Drifting Along the Nile: Collecting Memories of Egypt, 1850-1926

Elaine Altman Evans
The great temple, dedicated to the sun gods Amen-Re of Thebes and falcon-headed Re-Harakhte of Heliopolis, was created to celebrate the thirtieth year of the pharaoh’s reign. In the distance is a feluka, a typical sailboat.

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The most important museum in Egypt is the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Also called the Cairo Museum, it had evolved from a collection of antiquities housed in the Citadel in Cairo during the rule of Mohammed Ali (1805-1848). Unfortunately, through the years the treasures had been dispersed through government gifts, thefts and possibly neglect. More appropriate quarters were later found to house Egyptian antiquities at Boulaq, a section of Cairo. In 1857, The Boulaq Museum opened, mainly through the relentless efforts of the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881), whose monumental, archaeological discoveries were displayed and stored in the Museum.

However, subsequent difficulties arose. