⁰ The purchase price was £10,000. The amenities included large staterooms, an impressive staircase and a seven-acre garden.⁷¹

⁶⁹ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 109.

⁷⁰ In 1677, the Duke of Montagu, commissioned the house to be designed in seventeenth-century French style.

⁷¹ Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum*, 9.

Construction of the new British Museum, based on Robert Smirke's design (1780-1867), began in the late 1820's (Fig. 2).⁷² Most notably, the building gained a neo-classical Ionic façade at its south main entrance. Distinctive features such as Ionic columns on Attic bases, an entablature and a pediment gave the British Museum the presence and look of a Greek temple.

The South pediment is the British Museum's crown jewel. In 1848, Sir Richard Westmacott (1775-1856) completed his commission to fill the pediment with a sculptural group titled the *Progress of Civilization* (Fig. 3). At the cost of £4,500, fifteen statues told the story of humankind's evolution against a blue background. Sir Henry Ellis expanded upon Westmacott's brief description of the pedimental statues. In Ellis's words:

Commencing at the Eastern end (Fig. 4)...man is represented as emerging from a rude savage state, through the influence of religion. He is next personified as a hunter, and a tiller of the earth....Patriarchal simplicity then becomes invaded and the worship of the true God deified. Paganism prevails and becomes diffused by means of the Arts. The worship of the heavenly bodies...led the Egyptians, Chaldeans and other nations to study Astronomy, typified by the [center] statues, the keystone of the composition (Fig. 5). Civilization is now presumed to have made considerable progress. Descending towards the Western angle of the pediment, is Mathematics...The Drama, Poetry and Music balance the group of the Fine Arts on the Eastern side, the whole composition, terminating with Natural History (Fig. 6).⁷³

The *Progress of Civilization* pediment that crowns the British Museum clearly reinforces the "chain of art" concept that dominated the arrangement of the galleries within that were designed place during the nineteenth-century.

My principal concern is how the Egyptian sculptures were so important to the assertion of English identity that the need for their display dictated extensive renovations within the British Museum's interior. I believe that the British Museum found it necessary to write England into the history of all the foreign material culture it displayed. Thus, the British Museum Egyptian sculpture galleries can evoke Margaret Olin's

⁷²British Museum trustees approved Robert Smirke's original design in 1823. They were later published in 1836.

⁷³Crook, *The British Museum*, 127.

statement that “the gaze, then, corresponds to desire, the desire for self-completion through another.”⁷⁴

The design of the sculptural galleries had to conform to the Museum’s desire to create a clear message of evolutionary progression. In 1803 the buildings committee, chaired by Sir Joseph Banks, presented their first report to the other Trustees. As J. Crook writes, “they recommended a [program] of staggered expansion with galleries running northwards from the main building first to the west and then to the east of the garden behind Montagu House.”⁷⁵ In 1803, Taylor Combe was appointed Keeper of Antiquities. He immediately set about answering the challenge of accommodating the British Museum’s growing Egyptian sculpture collection. Combe had to balance the aesthetic principles of exhibit design with the reality of limited space. The first order of business was planning the construction of a new gallery.

In 1804, Combe commissioned the architect George Saunders to design the Townley Gallery of Egyptian Sculptures. Saunders’s peer Robert Smirke modified the original plans after he took over as the project architect in 1816.

The Townley Gallery, named for British Museum trustee Charles Townley, was the first gallery devoted to Egyptian sculptures. It was situated on the northwest corner of Montagu House. It was specifically designed for the large Egyptian sculptures.⁷⁶ Builders followed blueprints that indicated the location of the major sculptures. They also reinforced the gallery floor to handle their weight. In 1808, the sculptures were moved into their new home.

A decade after the Townley Gallery was opened the British Museum received another large shipment of monumental sculptures. In addition to this, in 1823 the British Consul purchased more sculptures from Henry Salt, the British Consul-General in Cairo. Once again, Combe had to face the dilemma of placing these objects on permanent display. Moreover, the recently accessioned King's Library would place a greater strain on space within the Museum.⁷⁷ While the accommodations for the library were being

⁷⁴Olin, “Gaze” 215.

⁷⁵Crook, *The British Museum*, 108.

⁷⁶Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 103.

completed in the east wing, work on the northern extension to the Egyptian galleries was postponed (17 on Fig. 7).⁷⁸

Before the completion of the northern extension of the west wing, the keeper Edward Hawkins planned the arrangement of the new gallery in 1833. According to his specifications, larger sculptures would be arranged “in two lines along the room... and the smaller sculptures in the recesses at the sides.”⁷⁹

By 1834, Smirke’s new gallery housed the colossal bust of Ramesses II and head of Amenophis III. At that time, several prints documented the great effort used to move these objects . One notable print is that of the removal of the head of Amenophis III (Fig. 8). The print, made in 1834, shows a detachment of Royal Artillerymen using a system of pulleys to lift one of the heads from its base in order to move it to the new Egyptian sculpture gallery.

In 1846, the strain of the growing Egyptian collections prompted Robert Smirke to submit drawings for a southern extension to the Egyptian gallery (19 on Fig. 7). By the end of the same year Townley Gallery was demolished to make room for the extension. Tensions between Smirke and Keeper of Antiquities Edward Hawkins surfaced when the designs were unveiled. Smirke wanted to repeat the pilasters on the new addition. Hawkins argued that the pilasters would undermine the arrangement of the statues. Eventually Smirke won and the pilasters were repeated on both sides of the gallery.

In 1852, as the new southern gallery neared completion, Hawkins’s partner Edmund Oldfield submitted a proposal to the Trustees. In it, he proposed a more rigid chronological order for the Egyptian sculpture collection. Oldfield's proposal was to arrange the sculptures in strict chronological sequence, with the earliest sculptures displayed in the northern division of the gallery. Everything was to be arranged from the fourth to the eighteenth dynasty. Works of the nineteenth dynasty would be placed in the Central Salon, which also spilled over into the southern division. Works from later

⁷⁷In 1823, the King's Library was donated as a gift from King George IV to the British Museum.

⁷⁸Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 112.

⁷⁹ Idem.

dynasties were housed in the southern division. All of the objects were placed on a central axis that resulted in a clear path throughout the gallery.⁸⁰ By 1854, workers completed rearranging the Egyptian sculpture according to Oldfield's design.

The Egyptian sculpture gallery, as a whole, had to exist within a system including other sculptural traditions. According to evolutionary theory of the "chain of art," one should encounter objects from Egyptian and Assyrian civilizations before those of Greece and Rome. Upon studying a plan of the sculpture galleries, one can see how the galleries progress from east to west on the horizontal axis (Fig. 7). A path could be easily traced from the Egyptian galleries, continuing through the Assyrian collections, and terminating in Greek sculpture galleries in the west of the plan. As Frederik Bohrer argues, "This scheme presents a distinct chronological progression, from the most distant past to classical antiquity (exemplified in both the Phigaleian frieze and the Elgin Marbles)."⁸¹ Ideally, the British Museum's architecture would allow for the visitor to physically move through the ancient galleries in this manner.

Documents used by visitors during this era reveal a constantly evolving circuitous path that wedges the Egyptian antiquities and sculptures in between their Greek and Roman counterparts. One source that records the order in which British Museum officials wanted the collections to be viewed is the *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum*.

The *Synopsis* was a guide published by the Museum for the use of nineteenth-century visitors. It provided a cursory knowledge of the objects within the Museum. Most objects are numbered individually while some are in numbered cases. The descriptions of the objects are brief-most likely reflecting the labels on the objects. Sometimes the *Synopsis* includes supplemental information concerning the provenance of an object. A more detailed description provides the name of the donor and acquisition date. For example, the 1827 *Synopsis's* description of object 43 from the Egyptian sculpture room

⁸⁰ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 124.

⁸¹ Frederick Bohrer, "The Times and Spaces of History: Representation, Assyria, and the British Museum," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, eds. D. Sherman and I. Rogoff, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), 210.

reads, “Colossal head of brownish breccia, and three fragments from the same statue. From Mr. [Henry] Salt’s collection.”⁸²

By following the route suggested by the *Synopsis*, a visitor moves through fifteen rooms indicated in the text by Roman numerals. The 1827 edition begins the tour of the “Gallery of Antiquities” with terracotta in Room I. After viewing terracotta bas-reliefs and statuary, the visitor moves through rooms of Greek and Roman artifacts. These include four rooms of Greek and Roman Sculptures and one room of Roman sepulchral antiquities. Then the visitor would reach the Egyptian material after passing through the Roman Antiquities room (Room VII). The path the *Synopsis* suggested the visitor take through sculpture galleries periodically changed in order to keep pace with the changing Museum.

As the mid 1800’s approached, the British Museum added large Assyrian sculptures to its collections. Their arrival prompted the Museum to build more gallery space. The Sub-Committee on Antiquities arranged for the construction of the southern and northern side-galleries adjacent to the Egyptian galleries (14 and 16 on Fig. 7). The committee called upon Sydney Smirke, [brother or son] of Robert Smirke to draw the plans. After some debate with the Trustees, Hawkins and Oldfield set about installing the Assyrian sculptures first in the southern side-gallery (14 on Fig. 7) and then in the central transept (15 on Fig. 7) and northern side-gallery (16 on Fig. 7).⁸³

Even though the addition of the Assyrian sculptures added scope to the Museum’s sculpture galleries, they further confounded the order in which Museum officials intended visitor circulation through the individual galleries. As I mentioned earlier, the *Synopsis* guides dictated this order. Ian Jenkins reviews the 1856 *Synopsis* of the Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture galleries in his text *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*. He writes:

[The] visitor was led backwards through time, first to the Roman [1 on Fig. 7] and later Greek sculptures [2-5 on Fig. 7] and then to the classical Greek [7-9 on Fig. 7]; from there he was directed through the sequence of Assyrian sculptures [16-14 on Fig. 7] which terminated in the Assyrian transept [20 on Fig. 7] Here turning north again, were

⁸²British Museum, *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum* (London, 1827), 125.

⁸³ See Jenkins’s chapter “Lycian Tombs and Assyrian Palaces” of *Archaeologists and Aesthetes* for more detail about this debate.

to be found the Egyptian sculptures [19 on Fig. 7], recently rearranged to run from the Roman and Ptolemaic at the near end of the gallery through to the early dynastic at the far end.⁸⁴

By writing that “the visitor was led backwards through time,” Jenkins refers to the efforts of the nineteenth-century British Museum officials to lead the visitor through a three-dimensional timeline marked by the sculptures. He clearly implies that the viewer, in an ideal setting, would have approached the Egyptian sculptures first and the Roman sculptures last.

Conclusion- British Museum

The British Museum continued to grow and change throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond. I believe that British Museum would have even been a more powerful conveyor of an evolutionary art theory if the galleries were custom-built from the ground up. If given this opportunity, the officials would have been able to express their interpretation of the “chain of art” through the design of the building. Thus, the relationship between the sculptural collections would have been more obvious. Many of the British Museum’s chronic problems with space and visitor circulation that plagued its early years and today may have been avoided. However, we know that the choice of the old Montagu house was more a matter of financial restrictions.

I believe that even with the above-mentioned complications, nineteenth-century British Museum officials successfully enforced English identity through the collections and architectural design. I also suggest that they expressed their individual identities. As a result, internal conflicts arose when matters of object display and architecture were at hand. By creating strong visual clues, such as the building’s exterior details, they engaged the Egyptian sculptures and the English public into a dialogue. This dialogue linked the Egyptian material culture to England in an intimate bond. These sculptures created millennia ago now were a part of England’s story and English identity.

⁸⁴ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 163.

CHAPTER 2

THE ARTIST DAVID ROBERTS

An artifact does not have to be physically moved from one place to another to be “collected.” In this and the subsequent chapter, I widen the concept of collection to include the artist traveling to Egypt to portray its ancient material culture *in situ*. Nineteenth-century artists, through their depiction of this subject, add to the voices of those who asserted English identity.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, David Roberts collected imagery on site with his pencils and sketchbooks. These sketches were made into paintings and lithographs after his return to England. His extensive travels granted him access to views that were unfamiliar to the Victorian public. Today, Roberts is best known for his topographical paintings of the ancient and contemporary Egyptian landscape.

This chapter seeks to show that David Roberts, as an artist, asserted national identity by manipulating the gaze of his audiences. From production to display, his works reflect the role of England as empire, archaeologist and art patron. Roberts did this primarily through representations of the other: setting up ancient Egypt as a foil to nineteenth-century England.

This chapter focuses on how David Roberts’s experience as a tourist along with his early career in the theater determined the character of his Egyptian works. This chapter also addresses his commercial aspirations.

Brief Biography

In 1796, David Roberts was born into a modest household in Stockbridge a town near Edinburgh, Scotland. His father was a shoemaker. Roberts’s promise as an artist was discovered and cultivated early. Scholars tell us that the stories that his mother told of the ruins of a cathedral which stood in her native town of St. Andrew sparked his

childhood imagination. He was also inspired by some colorful circus posters to draw animals and other figures on the walls of his mother's kitchen. Instead of punishing the young Roberts, she encouraged his father to inquire about formal training.⁸⁵

Unfortunately, his income was not enough to send David away to school. Instead, Roberts's parents arranged an apprenticeship with the house-painter Gavin Beugo from 1808 to 1815. His work as a house-painter was competent. He was renowned for his imitations of marble and wood work.⁸⁶ Throughout most of his life Roberts was self-taught until his mid-life training in basic academic skills.

By 1816, Roberts lost his job as a house painter. In less than a year he began his career in theater. Ironically, his first job as a scenery painter was affiliated with a circus, the same environment that from which originated the posters that inspired him as a child. There, he worked for James Bannister. Bannister was in the process of setting up a strolling company to complement his successful animal-and-variety circus in Edinburgh. Roberts then moved on to work for more theater companies in Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 1822, he gained work in London theaters, first at the Coburg then in Drury Lane and Covent Gardens. Roberts returned to the Edinburgh Theater Royal to paint scenery for a pantomime production. Overall, his work for the theaters was well received. He continued working in this format until 1830.

Early on, David Roberts was savvy to the public demand for fresh and unfamiliar sights. For a topographical artist, seeking out new material meant either drawing on one's imagination or travel.⁸⁷ Roberts chose the later. He began working with foreign subject matter during his trip to Spain in 1832, "which was to prove a generous source of inspiration for his creative urges."⁸⁸ He spent two years drawing his way through Madrid, Toledo, Granada, Malaga, Seville and Gibraltar. In 1837, his lithographic prints

⁸⁵ Helen Guiterman, foreword to *From an Antique Land: Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land*, by David Roberts. ed. Barbara Culliford (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸⁷ Briony Llewellyn, "Roberts's Pictures of the Near East," chap. in *David Roberts* (London: Phaidon Press and Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 76.

⁸⁸ Fabio Bourbon, *Egypt Yesterday and Today: Lithographs by David Roberts, R.A.* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1996), 20.

from these years were published in the text *Picturesque Sketches of Spain*. Although he had problems with the publisher, Roberts's freshman efforts netted him an international reputation, considerable wealth and the acquaintance of Louis Haghe, the engraver who would work with him on future projects.

There are several reasons why Roberts decided to travel to Egypt. David Roberts was not the first artist to go into Egypt; however he was the first to travel there with the intention of producing art to sell to the public back home.⁸⁹ Primarily, his success with *Picturesque Sketches of Spain* made him look to the Middle East to answer the consumer demand for more exotic subject matter. Roberts was also in tune with the religious significance of Egypt to Victorian England. Besides his entrepreneurial motives, Roberts had personal reasons for traveling to Egypt. Adele Lewis reasons that Roberts enjoyed the Islamic architecture of Spain so much he decided to see more of the same in the Middle East.⁹⁰

David Roberts worked in Egypt from 1838 until 1839. During the journey he kept a detailed journal. Excerpts from his journal have been reproduced frequently. He was also interested in the juxtaposition of native people against these remains and contemporary settings. The paintings, developed from sketches, received acclaim during the 1840 exhibition at the Royal Academy. The following year, Royal academicians granted Roberts a full membership.

Between 1842 and 1849, the publisher Francis Graham Moon released Roberts's Egyptian pictures as a series of lithographs. Moon commissioned Louis Haghe to execute the engravings for the two-volume series *The Holy Land and Egypt and Nubia*. The two hundred forty-seven lithographs were printed along with Roberts's comments. Moon issued the lithographs in monthly installments. Subscribers could then bind them in large albums. Among the more than six hundred subscribers were dignitaries such as Queen Victoria, several other European royals, the Pasha of Egypt, John Ruskin and Charles Dickens.

⁸⁹ Peter A. Clayton, *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artists and Travellers in the 19th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 49.

⁹⁰ Adele H. Lewis, "'The Very Atmosphere of Egypt': David Roberts's *Egypt and Nubia*." (M.A. thesis, Arizona State University, 1994), 5.

How David Roberts Asserts National Identity

As a topographical and architectural artist, David Roberts presents the material culture of ancient Egypt in a manner that reinforced several characteristics of Victorian England. An effective method for a nation to establish its own identity is to set itself apart from others. That entails determining what or who the “other” is. As David Braund writes, “there now seems scant doubt. . . that the nation depends upon its enemies, actual or potential, to define it. That is, without ‘them’ there is no ‘us’: without ‘otherness’ there is no ‘sameness’ and, arguably, no need for it.”⁹¹

One of the first things the nineteenth-century viewer must have noticed about his Egyptian works was their exotic atmosphere. David Roberts’s work, by capturing imagery that could not be encountered on the British Isles, visually set Egypt up as a foil to England. Images such as pyramids, the Sphinx, desert storms and costumed natives, reinforced the idea of Egypt as exotic or the “other.”⁹²

Roberts also suggests the idea of Egypt as being timeless or caught in a historical present. This enhances the picturesque nature of the otherwise factual images. Another way to differentiate England from Egypt was to present to the Victorian English images of a land suspended in time. These would be especially powerful when viewed in a country bristling with new industry. The dissociation of Egypt (ancient and contemporary) from progress and industry, scholars suggest, comes from its years as an English colony. Edward Said, in his text *Orientalism*, addresses this facet of England’s relationship with Egypt. He writes that, “Egypt was not just another colony: it was the vindication of Western imperialism; it was, until its annexation by England [in 1822], an almost academic example of Oriental backwardness; it was to become the triumph of English knowledge and power.”⁹³ I argue that an imperial nation takes comfort in its own perception of being superior, in all ways, to its holdings. To me, nineteenth-century

⁹¹ David Braund, “The Nation, a Real Myth,” in *The Nation: Myth or Reality?*, ed. Keith Cameron, (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1994), 62.

⁹² David Roberts did produce paintings of nineteenth-century life in Egypt. This thesis focuses on the topographical and architectural paintings of ancient subjects. The discussion will touch on contemporary topics when considering paintings populated with native Egyptians and visitors.

European artists preached their gospel of “Oriental backwardness” by producing retrograde images of the Holy Land including Egypt.

Linda Nochlin, in an article published in *Art in America*, considers the tendency for European artists to dismiss the sense of progress from canvases depicting Eastern or Oriental subjects. Even though her article focuses on the works of the French painter Jean-Leon Gerome, one can apply the following statement to David Roberts. Nochlin writes, “[he] suggests that this Oriental world without change, of timeless, atemporal customs and rituals, untouched by the historical processes that were ‘afflicting’ or ‘improving’ but, at any rate, drastically altering Western societies at the time.” She goes on to write that the Eastern regions, which were being depicted in a state of suspended time, were actually undergoing significant changes. Ironically, these changes were due mostly to Western intervention.⁹⁴ Judging by the scope of Roberts’s subject matter, there was little room for the portrayal of these changes in topographical art featuring ancient structures.

Scholars report that nineteenth-century patrons prized antiquated images like these for their ability to invoke the *Bible*.⁹⁵ The sight of ancient Egyptian subject matter struck a chord with Victorian England. This reaction is based on the religious nature that is often attributed to them. This includes the fact that Victorians held the *Bible* to be a historical account.⁹⁶

Victorian viewers of Roberts’s works were most intimately associated with the Exodus account. I argue that they projected their identity onto that of the biblical-era nation of Israel. As Linda Colley writes:

Protestant Britons believed they were in God’s special care. They knew that they were bound to be regularly tested by periods of extreme sin and suffering, and they took it for granted that struggle. . . was their birthright. . . But they also believed that under

⁹³Said, *Orientalism*, 35.

⁹⁴ Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” *Art in America* 71 (May 1983), 122.

⁹⁵ Biblical references to Egypt include but are not limited to: the story of Abraham (Genesis 12), Joseph’s rise from slavery to prominence (Genesis 37-50) and the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt (Matthew 2). Egypt was best known for the Exodus account of Moses leading the nation of Israel’s liberation from their centuries-long enslavement in Egypt (Begins in Exodus 2).

⁹⁶ John David Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology 1549-1906*, 92.

Providence they would secure deliverance and achieve distinction. In short [many of them believed] that their land was another and better Israel.⁹⁷

Colley's observation of Victorian-era Protestants implies a sense of continuity that bridged the temporal gap between ancient Egypt and Victorian England. Roberts provided, for the people making this connection, a vehicle in which to interact with their adopted biblical ancestors on a visual level.

Besides providing an illustrative link to the past, Roberts projected onto his works the Victorian sense of morality. His depiction of both contemporary and ancient subject matter suggested themes that would provoke a moral response (active or inactive). Ruination, a prominent theme in Roberts's topographical works, encompasses images of timeworn, crumbling and dilapidated structures. This imagery is often associated with the concept of how a society can bring about its own destruction. One could imagine how particularly meaningful this theme could be for the English at the zenith of their influence.

I suggest these sensibilities would have viewed any depiction of the ruination of a once-grand civilization as a warning. Kenneth Bendiner keeps the *Bible's* Old Testament in mind when discussing the Victorian response to ruination imagery of David Roberts. He argues that "to the Victorian public all of [Roberts's] views of Egyptian ruins and deserts must have recalled Biblical prophesies such that of Ezekiel."⁹⁸ For effect, Bendiner quotes the following oracle from the prophet Ezekiel: "And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate. . . It shall be the basest of kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself anymore above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall not rule over nations."⁹⁹

Scholars cite Roberts's exhaustive recording of Egyptian ancient and contemporary culture as England's response to the same subject matter depicted by French artists. One of the most impressive examples of such work is the suite of engravings, entitled the *Description of Egypt*, published in 1822 by Vivant Denon (1747-

⁹⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 29-30.

⁹⁸ Bendiner, "David Roberts in the Near East," 71.

⁹⁹ Ezekiel 29:12-15.

1825). Beginning in 1798, Denon and his artists followed Napoleon's expedition of Egypt. *Description of Egypt* was intended to be the first publication to meet the challenge of presenting a comprehensive record to Egypt.¹⁰⁰ The company of artists sketched everything from the pyramids of Giza to indigenous workers grinding tobacco. In its original form, *Description* spans nine volumes of text and eleven volumes of illustrations.¹⁰¹ France had scored an international triumph with this work.

David Roberts seems intent on besting earlier attempts by French artists in Egypt. In a journal entry, written three months into his Egyptian tour, he writes "my drawings I feel are not only good but of the greatest interest independent of their being mere pictures. . . . The French work I now find convey no idea of these splendid remains."¹⁰²

David Roberts as the Viewer

Approaching David Roberts via his personal experience as a traveler offers insight to the visual dialogue into which he entered with the objects. This section discusses how Roberts, as traveler, visually engaged the material culture of Egypt.

Before anything about Roberts's Egyptian tour is discussed, we must look at prior experiences. Roberts was an experienced international traveler. As I mentioned earlier, he had traveled to Spain in 1832 to gather material for subsequent drawings, oil paintings and lithographs. Before that, he had been to France and Belgium. It seems likely that Roberts would have had a more intense experience with temples and sites had he been homebound his entire life before leaving for Alexandria.

It almost goes without saying that the actual journey is the most visually charged stage. It is here that Roberts's personal experience with the subject matter separates him from artists who were only painting Egypt from second-hand experience. Here his gazes rests upon the objects that were to dominate his professional life.

David Roberts left London for Egypt in August 1838, arriving in Alexandria on September 24. From there, he moved on to Cairo, where hired a boat and crew to take

¹⁰⁰Vercoutter, *The Search for Ancient Egypt*, 138.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰²Roberts, *From an Antique Land*, 74.

him up the Nile river. Roberts was accompanied by a *reis* and servant.¹⁰³ Along the way, he stopped at various sites, including temples at Dendera, Luxor, Edfu and Philae, recording what he saw in his notes. Roberts did the majority of his sketchwork while sailing downstream on his return-trip. By October he returned to Cairo with a wealth of sketches. He stayed there until the next February before completing his eastern tour in the Holy Land including Jerusalem.

The sites that Roberts encountered were diverse. His journal reflects both the bitter and the sweet. In an entry dated September 30, Roberts describes his first glimpse of the pyramids at Giza. He writes, “What sensations rush upon us at the first sight of these stupendous monuments of past ages. . . What were the stupendous works of Roman art compared to these. . .”¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Roberts was troubled by the sight of slaves bound in chains. He often mentions coming across dead dogs and camels. Moreover, he suffered bites from mosquitoes and flies.¹⁰⁵

As an artist collecting imagery for later compositions, Roberts’s viewing experience would have been more intense than the average tourist. This can be explained by applying John Davis’s model of the tourist gaze. In the model, the second stage or actual journey “takes place during a heightened liminal state...[that] results in intense visual acuity and attention to landscape.”¹⁰⁶ I noticed that his most visual descriptions are of the settings of the structures. Roberts’s journal entry (dated November 1) from his visit to Philae reveals this. Philae is often referred to as one of Roberts’s favorite sites in Egypt. His writing indicates how, first and foremost, the temple captured his gaze. It is clear that the temple could not contain his attention entirely. His gaze shifted to its surroundings. In Roberts’s words:

I made a large sketch of the temple called ‘[Pharaoh’s] Bed’ which seen in every direction is beautiful. The surrounding country is most extraordinary [and] unlike

¹⁰³ A *reis* is a native guide.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *From an Antique Land*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Helen Guiterman, “The Travels of David Roberts (1796-1864),” *Archaeology* 40 (Nov./Dec. 1987), 49.

¹⁰⁶ John Davis, *Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6.

anything else: immense rocks peeping occasionally through the drifted sand, which as the night closed in had the appearance of snow; with here and there patches or strips of vegetation and close to the water's edge groups of palm trees.¹⁰⁷

I would suggest that his journal entries not only served as a personal record, but also as a complement to his sketching. In his drawing (on site and in route), Roberts had to focus his attention on the buildings and such details as hieroglyphs. His travel journal entries, I argue, provide an outlet for him to express a more intuitive reaction to the scenery. It was only after his return home that he could incorporate this in his full-scale works.

Roberts, in his drawing and journal writing, cataloged visual motifs exclusive to Egypt. As a traveler, viewing these landmarks or signs shaped his own perception of what Egypt should look like.¹⁰⁸ These form a string of key imagery including pyramids, the Nile, temples, monumental statues, dunes, palm trees and more. When Roberts concluded his travels, he drew upon this vast archive of signs to create for the viewing public his idea of Egypt as eternal and timeless.

Scholars summarily mention the interrelationship between Roberts's work in the theater and his lithographs from Egypt. Scholars' use of terms like "dramatic" connotes David Roberts's experience with the theater. Roberts's portrayal of Egyptian subject matter was a natural response to his early career as a theater scene painter.

A major problem with analyzing Roberts's work in the theater in relation to his later work in the Middle East is the lack of existing material. Although we have a multitude of his Middle-Eastern paintings to consider, no examples of his scenery painting survives. This is a result of the impermanent nature of stage designs. Often his scenes were either painted over or used until destroyed. We do have some indications of how his scenery painting looked. For example we have Roberts's *Lithographic Key to his Grand Panoramic Naumachia in Harlequin and Number Nip*, 1827 (Fig. 9) from the Covent Garden Theater. This key was used to produce a panorama for a stage production.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *From an Antique Land*, 60.

¹⁰⁸ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 3.

David Roberts was an accomplished scenery painter. His backdrops attracted the praise of numerous critics. His work for the *Opera Seraglio* was especially lauded. Roberts painted this scenery for the Drury Theater in 1827. A contemporary article in the *New Monthly Magazine* writes:

The scenery is without exception, the most beautiful we have ever seen exhibited in a theatre, comprising a succession of the richest classic pictures which could be imagined as belonging to a Greek Island adorned with the noblest remains of ancient art, and shown in the most delicious lights that ever were by sea or land.¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, a rival set designer destroyed the *Opera Seraglio* scenery. Even though we no longer have this image, we can imagine how David Roberts manipulated the remains of the temple with lighting effects to set a tone that complemented the action of the play. At times, Roberts conveys a similar sense of desolation in his journal. Roberts recorded his thoughts the day he sketched the ruins of the temple on Gebel Garabe (Fig. 10) Roberts writes of the remains as if they were out of place in their native land. This journal reads, “What could have been the intent of these temples and memorial stones in the midst of solitude and silence, in the lone and distant land with which they would seem to have no possible [connection]? This is a point wrapped in the darkness of time, and which the hand of modern science has not yet unveiled.”¹¹¹ Here Roberts suggests that he considered the temple ruins as being stripped of their context.

It has been established that Roberts responded to the objects from a creative point-of-view. As an artist, he was most concerned with the object: what he viewed and what he subsequently interpreted in his art. The sites that Roberts viewed in Egypt coaxed words like “picturesque,” “extraordinary,” and “beautiful” from him.¹¹² There is another way to consider how the gaze of the artist was met. Roberts was also looking at the same sites from a commercial point of view. “However romantic his response to the magnificent sights of the East, it was based on the sound practical knowledge that his

¹⁰⁹ A panorama is a type of scenery that is designed to be scrolled from one side of the stage to the other.

¹¹⁰ Ballantine., *The Life of David Roberts*, 27.

¹¹¹ Roberts, *From an Antique Land*, v-45.

¹¹²All words are taken from journal entries recorded in *From and Antique Land: Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land* edited by Barbara Culiford (1989).

journey would bring him fame and fortune, for no artist of his [caliber] had previously attempted such an ambitious topographical project.”¹¹³ This is what leads to the bottom line. Roberts would not have set out for Egypt had he not determined it to be profitable. Roberts’s time in Egypt was an incredible investment of time, money and energy. Fortunately, for him it paid off royally.

At all times, Roberts kept his viewing public or market in mind. In his journal entry dated 20 December 1838, he writes, “I am the first artist at least from England that has yet been here and there is much in this. . . We shall see what impression [my sketches make] in England.”¹¹⁴ Doing this, I argue, colored the way he looked at his chosen subjects. Roberts was providing the English with a view of Egypt through Victorian eyes.

In order to meet the demand for art representing the Middle-East Roberts had to bring back a large number of sketches. While there, he completed over two hundred sketches filling three sketchbooks. He knew that these would provide him a lifetime income.¹¹⁵

The comprehensiveness of his drawings proves that Roberts systematically collected what was to become the standard vision of ancient Egypt: monumental, timeless and picturesque. This would explain why Roberts’s images of Egypt have come to be so ubiquitous. This is what the nineteenth-century market desired. Roberts, I argue, supplied the public’s need to see Egypt as contrast and complement to England as an exotic and timeless.

David Roberts as the Controlling Agent

As a painter, Roberts’s livelihood depended on him successfully conveying his visual experiences to the viewing public, some of whom would have been his potential consumers. This section addresses how Roberts shaped the perception of the Victorian viewing public through his creative process, marketing and display.

¹¹³ Llewellyn, “Roberts’s Pictures of the Near East,” 73.

¹¹⁴ David Roberts, *The Holy Land* (New York: Wellfleet Books, 1982), 74.

¹¹⁵ Llewellyn, “Roberts’s Pictures of the Near East,” 69.

Roberts's role as proxy to the home-fettered viewer granted him the influence to shape the perception of the viewing public in England. While many only collected and displayed ancient Egyptian objects after they were exported to England, Roberts had the advantage of viewing them in their native space.

The principal way in which Roberts exerted control over the viewer was selection. Roberts's images enabled him to take the viewers where he wanted them to go. Whatever the viewers saw was limited to the scale of his works.

Just as Roberts's gaze was constructed by signs, he shaped that of the viewer by effectively incorporating them into his works. For instance, he fills his drawings of the temple complex on Philae with the visual clues that would have fit neatly into most viewers' preconceptions of Egypt. Roberts executed a drawing with a view of the Trajan Kiosk temple or the "Pharaoh's Bed" (Fig. 11).¹¹⁶ Here the colonnaded monument rises above a landscape enclosed by palm trees that almost dominate the middle of the composition. Other vegetation peeks out from between the rocks in the lake. Roberts inhabits the drawing with men at the base of the pavilion, at the water's edge and on boats moored in the foreground. All of these elements combine to create a sense of place. I argue that this sense is what connects the viewing public to Roberts's experience as traveler. A large part of Roberts's success comes from his ability to reconstruct for the viewer the heightened viewing state of a traveler in a place that is vastly different from home.

Adele Lewis, in her thesis writes that, "His experience in scene painting resulted in his propensity for images which compressed a panoramic view observed from a dramatic angle. He also learned to place his monumental forms in the foreground up close to the picture plane which had the effect of pulling the viewer into the landscape." She continues by writing that, "Roberts created a stage wherein a multitude of mental and emotional plays could be enacted."¹¹⁷

Thus, Roberts acts as both set designer and playwright. In his paintings, he not only creates the environment for the inhabitants, but also provides a sense of place for the

¹¹⁶ This site is also known as Trajan's *Mamesi*.

¹¹⁷ Adele H. Lewis, "The Very Atmosphere of Egypt': David Roberts' *Egypt and Nubia*" (M.A. thesis, Arizona State University, 1994), 60.

viewer. Moreover, he arranges the unique visual vocabulary of Egyptian material culture to compose a script. This script, which changes from one painting to the next, was written to attract the eyes of the viewing public back home. *The Arrival of the Simun in Giza* is an exceptional example of his theater-inspired compositions (Fig. 12). Roberts sets the scene in motion with a sand storm or *simun* lashing a group of men and animals. The Sphinx and the Pyramids have been repositioned. The virtual repositioning of these monuments is proof of the artist's ultimate control. Slight rises in the dunes on opposite sides of the composition frame the group within the stage set by Roberts.

His approach would appeal to his theater-going contemporaries in England. According to J.L. Styan, "It follows that our guides to audience perception on the Victorian stage are bold and simple, and outrageously so: There was no final illusion of reality. Characterization was uncomplicated, with never a sense of development and marked by the clearest signals."¹¹⁸

A primary consideration in set design is determining the relationship between the players and the stage. Roberts includes indigenous Egyptians in his compositions. The people indicated scale, whether true or contrived, and added to the picturesque quality of the works. One example of his use of people is in his *Interior of the Temple of Dendera*. Here, Roberts uses the figures to indicate the scale of the columns (Fig. 13). We can observe how Roberts manipulates the scale of the temple in relation to its inhabitants. Even though the men provide visual interest, the temple is the real star of this lithograph. We can also appreciate how the oriental dress of the group imparts a picturesque tone to the piece. These men, serving as actors in costume, are essential to any playwright.

Some scholars, when discussing the inclusion of indigenous people, consider how Roberts perceived them on a personal level. J. Proctor, for example, writing for the journal *Muslim World* writes, "Whatever the location, the people are always dressed in unfamiliar costumes and are frequently engaged in strange occupations. Very few of the lithographs emphasize the humanity of his subjects and evoke feelings of identity or compassion."¹¹⁹ *The Temple of Wadi Saboua* can be used to illustrate this statement.

¹¹⁸J.L. Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 133.

¹¹⁹ Proctor, "David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism," 50.

Roberts moves the temple to the middle-ground and outfits the men in the foreground in costumes that would most likely be unfamiliar to contemporary Egyptians (Fig. 14).

A similar group appears in *The Colossi of Memnon at the Inundation* (Fig. 15). In this work, Roberts places the group of indigenous men before a rare view of the backs of the statues. The men are indistinct without any obvious attempt to portray them as a group of individuals. A hazy atmosphere filled with the colors of sunrise heightens the aura of the picturesque. The cattle in the middle-ground evoke pastoral works painted in Europe at the time. Proctor goes on to claim that among the Middle Easterners, Roberts disliked Egyptians the most. He also argues that Roberts, through his depiction of Eastern culture, echoes the nineteenth-century imperialist sentiment that Arabs needed English rule “not only to provide better government but also to promote their economic development and social progress.” He goes on to write that, “Arabs were reputed to be indolent, deficient in initiative and perseverance, and undependable. Roberts’s experiences led him to agree with this attribution.”¹²⁰ Proctor is not alone in reporting the negative side of this artist’s perception of the Egyptian people. Kenneth Bendiner, in the journal *Art History*, also argues that Roberts implies slothful nature with his interpretations of the Arabs.

While it is popular to criticize the inconsequentiality of the natives depicted in *Temple of Wadi Saboua* (Fig. 14) and in *The Colossi of Memnon at the Inundation* (Fig. 15) as making a statement against the culture, critics need to take another look. When considering the duties of a playwright, we can interpret the presence of the natives as necessary, but their individual identities as irrelevant. Roberts’s use of Arabs in Eastern style clothes is just as indistinct as a set of extras on the movie set or in a theater.

We can also use the artist’s words to more firmly establish links between his theater scenery and his Middle-Eastern sketches. In 1815, after visiting a theater in Edinburgh, Roberts wrote in his journal, “The scenery of *Aladdin and the Forty Thieves* had irresistible charms for me. [Baghdad], with its countless minarets, and scarcely a night passed on return from the theater without my having made sketches of what I had seen.”¹²¹ His journal entry written during his visit to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt

¹²⁰ Ibid., 52.

describes the effect this encounter with the scenery in 1815 had on him more than fifteen years later. Roberts records this visit in his work *Entrance to the Tombs of the Kings of Thebes* (Fig. 16). On 22 October 1838 he writes, “The heat was intense. It brought to my mind the story of Aladdin, and the wild scene in the mountain with the magician. This was the very spot for such a scene and upon descending into the tomb called Belzoni’s, I could not help thinking, the subsequent part of [*Aladdin and the Forty Thieves*] might have been realized.”¹²²

In addition to addressing Roberts’s use of people among the ancient architectural remains, Bendiner comments on the condition of the buildings themselves. He liberally uses the term “ruins” for the structures. The manner in which he uses the term implies the remains are the product of a less-than-perfect society. Bendiner argues that ruination was the dominant subject in Roberts’s works of Middle-Eastern subjects. He writes, “Ruined states, buildings, cities, and landscapes appear everywhere. And ruination, in addition to several other meanings, signified Islamic corruption. . . Architectural decay is linked to Moslem social decay.”¹²³ He and other scholars cite works such as *An Ancient Egyptian Temple on Gebel Garabe* (Fig. 10). Roberts’s patrons responded to the crumbling nature of the monument that was brought to ruin.

The depiction of the “ruination” theme has been regarded as casting a negative light on the Egyptian people. I believe that Roberts utilized these as markers of a civilization long past. In my opinion he presented an idealized view of the most damaged monuments. This idealization is apparent when viewing Roberts’s *Ancient Egyptian Temple on Gebel Garabe* (Fig. 10). I believe that Roberts’s experience as a scene designer enabled him to amplify a sense of desolation. He did this by stripping away extraneous landscape elements. He discarded rubble that would distract from the primary stone features. Roberts’s landscape evokes the memorial theme of a graveyard.

Upon his return, Roberts gaze shifted from the objects to the bottom line. He immediately began to collect on his investment. This was done through the production,

¹²¹ Ballantine, *The Life of David Roberts*, 7-8.

¹²² Roberts, *The Holy Land*, 40.

¹²³ Bendiner, “David Roberts in the Near East,” 68.

display and sale of his works, including watercolors, drawings, oil paintings and lithographs. As stated earlier in this chapter, Roberts was sensitive to his market. This market consisted of art patrons with the money to satisfy its demand for fresh imagery.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the production of the lithographs was a joint effort of Roberts and his chosen lithographer Louis Haghe. Roberts provided drawings made from the sketches and accompanying color notes. Haghe then hand colored the drawings before processing.¹²⁴

Besides producing remarkable works, Roberts's success lay in his ability to make them available to his intended market. His most powerful ally in all of this was the Royal Academy. The Royal Academy, founded in 1768, was England's answer to the great artist salons of continental Europe. By the early nineteenth century the annual Royal Academy exhibitions became a staple in the social calendar. The Academy embodied England's desire to establish itself as a patron and sustainer of artists. Two years after his return from Egypt, Roberts gained prestige by being elected a full Royal Academician. This new status gained him the most valuable marketing tool: exposure. Roberts had a profitable relationship with the Academy. He exhibited his first set of Eastern paintings at the 1840 exhibition.

Conclusion – David Roberts

Roberts worked until his death in November 1864. He left behind a tremendous visual legacy. Clayton reports in the year following his death, Christie's auction house sold 1040 of his works in a five-day event.¹²⁵ His works can be found illustrating a multitude of texts from souvenir books sold today in Egypt to books found on the coffee tables and classrooms.

¹²⁴ Peter Clayton, *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artists and Travellers in the 19th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

CHAPTER 3

THE ARTIST FRANCIS FRITH

As England approached the mid-nineteenth century, photography joined painting as a means of collecting and displaying Egyptian imagery. Artist-explorers used the new medium to provide an innovative way for their viewing publics to look at Egypt. Francis Frith was a part of the first generation of Western photographers to travel to Egypt. Western photographers working with publishers mass-produced photographic prints. As a result, more social groups were granted access to an Egypt that was still regarded as exotic and timeless.

Francis Frith, through his photography, asserts England's role as an imperial capital. His photographs helped the Empire document its expanding overseas holdings during the mid to late nineteenth century. His travel photography also reinforces the perception of the Victorians as cosmopolitans at ease traveling abroad or from their armchairs. The popularity of Frith's work reveals England's religious population who prized his images as validation of the *Bible*.

Brief Biography

Most of what is known about Francis Frith comes from *A True Story of My Life: A Biographical, Metaphysical, and Religious History*, the autobiography he penned in his sixties. Even though scholars have access to his personal narrative, they are at the mercy of human memory. Common complaints from scholars are dating discrepancies concerning his early career and overseas travel.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ See Bertrand Lazard, "Francis Frith in the Holy Land: Some Dates Revised," *History of Photography* 19, number 3 (Autumn 1995). See also Bill Jay, *Victorian Cameraman: Francis Frith's Views of Rural England 1850-1898* (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1973), 13-15.

Francis Frith was born in England in 1822 to a working-class family in the town of Chesterfield, Derbyshire. The young Francis lived in scenic surroundings. His parents, both devout Quakers, raised him in a loving environment with a healthy balance of recreation, worship and education.¹²⁷ The practical nature of Quakerism, a Protestant faith, was quickly absorbed by Frith and sustained his lifelong love of theology and philosophy.¹²⁸

For his formal education, Francis's parents sent him to a parochial boarding school in Birmingham. Even though he considered his life in boarding school "insipid and mechanical," he thrived in languages and sciences.¹²⁹ He graduated at age sixteen. Afterwards, his parents arranged for an apprenticeship with the proprietor of a cutlery shop. During this apprenticeship, Frith demonstrated a mechanical aptitude.

At the end of his apprenticeship in 1843, Frith suffered a debilitating mental and physical breakdown. He attributed his recovery to a spiritual renewal. He claimed the breakdown pushed religious faith to the center of his life.¹³⁰

After a year of traveling with his parents, Frith settled in Liverpool and opened a green grocery as part of a short-lived partnership. Frith ran the business on his own until he sold the business at a good profit. This new wealth gave him the means to pursue his interests in photography and travel.

No one knows exactly why Frith chose photography as a profession. I can imagine that he watched innovations like the 1851 introduction of Frederick Scott Archer's wet-plate collodion process with great interest.¹³¹ He gained experience by traveling across the English countryside photographing the estates of middle- to upper-

¹²⁷I will use the terms Quakers and Society of Friends interchangeably.

¹²⁸ Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 111.

¹²⁹ Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 11.

¹³⁰ Joanna Talbot, *Francis Frith, Masters of Photography*, ed. Rosemary Eakins (London: Macdonald & Co., 1985), 2.

¹³¹The wet-collodion process produces glass negatives. In a dark room a glass plate was coated with a mixture of collodion and iodides. After drying, the plate was dipped in a silver nitrate bath and loaded, while still wet, into the camera to be exposed. The plate had to be developed immediately afterwards. For more detailed explanation of how Frith's use of wet collodion, see Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 24.

class patrons.¹³² In 1853, Frith founded the Liverpool Photographic Society with a small group of other camera enthusiasts. Three years later he left for his first trip to the East.

Frith did not travel alone. Of his traveling companions, Francis Herbert Wenham is the only one identified by name. Wenham accompanied Frith on two of the Middle-Eastern tours. From September 1856 to the following July, Frith worked his way up the Nile Valley from Cairo to Abu Simbel. Leaving Egypt, they traveled to Nubia, Palestine and Syria. In November 1857 they traveled to Syria and Palestine via Egypt and returned home in spring 1858. The next summer Frith challenged himself by sailing over 1,500 miles up the Nile beyond the fifth cataract.

Some scholars attribute Francis Frith's initial interest in Egypt to his personal faith. Joanna Talbot claims that, "because his religion was the [center] of his life, it is not surprising that he was drawn to the East."¹³³ Frith was an active member of the Society of Friends. Like many Victorians, he was attracted to the connection that Egypt's ancient material culture provided to the *Bible*. Moreover, his photographic expeditions to Egypt boasted his social status as a gentleman-traveler. Frith was not a struggling artist. He was able to bear the great expense of overseas travel and photography himself. Regardless of the exact reasons for going, Egypt and the Holy Land became his most profitable endeavor.

By 1860, newlyweds Francis and Mary Ann Frith had settled in the Quaker community of Reigate, Surrey. He opened his own photographic business, F. Frith and Company, a couple of years later. Although Frith was a gifted entrepreneur, he found the nature of business unpleasant. In his own words:

the necessity to [labor] is no curse; but the spirit in which money earning work is done is very often and very largely a cursing spirit. It may easily become a means of crushing out the little germ of generous, true, spiritual life and noble aspiration which God and nature have planted in a man. . . . There is nothing even in commercial success that any man need be proud of. Some of the poorest, most ignorant and most vulgar minds make 'capital, shrewd, successful business men.'¹³⁴

¹³²Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 22.

¹³³ Talbot, *Francis Frith*, 3.

¹³⁴ Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 15.

Frith and Mary Ann raised a host of children. Like his family, Frith's business thrived. He hired photographers and dispatched them on assignments around Britain. Frith never truly retired. In his later years, he continued to pursue both painting and photography. All the while he remained faithful in his ministry of speaking and writing for the Society of Friends. Francis Frith died, in 1898, during a stay in Cannes, France.¹³⁵

How Francis Frith Asserts National Identity

As England crossed the mid-century mark it was not only flexing its imperial muscle, but also taking stock of what it had already claimed. By the 1800's, England had already fixed its eye on Egypt. In 1798, the English forces led by Admiral Horatio Nelson squashed France's ambitions to annex Egypt at the Battle of the Nile. England along with Europe was drawn to the economic potential of building the Suez Canal. France won the coveted construction rights and opened the Canal in 1869. Not to be excluded, England purchased a major share by 1875, thereby expanding its own global economy.¹³⁶

The survey of one's holdings is an imperial prerogative. To see what one has acquired satisfies a sense of entitlement. Frith empowered the nineteenth-century English public by giving it a means to do so. His body of work, encompassing the British Isles and abroad, reassured the self-perception of mid-Victorian England. In his own way, Frith was mapping out parts of the British Empire. This proved to be an effective means of visualizing England and her possessions.

The Royal Geographic Society, founded in 1830, led the effort to chart the British Empire. Atlases published and distributed by the Society translated the expanse of empire into formats that were easily understandable by the public. Seeing the entire British Empire encapsulated on a wall, for instance, reinforced the perception of global dominance. "Separate, constituent parts of the British Empire were easily visualized as one general, all-encompassing whole. This was partly because large areas of the map of the world were [colored] red, and that cartographical image provided a reassuring picture of coherence and uniformity."¹³⁷ Thus, the perception of unity was also reinforced.

¹³⁵Talbot, *Francis Frith*, 7.

¹³⁶Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 20.

Royal Geographic Society members nurtured a partnership with photographers. The burgeoning art of photography complemented their mandate to record the world. Like atlases, photographs presented two-dimensional versions of the world. Photographs allow the viewer to “hold the whole world in [his or her] hands— as an anthology of images.”¹³⁸ Photographic views flesh out dots and names on the atlases. Photographs also draw attention to particular points of interest. At Royal Geographic Society gatherings, onlookers interacted with familiar and foreign places through lantern slideshows.¹³⁹ Visitors and members also viewed adjacent galleries filled with photographs of the same. Forums like this, along with album books, visually entwined different lands together under the same crown.

Both photographs and atlases are imperial vehicles of self-promotion. These visual aids were invaluable for disseminating the concept of empire. Beyond words, they gave a sense of how large and eclectic the empire was becoming. They boasted the ease by which England ruled culturally diverse and vast collection of lands. School administrators prominently displayed atlases to students to keep the idea of empire close. “One of its most enduring icons, projected onto the memories of generations of schoolchildren, was the world map with the territory of the Empire [colored] pink.”¹⁴⁰

The appeal of travel photography in mid-Victorian England reveals the continuing fascination with the exotic other. Photographs emphasizing the allure of the exotic East were a marketer’s dream. “Images of almost the entire world were or were soon to be available for the imperialist imagination to contemplate and possess, as photographers documented the museum of the world.”¹⁴¹ Brimming with exotic sights and culture, Egypt commanded attention from photographers, publishers and consumers.

¹³⁷ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85.

¹³⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 3.

¹³⁹ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 22.

¹⁴⁰ Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 20.

¹⁴¹ Hershkowitz, *The British Photographer Abroad*, 85.

The Victorians wrapped the Near East in a mystique that reinforced the association of Egypt with darkness. Dramatic words like “deepest” and “darkest” have peppered dialogue concerning locations in Africa and other parts of the East. To the Victorians, exposing such places to the light-dependent process of photography signified their own illuminating influence.¹⁴² For them, the arrival of the photographer and camera symbolized the infusion of light and order to regions considered culturally stagnant. Nineteenth-century photographers of Eastern subjects typically shunned signs of modernity while emphasizing antiquity. Such imagery, ubiquitous in Frith’s time, reinforced the public’s perception of civilizations left in the shadow of progress.

Progress was not entirely considered to be ideal. Some feared that, if left unchecked, it could trigger social decay. By the mid-1800’s English city centers succumbed to the ill effects of industrial and population growth. As the situation at home became a disappointment, disillusioned Victorians looked elsewhere for cultural relief. They idealized distant societies, seeing in them the purity and order that they believed had diminished in their own.¹⁴³ The nineteenth-century English public, enchanted by Eastern societies, forever bound the long-gone societies to their own history. Frith, reminiscing about his travels to the East, writes that he was “[following his] quest towards the romantic and perfected past, rather than to the [bustling] and immature present.”¹⁴⁴

Francis Frith answers the question of the viability of Christian faith in Victorian England. Frith is known for his spirituality. His biography is rich with his personal testimony of faith. He embodies the resistance to the secularized atmosphere of the Enlightenment in mid-Victorian England.¹⁴⁵ He and other Christian positivists sought assurance in imagery that proved the veracity of the *Bible*. Francis Frith did not disappoint. He provided Victorian Christians visual testimony of what they were

¹⁴²Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 30.

¹⁴³Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 67.

¹⁴⁴Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 16.

¹⁴⁵Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 111.

defending. I argue that Frith's time in Egypt and the Holy Land was, beyond being a business venture and a display of social status, an act of worship.

Photographs were credited with making Egypt, and other biblical lands, more realistic and accessible than paintings. "As a kind of mechanical usurper, the camera could be seen as supplanting mid-century landscape painters by removing their major determinant of quality and success, faithfulness to nature, from the critical discourse."¹⁴⁶ Photography, by combining technology and art, suspended time. Therefore, photographs that accurately depicted an antiquarian Egypt made its related *Bible* narratives seem more tangible. It was this evidence that reinforced an assumed religious heritage dating back two thousand years.

Nations, when reinforcing identity, seek out the oldest history with which they can associate themselves. "And that antiquity must be remarkable in ways which impinge on contemporary self-images."¹⁴⁷ Thus England, as it sought to assert its identity, was drawn to historical narratives from civilizations that have already been tested by war, strife and other issues.

Akin to constitutions and other nation-building documents, the *Bible* became a national artifact for the Victorians. Its antiquity was mingled with that of England's more recent history. As Howe writes, "In the nineteenth century, history was the governing concept that united almost all intellectual inquiries: the life of the mind was particularly involved in the search for origins— of species, of languages, of beliefs. History was the inevitable touchstone for these inquires, and the *Bible* was the ultimate history."¹⁴⁸ Collecting history lies at the heart of England's desire to acquire Egypt's imagery.

Victorian England, ancient Egypt and the *Bible* became inextricably bound together by traveler-artists. Michel Frizot, addressing the relationship between ancient objects and the photographs that depict them writes, "It is perhaps possible to see a similarity between the monument, seen as a witness of and ghost from ancient times, and

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *Landscape of Belief*, 208.

¹⁴⁷ Braund, "The Nation", 59.

¹⁴⁸ Kathleen Stewart Howe, *Revealing the Holy Land: The Photographic Exploration of Palestine* ed. Patricia Ruth, (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara, 1997), 19.

the photographic document which perpetuates its memory, even allowing us, in a sense, to revisit it.”¹⁴⁹ Through historical introspection, the religious positivists claimed the *Bible* and its settings as their own. This is critical when competing with other imperial states for the status of most effective conqueror, missionary, educator and steward.

Frith’s photographs sparked another English imperial trait: the aspiration to reform, through evangelism, lands considered to be heathen. Frith viewed Egypt as a land waiting for cultural and spiritual renewal. He remarks, “It is an exciting thought that perhaps to England will eventually fall the task of governing this wonderful land, and of reviving and [Christianizing] its mummified and [paralyzed] life.”¹⁵⁰ Frith, although impressed with the material culture he encountered in Egypt, was still the citizen of an empire.

Frith’s overseas expeditions fulfilled England’s function as a world explorer. The English, at all times of their history, were known for their wanderlust. Expeditions to the Arctic, the Americas, Africa and Asia extended the empire’s reach. Through exploration, the British Empire asserted its identity by casting its gaze as far as its most intrepid citizen would tread. This is especially true during the mid-nineteenth century at the height of its influence.

From the privileged Grand Tour participant to the career-explorer, the idea of the English explorer is ubiquitous. As the State’s official geographer, the Royal Geographical Society “played an influential role in imperial society through its organizing of expeditions and its position as the focus of geographical knowledge.”¹⁵¹

Exploration, “by definition, . . . is both purposeful and seeking.”¹⁵² It indicates a sense of adventure. Moreover, exploration signifies one’s comfort with one’s place in the larger world. Its undertaking presents the picture of one who wants to expand one’s boundaries.

¹⁴⁹ Michel Frizot, “States of Things,” chap. in *The New History of Photography*. trans. Susan Bennett and others (Köln: Könemann, 1998), 381.

¹⁵⁰Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 20.

¹⁵¹Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 22.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 31.

In nineteenth-century England, the ability to travel abroad indicated status. Travel was considered obligatory for the proper English gentleman. Neither David Roberts nor Frith excluded themselves from that assumption. Frith's first expedition to the East established his social identity as a gentleman-traveler. Frith and his family defended this status. When London publishers Negretti & Zambra implied that they sponsored his first expedition, his sister quickly rebuked them with a stern letter.¹⁵³ "Despite financial agreements he had entered into with publishers, it was important to Frith and his family that no mistake be made about his hard-earned status as gentleman and amateur, or about the creative autonomy that status afforded him."¹⁵⁴

Above all, exploration satisfies the desire to influence indigenous populations of "discovered" places. Like explorers imposing themselves on foreign lands, tourist-photographers subjected the people under their imperial gaze.¹⁵⁵ Exploration and empire building were necessary to each other. These, in turn, inspired religious pilgrimage and mission work.

Francis Frith as the Viewer

Egypt, while never losing its exotic appeal, was familiar to privileged European and British travelers by the time Frith made his first expedition there. In the 1860's Victorians were spending winters on the banks of the Nile. By 1868, Cook's Tours helped a growing number of westerners make Egypt a stop on the Grand Tour.¹⁵⁶

Frith's visual experience in Egypt was shaped by his faith. "Frith's awareness of the contemporary discussion about religion and history influenced how he approached his photographic subjects in the Near East and, more importantly, how he would submit his results to his Western audience."¹⁵⁷ Francis Frith's travels to Egypt and the Holy Land can be regarded as his religious pilgrimage. In his own way, Frith was validating his

¹⁵³ See Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 70.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵⁵ Nir, *The Bible and the Image*, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Deborah Bull and Donald Lorimer, *Up the Nile: A Photographic Excursion: Egypt 1839-1898* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1979), xvi.

¹⁵⁷ Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 113.

faith and subsequently the faith of those back in England. Overall, his gaze was motivated by a drive to accurately portray his experiences on film.

To say that Frith enjoyed his time in Egypt would be an understatement. His writings recount the thrill of experiencing the East. Frith cast his eager gaze on the wealth of exotic sights. His “main delight was in the ruins— temples, sphinxes, pyramids, tombs, rock carvings and sculptures. His writings are littered with awe-filled descriptions of them, and they are the subjects of the vast majority of his photographs.”¹⁵⁸ The scale and variety of the ancient structures impressed Frith. The wealth of colorful descriptions in his memoirs proves that a heightened state of awareness remained with him long after his return. Frith remarks, “I can still struggle back to the confines of the mental region in which those intensely delightful days were passed.”¹⁵⁹

Frith maintained a leisurely pace during his first Eastern expedition. He savored being in the presence of the various sites. Excluding the time he spent setting up equipment, framing views, and developing negatives Frith spent a lot of time at the sites he photographed. His attitude is logical considering that this was his first time in Egypt. Douglas R. Nickel explains that adopting an unhurried pace during travel was a trait of a “gentleman’s Grand Tour.”¹⁶⁰ However, he did not confine himself to his photography; he did mingle with the local population.

Some scholars report that Frith wore Eastern costumes for comfort and ease of movement among the local population.¹⁶¹ Nickel disagrees, claiming that by the time Frith was traveling through the East, there was no need for dressing to blend in for safety’s sake. He argues that Frith’s self portraits in Turkish dress “represented nothing more than a Western affectation.”¹⁶² Frith’s self-portraits in Turkish dress introduce him

¹⁵⁸Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 20.

¹⁵⁹ Talbot, *Francis Frith*, 5.

¹⁶⁰Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 47.

¹⁶¹ David Bate addresses the irony in the trend of Western nationals wearing traditional Eastern costumes. His article has two portraits of Francis Frith in costume. See “The Occidental Tourist: Photography and Colonizing Vision,” *Afterimage* (Summer 1992).

¹⁶²Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 150-151.

to readers of his photographic view albums. *Portrait: Turkish Summer Costume* was the first photo print sent to subscribers of the *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described by Francis Frith* (1858-1860) publication (Fig. 17). By opening his publication with a self-portrait in native attire, Frith established himself as a knowledgeable interlocutor of the East to his viewers.

Travel conditions affected Frith's approach to photography. He experienced hardships beyond those encountered by the increasing number of travelers to the region. Besides worrying about usual concerns like logistics, food and safety, Frith had to overcome the challenges of photographing in harsh conditions. The desert environment complicated the already difficult wet-collodion process. Throughout his travels, Frith was plagued by dust, heat and insects and more. At one point Frith complains of the temperature inside his darkroom tent reaching 130 degrees Fahrenheit causing his collodion mixture to boil.¹⁶³

Because the process requires that negatives be immediately developed after exposure, the darkroom had to be within a few seconds walk from the camera. Frith variously used a boat, tent, carriage, and tomb for a darkroom.¹⁶⁴ In one of Frith's most admired prints, *Pharaoh's Bed: Island of Philae*, the darkroom boat competes with the temple kiosk for the viewer's attention (Fig. 18).¹⁶⁵ The mast of the boat, docked in the foreground, repeats the strong vertical lines of the kiosk's columns, walls and palm tree stands.

The wet-collodion process did not permit enlargements after developing. Frith had to transport two cameras for 8 x 10-inch plates: one for page views and the other for stereo views. He also carried a camera large enough to accommodate 16 x 20-inch mammoth prints. Besides the cameras, he transported crates of auxiliary equipment glass plates, chemicals, and distilled water. That Frith returned twice suggests that he believed

¹⁶³Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 24.

¹⁶⁴It is worth mentioning that a favorite story of Frith scholars is the misunderstanding about his darkroom carriage. Frith reports that the carriage was thought to transport his harem. See Talbot, 1985, 3 and Jay, 1973, 25.

¹⁶⁵ When possible I used the same titles as Nickel records in his Appendix on page 177. Other titles are spelled as they were printed in their sources.

it was worth the effort. Frith surprised himself with the quality of work produced in spite of the harsh conditions. He writes, “when I reflect on the circumstances under which the photographs were taken I marvel greatly that they turned out so well.”¹⁶⁶

Although Frith had strong feelings about entrepreneurship, he successfully marketed his photographs to the Victorian public. He understood that their historical and religious significance gave them mass-appeal.¹⁶⁷ I argue that this knowledge colored the way he produced and marketed his work.

Frith set out to produce work that could be easily mass-produced and sold for a generous profit. Frith’s choice of the wet-collodion process shows that he recognized that higher quality negatives yielded more prints and greater profit. Each glass plate packed for his Egyptian excursions had the potential of producing thousands of pristine prints. I argue that knowing this gave Frith the incentive to produce spectacular topographical photo views.

Competition is a driving force of commercialism. Scholars often pit Francis Frith in a virtual competition against David Roberts. This is logical considering how each artist dominates nineteenth-century orientalist imagery. In the same breath, Julia Van Haften acknowledges the Roberts collection as both an inspiration and stepping stone for Frith. She states, “It is not impossible that the success of Roberts’s work prompted Frith, who recognized the superiority of photo images, to turn his photographic publishing ambition to the East.”¹⁶⁸ As an entrepreneur-artist, Frith would have been influenced by a competitive spirit. Thus the gaze of Francis Frith, willingly or not, was shaped by the work of his predecessor David Roberts.

David Roberts released two sets of lithographs titled *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea and Arabia* and *Egypt and Nubia* between 1842 and 1849. Their success prompted a second edition to be published between 1855 and 1856. The timing was

¹⁶⁶Talbot, *Francis Frith*, 3.

¹⁶⁷Van Haften, *Egypt and the Holy Land*, vii.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

convenient for Frith. It is also opportune for his modern scholars. It means that Frith had access to Roberts's work as he was preparing for his first tour to Egypt.¹⁶⁹

Considering the care that Francis Frith put into the collection and distribution of Egyptian imagery, I believe that he used Roberts's lithographs as blueprints. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Frith experienced many challenges photographing his way through Egypt. He chose state of the art technology for collecting imagery in one of the most inhospitable environments for photography. He would have sought out assurance that this investment of money and efforts would pay off. Using Roberts's Eastern works as a model guaranteed his own success. Nickel writes "[that] Frith and his publisher wanted *Egypt and Palestine* to be a photographic reworking of the Roberts project is readily apparent. Not only did they employ the same distribution system and style of layout, but Frith's approach to his subject matter in the field emulated his forerunner's."¹⁷⁰ As an entrepreneur, Frith had decided that his photographic prints be mounted on card stock, described with text and sold by subscription. As an artist, Frith took advantage of Roberts's having already solved compositional problems. Before leaving England, I propose that he engaged in an imaginary dialogue with the painter to address issues such as site selection and camera placement. This dialogue continued as he was working in Egypt.

Francis Frith as the Controlling Agent

Francis Frith had a genuine interest in recreating the traveler's experience in Egypt. He confesses that his efforts fall short of conveying the thrill of his first experience in the East. Frith in his introduction to *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described* complains, "I am too deeply [enamored] of the gorgeous, sunny East, to feign that my insipid, [colorless] pictures are by any means just to her spiritual charms."¹⁷¹ In one statement, Frith not only celebrates his experience, but also humbles his efforts. Even with his stunning results, Frith felt that he was no match for the East.

¹⁶⁹Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 85.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷¹Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 26.

Although more people were seeing Egypt for themselves, there were still many who would never be able to go. Urry offers consolation to home-bound travelers. He notes that the viewer, unable to “‘see’ the actual wonder in question . . . can still sense it, see it in their mind.”¹⁷²

Like David Roberts, Frith wanted to produce a body of work that encompassed as much of Egypt’s ancient material culture as possible. As discussed earlier, Francis Frith relied heavily on Roberts to accomplish this. Frith skillfully retraced Roberts’s steps in Egypt. Besides photographing the same sites, he often appropriated the same viewpoints from Roberts’s compositions.¹⁷³ In some cases the resemblance is striking.

For instance, both artists produced celebrated images of the Trajan Kiosk temple on the Island of Philae also known as Pharaoh’s Bed. Frith approaches the temple from an angle similar to that of Roberts’s version (Fig. 18). Like Roberts, he includes just enough landscape to give the viewer a sense of place (see Fig. 11). The work is picturesque without losing its documentary intent. Just as Roberts anchors his composition with river boats, Frith uses his darkroom boat to do the same. The human presence is minimal in Frith’s view. Considering the distance from which Frith had to shoot the temple, any figures posed near it would have been swallowed by the composition. The almost non-existent figures of the men sitting on his darkroom boat offer the viewer little consolation. The composition lacks the lively presence of Egyptians in native dress. Unlike Frith, Roberts has the luxury of staffing several sets of native Egyptians for scale and interest. He brings the Trajan Kiosk temple closer to the viewer; something that Frith cannot afford to move too much closer without sacrificing the composition.

Although he was greatly influenced by Roberts, Frith does offer the viewer his individual style. As a photographer, he had unique challenges to overcome. Frith’s own complaint was that he lacked the power to have complete control over the environments

¹⁷²Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 86.

¹⁷³Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 86.

in which he worked. He shares his frustration in one of his most printed quotes:

A photographer only knows— he can appreciate the difficulty of getting a view satisfactorily into the camera: foregrounds are especially perverse; distance too near or too far; the falling away of the ground; the intervention of some brick wall or other commonplace object, which things. . .are the rule, not the exception. I have often thought, when [maneuvering] about for a position for my camera, of the exclamation of the great mechanist of antiquity: ‘Give me a fulcrum for my lever, and I will move the world’. Oh what pictures we could make, if we could command our points of view!¹⁷⁴

His medium also gave him different opportunities. Above all, photography was prized for its unprecedented ability to convey realism. Frith was able to collect documentary-style images of the Egyptian objects that the English coveted. English media reflect the trend, in the latter-half of the nineteenth century, to favor the realistic over the romantic. A contemporary *London Times* review, reprinted in an introduction to an album of Frith’s prints, exclaims his photographs “carry us far beyond anything that is in the power of the most accomplished artist to transfer to his canvas.”¹⁷⁵ Frith was also able to produce the most comprehensive collection of images of the Near East available at the time.¹⁷⁶ Instead of relying on memory and sketches, Frith was able to create hundreds of pristine collodion negatives on the spot. The technology allowed him to capture his gaze on film. It is not filtered through time and the busyness of homecoming. His gaze is freshly presented to the viewer as snapshots of his encounter with Egypt’s ancient material culture.

Frith employed the popular format of stereoscopic views as a means of conveying a sense of interacting with the Eastern vistas. Stereoviewers employed optics to force viewers’ eyes to merge cleverly composed twin photographs into one three-dimensional image. This illusion immersed the onlooker in the image. Gazing at exotic vistas through stereoviewers enabled people to experience Egypt vicariously through Frith. As

¹⁷⁴ Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 22 and 24. The “fulcrum for my lever” quote has been attributed to the ancient Greek inventor Archimedes (c. 287-211 B.C.).

¹⁷⁵ Bull, *Up the Nile*, xiv.

¹⁷⁶Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 86.

Bill Jay notes, “The stereo viewer was an indispensable amusement in all the best Victorian families. It was the television of the age.”¹⁷⁷

Frith sent his first negative plates back to England while he was still on his first expedition. Negretti & Zambra published stereo views or stereographs from the views taken with the dual lens camera. Between 1857 and 1859, the firm published the views on card and glass mounts.¹⁷⁸ Collectors kept the card mounted stereo views in the pocket to complete the *Stereoscopic Views in Egypt, Nubia, etc.* One example, *The Two Largest Pyramids at Geezech*, illustrates Frith’s typical compositional style (Fig. 19). From the peaks of the pyramids to the group of people in the foreground he demonstrates sensitivity to the near and the distant. Each section of the landscape has an interesting feature. Photographers arranged compositions like this to enhance the three-dimensional effect created when prints were viewed in the stereo viewers. Frith’s stereo views were a success. William C. Darrah, claims that Frith’s “were probably the most lavishly praised and famous series in the history of stereography.”¹⁷⁹

Frith also passed on the sense of awe inspired by grand proportions of some of the temples and monuments he photographed. To give the viewer a physical and visual sense of Egypt’s largest structures, he shot on mammoth glass plates. Even after they were cropped, the prints measured an impressive 14.5 x 19 inches. From 1857, James N. Virtue published a subscription series of mammoth plates titled *Cairo, Sinai, Jerusalem and the Pyramids of Egypt* to accompany whole-plate series of the same name. One such example is the *Temple at Koum Ombos* print, dated 1858 (Fig. 20). Frith excludes extraneous landscape details forcing the viewer to focus on the details of the structure. It takes effort to find the man— dressed in black— near the left of the foreground. His presence is the only indicator of scale.

The time-worn portions of the temple strike the balance between grandeur and ruin that would be familiar to the mid-Victorian viewer. This proves their continuing

¹⁷⁷Jay, *Victorian Cameraman*, 27.

¹⁷⁸Photographic historians report different publication details for Francis Frith’s photo series. For purposes of clarity, I am using the Douglas R. Nickel text for the primary source concerning the nineteenth-century printing of Frith’s work.

¹⁷⁹ William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, PA: By the author, 1977), 131.

fascination with ruination. Frith's "image of Kom Ombo catalogues the attributes most likely to strike a responsive emotional chord in the modern viewer: immense scale, dilapidation, and the sense of man's great work returning to nature."¹⁸⁰ This also proves that Frith was not merely taking photographs for cataloging purposes. As a painter would, he was shaping the composition to transmit emotion. Like Roberts, Frith was using a crumbling ancient Egyptian structure illustrate signs that continue to be interpreted differently by individual viewers.

Frith's Eastern photographs when projected in lanternslide shows and enlarged as wall-sized panoramas also sought to reproduce his sense of being among structures of almost inconceivable grandeur. Nickel remarks, "Like the stereo views, Frith's mammoth-plate prints, panoramas, and projected images aspired to fill the viewer's field of vision, and thus promote the desired psychological projection onto the scene."¹⁸¹

Populating compositions with human figures not only indicates scale but also makes Frith's experience of Egypt accessible to enthusiasts. They could easily imagine themselves standing in the place one of his traveling companions. Nickel compares Frith's composition staffing to methods used by landscape painters:

As with the staffage figures of traditional landscape painting, Frith's plates invites viewers to imagine themselves bodily situated in the same space. Frith's intervention resulted in a more legible, assimilable delineation of the scene, one that made the foreign more accessible by encouraging physical identification with the outscaled subjects, and appealing to the familiar conventions of landscape composition.¹⁸²

In one example, *Osiriade Pillars and the Great Fallen Colossus, The Memnonium, Thebes*, Frith arranges an elegantly dressed group of Western (presumably English) tourists in the foreground (Fig. 21). They are accompanied by a native Egyptian kneeling alongside a camel. The Egyptian along with the seated man on the right forms the base of a carefully scattered triangle. This is Egypt depicted as an accessible tourist locale. To emphasize the exoticism of the place Frith used native Egyptians in Eastern dress. This practice continues today with Egyptians posing for cameras at tourist sites.

¹⁸⁰ Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 172.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸² Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 116.

Frith's commentaries also provided the viewer with insight to his traveling experiences. It is important to note here that Frith did not use his published commentaries as a means to evangelize. Considering his lifelong devotion to Quakerism, "it is an interesting gauge of Frith's personal reserve that questionings of faith or theology are almost completely absent from his commentaries."¹⁸³ Frith's desire to express his faith is fulfilled in the illustrated *Holy Bible* he published in 1862. Photographic views were pasted to complement the scriptural narrative. The illustrated *Bible* was Frith's most exclusive work; only his peers and upper class citizens could afford it. Nickel believes that such "genteel viewers" had the intellect to properly experience Frith's *Bible* edition. Without the aid of written commentary the readers had to rely on themselves to integrate the photographic image and scriptural text.¹⁸⁴ Seeing Egyptian topography paired with the biblical text eased the path taken between ancient Egypt and nineteenth-century England. I suggest that the viewing of the photographic prints in this context became a private act of devotion.

Frith's control extends to those who had seen Egypt and its monuments for themselves. Without the benefit of their own cameras, travelers had to depend on souvenir cards to give them mementoes of their experience. Frith was actually providing a way for travelers to extend their tourist gaze after returning home. I argue that Frith was shaping memory. Tourist memories are sparked, renewed and even altered by the viewing of photographs in any format—souvenir card, book, stereograph, etc. This is especially true when the traveler wants to recast a disappointing experience.¹⁸⁵

From the beginning, Frith exercised a fair amount of control over the distribution and display of his photographs and prints. These controls only increased with the opening of the F. Frith & Company printing firm. Frith worked with several publishers to get his volumes produced. In the months between his first and second tour, Frith made arrangements to have his stereographs and larger views published from his negatives.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³Van Haften, *Egypt and the Holy Land*, ix.

¹⁸⁴Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 134.

¹⁸⁵Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 86.

¹⁸⁶Van Haften, *Egypt and the Holy Land*, vii.

Frith's first photographic prints were distributed by subscription. The 274 subscribers on the list were, "for the most part, cultured, well-educated, and in many cases, theologically inclined."¹⁸⁷ Frith entrusted the publishing of the seventy-six print installment of *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described by Frith* to James N. Virtue. Between 1858 and 1860, subscribers paid ten shillings for each three-print installment. After receiving the entire series subscribers arranged and bound the prints. The prints, mounted on heavy stock, were not sent in geographical order. Some subscribers rearranged them to fashion their own photographic atlas of the Near East.¹⁸⁸ Frith provided valuable commentary for each print making *Egypt and Palestine* his most well-known work. For its sequel *Cairo, Sinai, Jerusalem and the Pyramids of Egypt* Frith enlisted Egypt scholars Sophia Poole and her son Reginald Stuart Poole to write the commentary. This edition was distributed in sixty installments from 1860 to 1861.

As the "the first mass-producer and distributor of photographic images in England," Frith granted unprecedented access to his art.¹⁸⁹ Besides following the entrepreneurial instinct of satisfying consumer demand, Frith obeyed a personal mission to prove his faith. Frith targeted a wide audience that spanned different socio-economic levels. He did not restrict himself to exhibition spaces. His Eastern photographs were a readily available commodity found in formats from the expensive *Queen's Bible* to postcard prints. Around 1862, F. Frith & Company produced over 150,000 prints from the *Egypt and Palestine* series.¹⁹⁰ Frith also opened Egypt to more travelers. Frith, intentionally or not, was selling Egypt to Victorian England with his appealing photo views. His pictures were inspiring consumers to go see the places that had so moved him.¹⁹¹

Conclusion – Francis Frith

Through the lens of her photographers, Victorian England found a new way of looking at Egypt. Francis Frith's photographs kept the views of places they owned,

¹⁸⁷Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 75.

¹⁸⁸Van Haften, *Egypt and the Holy Land*, xv.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, viii.

¹⁹⁰Nickel, *Francis Frith*, 78.

coveted and desired within reach. All of this worked towards asserting identity by controlling how these objects were encountered by onlookers. As a man of independent means, Frith was able to exert control over the entire process of image-making, distribution and display. In Francis Frith's hands, the medium also became another means for Victorians to look at themselves.

¹⁹¹Bull, *Up the Nile*, xvi.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate how nineteenth-century England asserted its identity through the collection and display of ancient Egyptian material culture. Such activities were done with the intent to manipulate the gaze and perception of various publics. This thesis has sought to prove that Victorian England, as capital of an expanding empire, was driven by the desire to project itself as resourceful, cosmopolitan, cultured and divine. This study has called upon England's preeminent collectors of ancient Egyptian imagery— the British Museum, David Roberts and Francis Frith— to reflect different stages of nineteenth-century English imperialism. Although the chapters addressed different aspects of national identity, they were bound by the theme of control through possession.

This study has identified a decreasing trend in control beginning with the most compelling collector: the British Museum. The British Museum chapter addressed how administrators filled sculptural galleries to illustrate their ideal of the “progress of civilization” as rendered on its pediment (Fig. 3). Museum administrators arranged ancient sculpture galleries along the “chain of art” crafted by contemporary scholars. The chapter also explained how the British Museum managed its public through restrictive hours of operation and admission policies. As the thesis turned to artists, we found that control over the imagery was loosened. Such loosening of control, however, did not weaken the assertion of English identity.

The chapter on David Roberts advanced the idea that artists traveled overseas to visually collect material culture. After returning home, they presented their views to homebound viewers via artwork. The chapter applied the Tourist Gaze model to address how Roberts viewed and shaped the viewing experience of the onlooker. He created romantic vistas that explored themes of ruination and exoticism. Examples of these

works were discussed along with the control Roberts had over their production, display and distribution. Although Roberts offered more access to imagery than the British Museum, his audience was still limited. As a member of the Royal Academy, David Roberts's original works were exhibited during annual shows that demanded entrance fees. Moreover, subscription costs moved his lithographic prints out of the reach of many.

Of the three collectors studied in this thesis, Francis Frith allowed the most access to Egyptian views. His extensive autobiography gives scholars insight into how he interacted with Egypt on an emotional and practical level. My third chapter discussed how Frith's religious life influenced his photography. His faith moved him to act as a pilgrim. His extensive travels photographing the Near East yielded a vast catalog of images to defend his beliefs and establish his own social status. It was important to Frith that his peers regarded him as an independent gentleman-traveler. His entrepreneurial side was also explored in the chapter. By distributing his photographic prints in formats ranging from souvenir cards to the plush *Queen's Bible*, Frith opened ancient Egypt to a diverse population.

In the course of my research, I expected to find more material that addressed art in the context of national identity. Instead, I found a more-than-adequate discussion of national identity in art-historical sources. Applying the theory of the gaze to the discussion of national identity can prove to be effective. However, there is a noticeable flaw. I found that no matter how effective the means used to shape public perception- the thesis subjects still relied on their publics. Essentially, the viewer was always in control. This proves that, while going through their creative processes, both artists considered what views would please the home market. It also proved that the British Museum, even with its physical control over the objects, reacted to the general public by enforcing selective admission policies.

If I had additional time and resources, I would study the connection between the nineteenth-century Church of England and ancient Egyptian imagery. Themes such as moral decline and ruination would have been especially meaningful as the Church was going through a period of reform during the nineteenth century. I would also explore further the interaction between word and image with the publication of David Roberts's

and Francis Frith's prints. Both artists knew that their views would be published with text. To what extent did that influence how the images were produced?

Research concerning national identity and collection is still relevant. Social and art historians fill publications with their findings on national identity. During the course of writing this thesis, several conferences have convened to discuss the relationship between national identity and art. The aggressive collecting activities of some nations are being challenged by counterparts demanding repatriation of precious objects such as the Parthenon marbles and Benin bronzes. More research can be done studying how other nations collected and display the material culture of foreign societies. Cross-disciplinary studies can be done as well. There is plenty of material to pursue a marketing study on both Roberts and Frith. Above all, the "other" still intrigues. There will always be interest in what makes one entity different from another.

Returning to the issue of control, this thesis concludes that it is impossible to have absolute control over what viewer sees in a piece of art. From the first moment, a gaze sparks a dialog between beholder and object. England initiated a century-long discourse when it looked back to ancient Egypt to visualize what it thought about itself. In this the collector, object and viewer are all necessary voices.

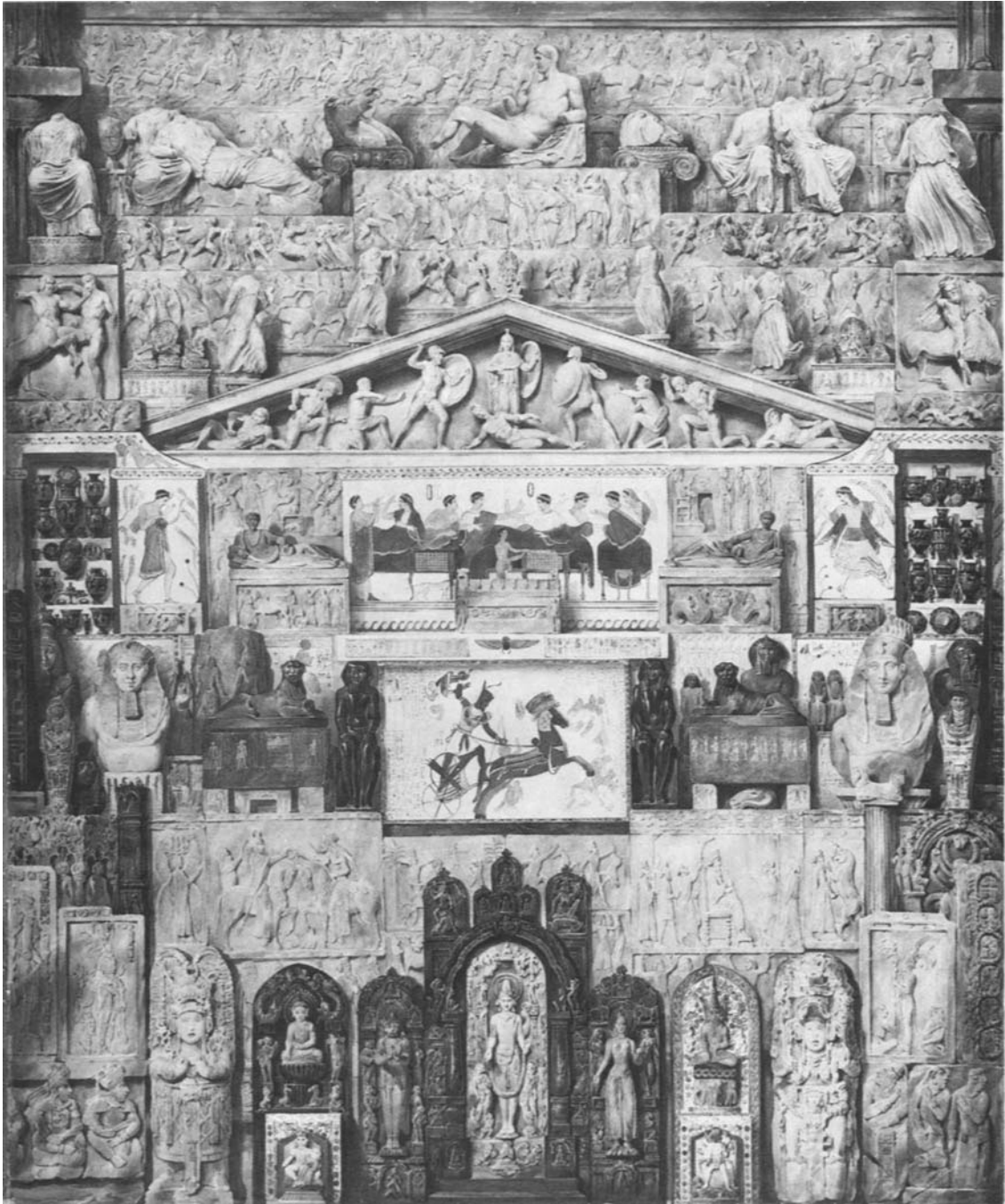


Fig. 1 James Stephanoff, *An Assemblage of Works of Art in Sculpture and Painting*, ca.1845.



Fig. 2 Robert Smirke, *The British Museum*, 1823.



Fig. 3 Richard Westmacott, *The Progress of Civilization*, British Museum, 1848.



Fig. 4 Richard Westmacott, Eastern Detail. *The Progress of Civilization*, British Museum, 1848.



Fig. 5 Richard Westmacott, Central Detail. *The Progress of Civilization*, British Museum, 1848.



Fig. 6 Richard Westmacott, Western Detail. *The Progress of Civilization*, British Museum, 1848.

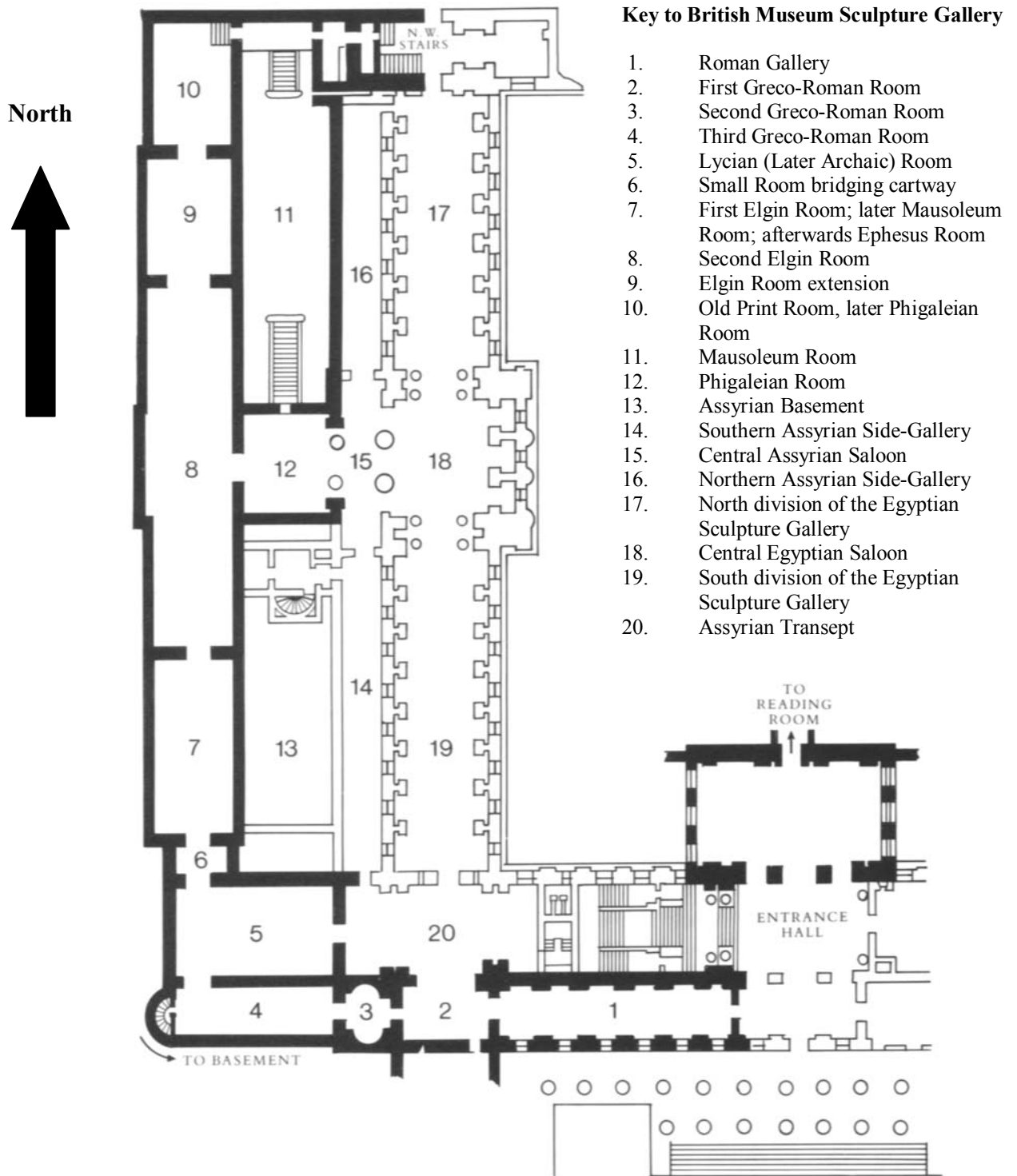


Fig. 7 Ian Jenkins, Plan of the British Museum Sculpture Galleries, 1992.



Fig. 8 Illustration of the removal of the head of Amenophis III, 1834.

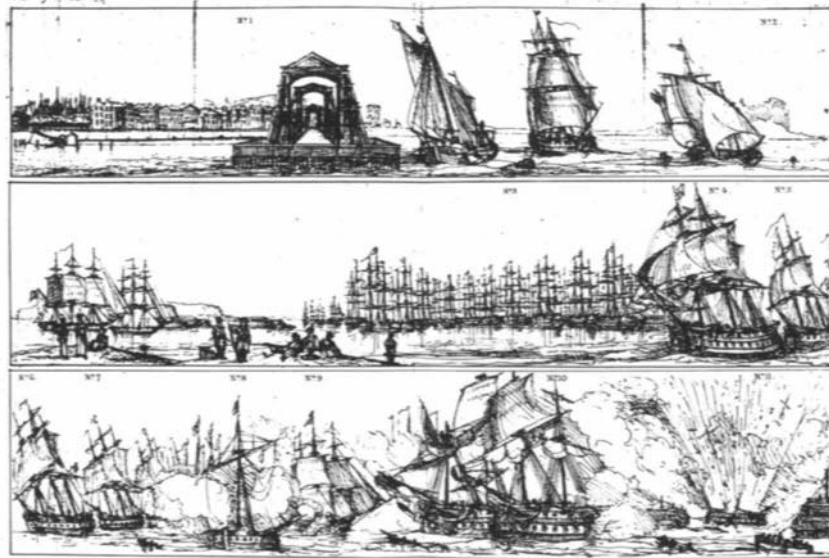


Fig. 9 David Roberts, Lithographic Key to *Grand Panoramic Naumachia in Harlequin and Number Nip*, 1827.

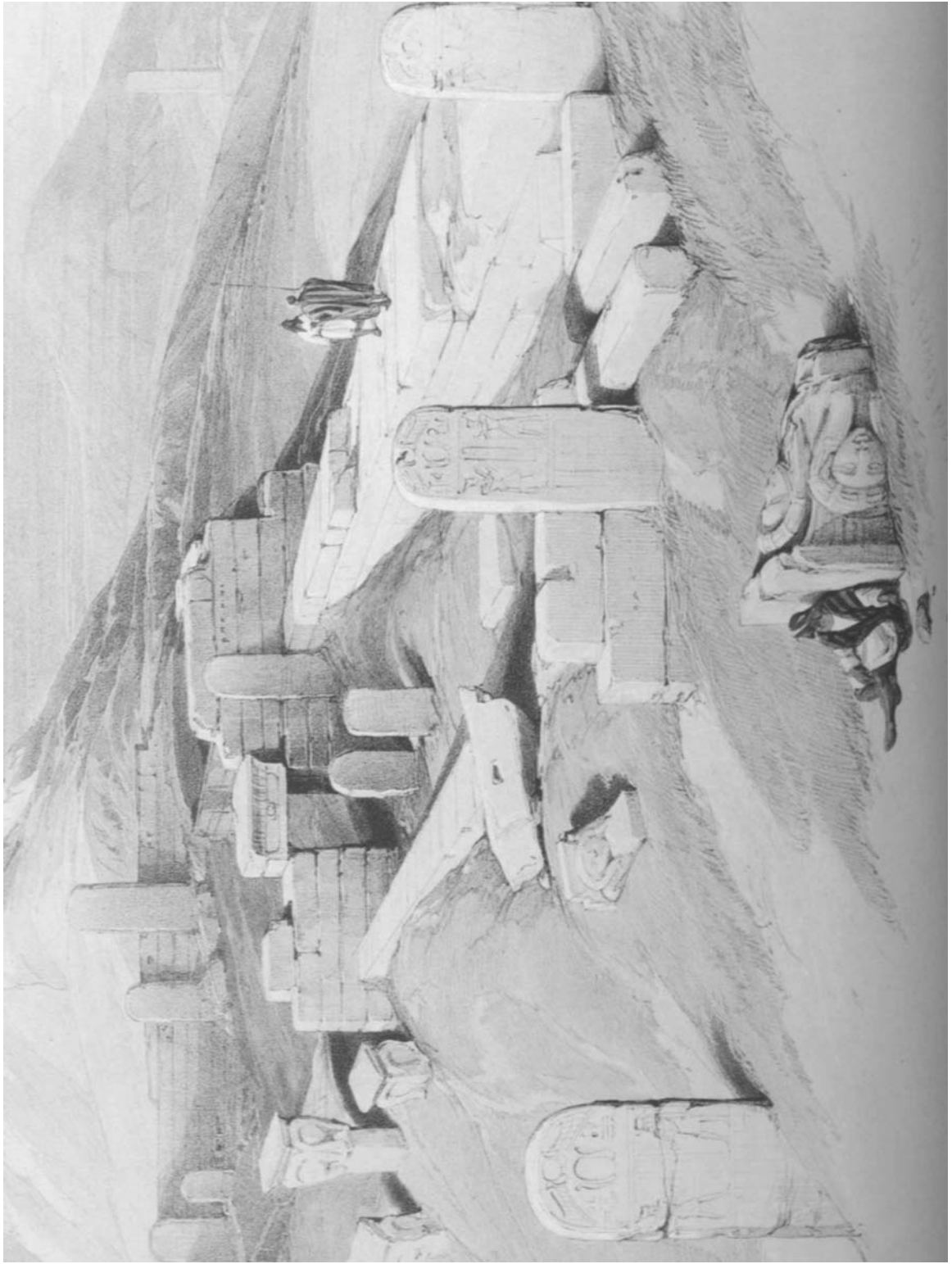


Fig. 10 David Roberts, *An Ancient Egyptian Temple on Gebel Garabe*, c. 1839.

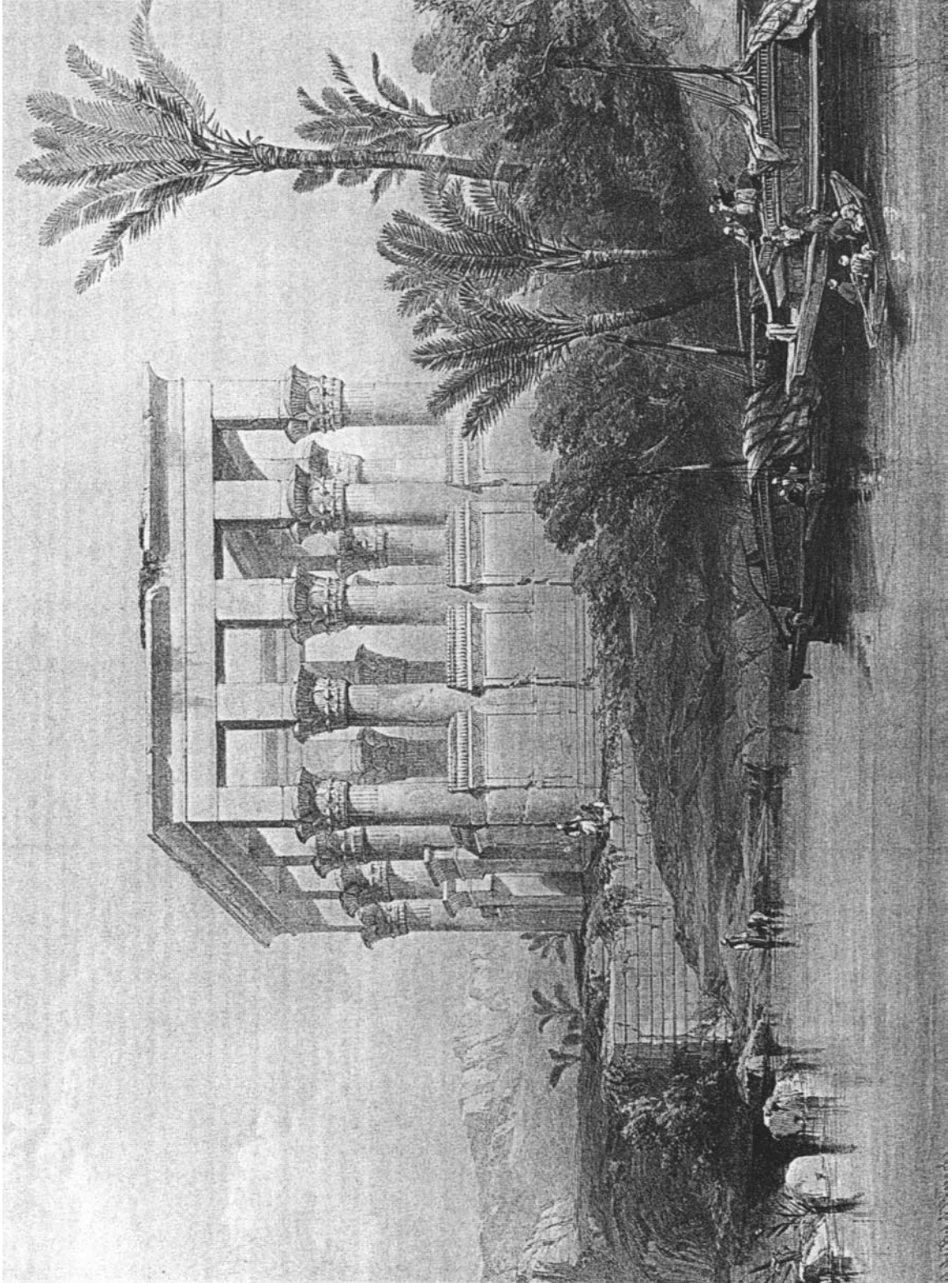


Fig. 11 David Roberts, *Philae: Pharaoh's Bed*, c. 1839.



Fig. 12 David Roberts, *The Arrival of the Simun in Giza*, c. 1839.

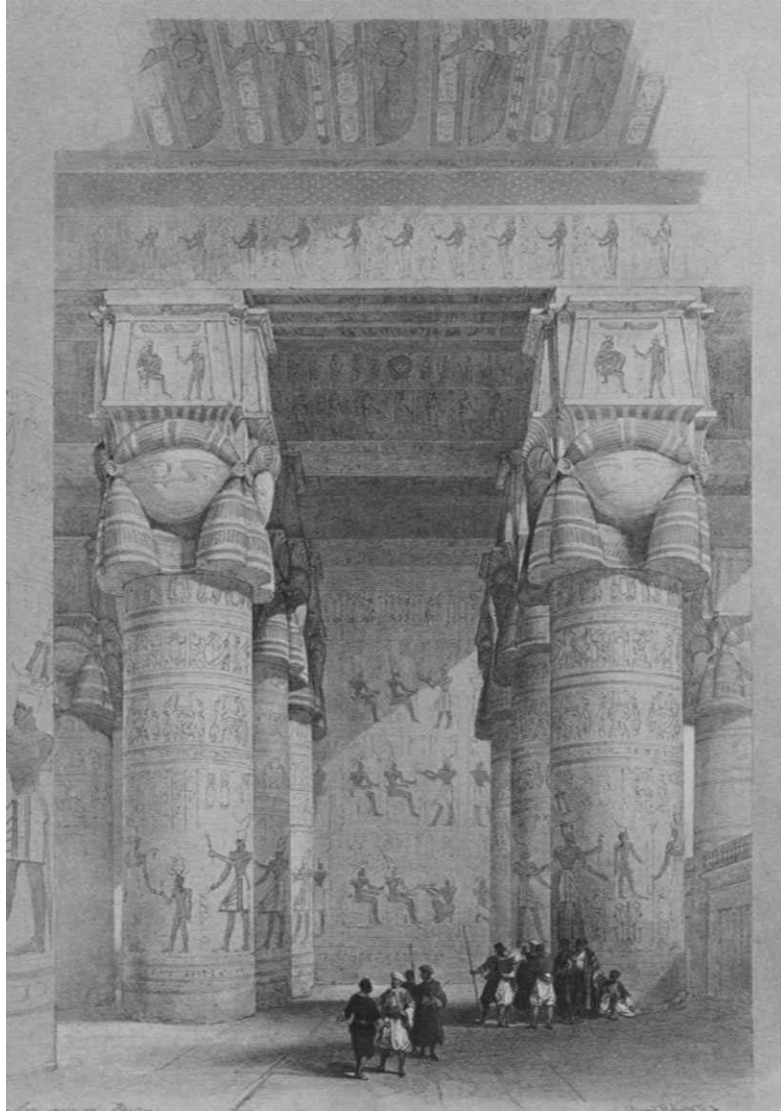


Fig.13 David Roberts, *Interior of the Temple of Dendera*, c. 1839.

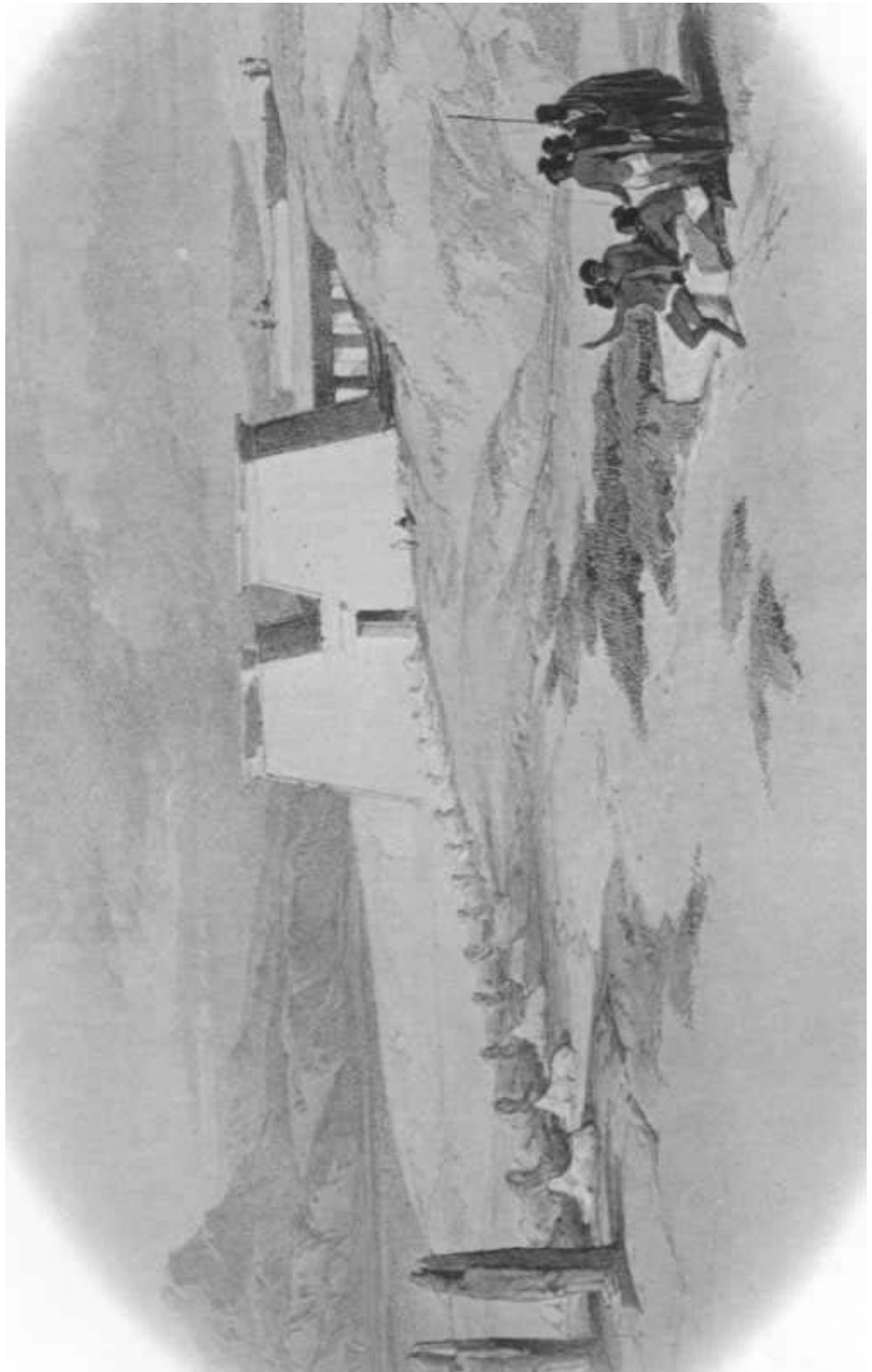


Fig.14 David Roberts, *Temple of Wadi Saboua*, c. 1839.



Fig.15 David Roberts, *The Colossi of Memnon at the Inundation*, c. 1839.

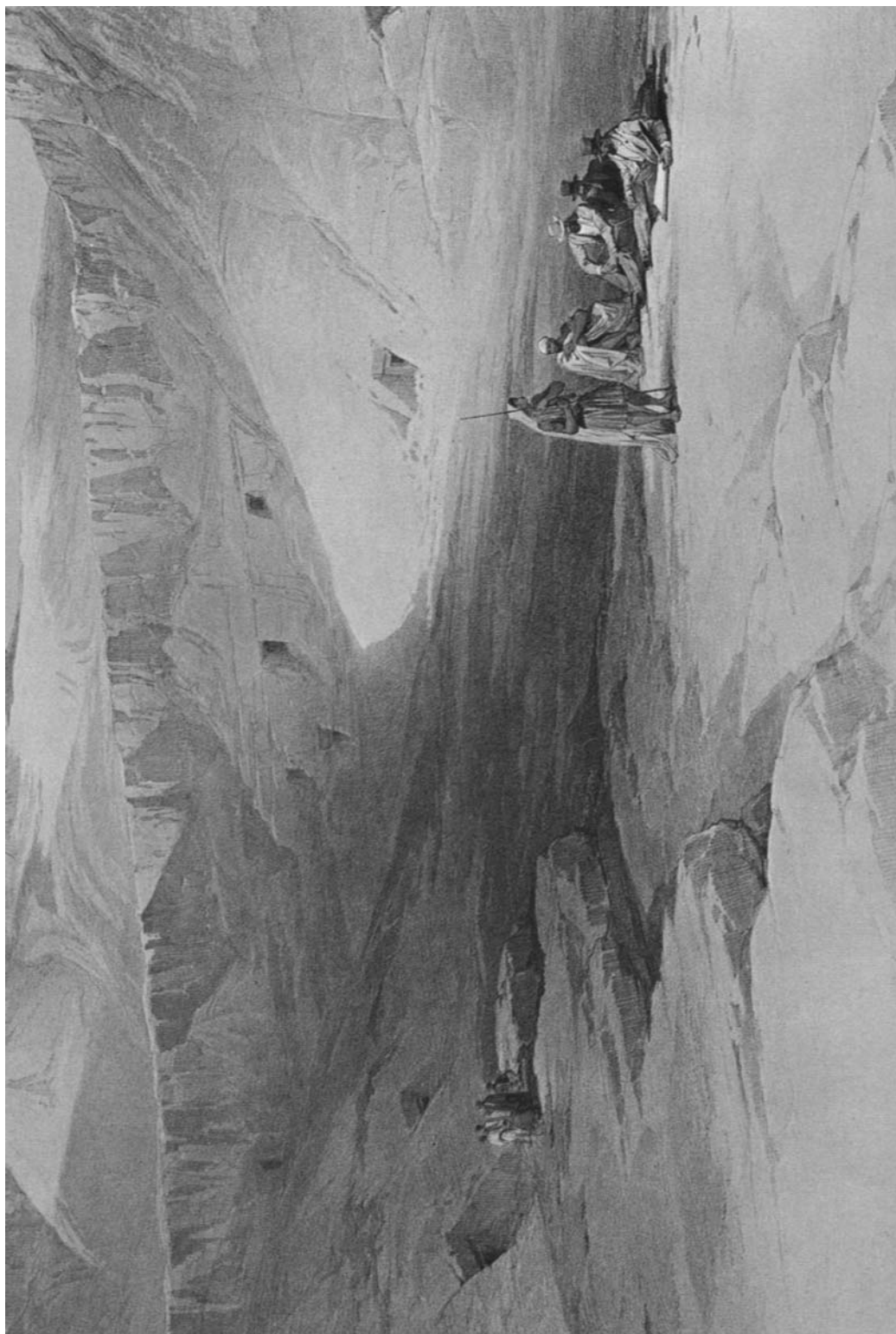


Fig. 16 David Roberts, *Entrance to the Tombs of the Kings of Thebes*, c. 1839.



Fig. 17 Francis Frith, *Portrait: Turkish Summer Costume*, c. 1859.



Fig. 18 Francis Frith, *Pharaoh's Bed: Island of Philae*, 1857.

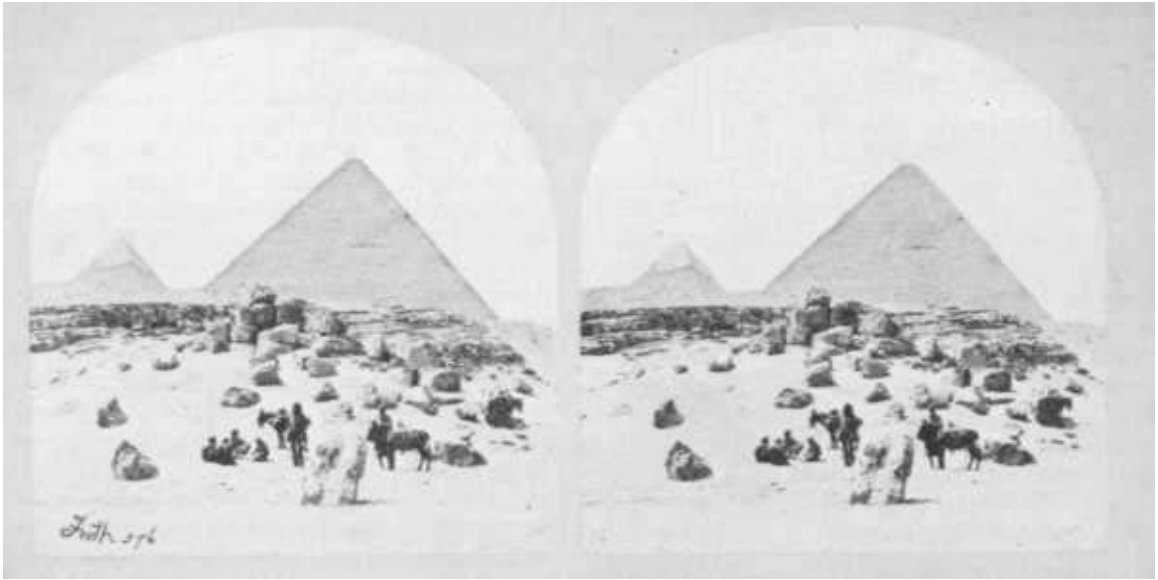


Fig.19 Francis Frith, *The Two Largest Pyramids at Geezech*, 1858.

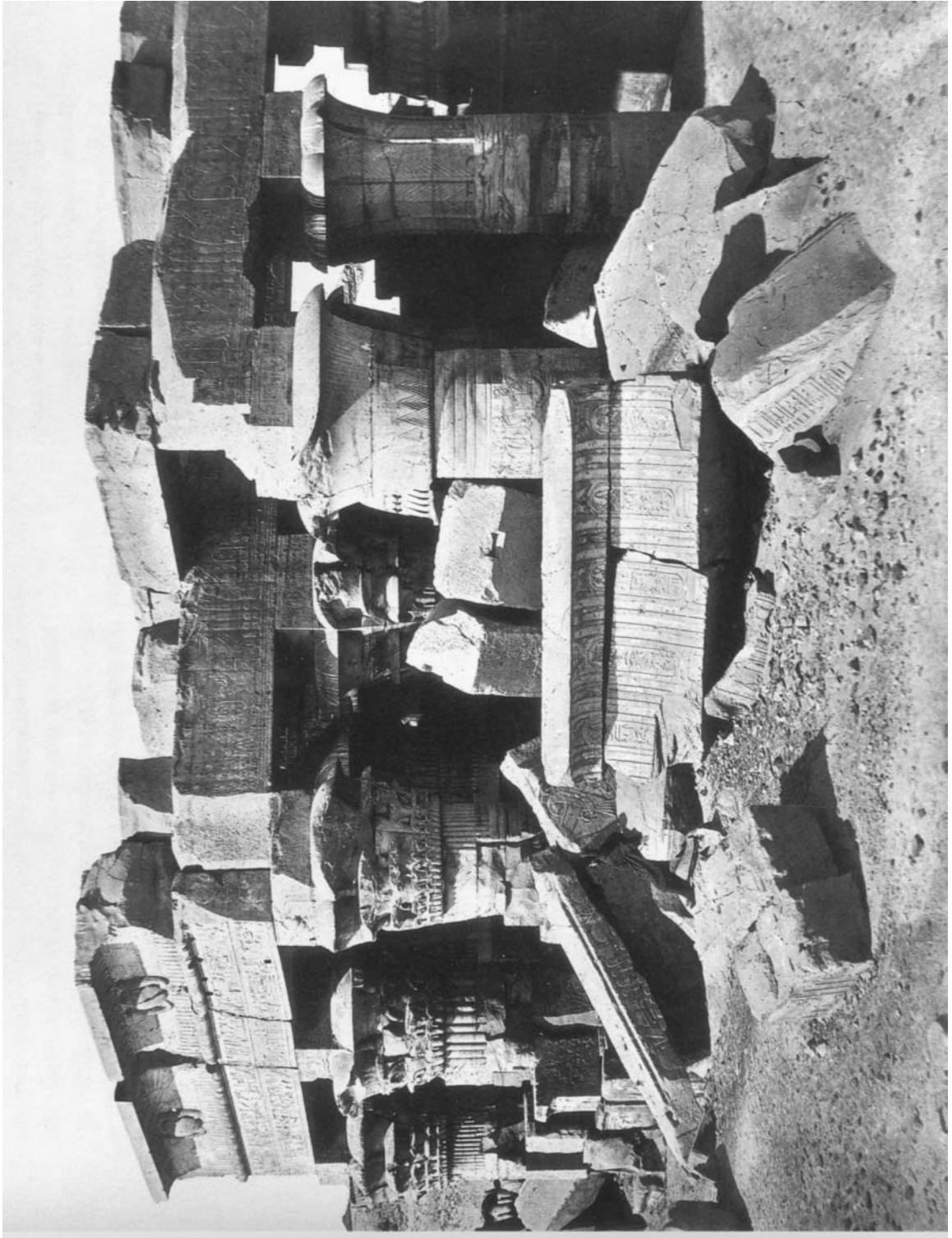


Fig. 20 Francis Frith, *Temple at Koum Ombos*, 1858.



Fig. 21 Francis Frith, *Osiriade Pillars and the Great Fallen Colossus, The Memnonium, Thebes*, 1857.

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Sharon E. Murray was born November 24, 1972 in Camp Zama, Japan. She was raised alongside her sister Camille Murray-Kent by her parents Robert and Bernadette Murray. Sharon is the proud aunt of Danielle Kent.

Sharon's family lived on several U.S. Army bases before settling in Ozark, Alabama. There, she graduated from Carroll High School in 1991. Sharon then attended Enterprise State Junior College in Enterprise, Alabama. During her time there, she was an active member of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society. In 1993, she transferred to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa where she received her B.A. in art history. In 1997, Sharon began her graduate work in the Art History department at Florida State University.

Sharon began her professional career at Tallahassee Community College in 1999. She is now the Assistant to the Dean of the Technology and Professional Programs Division.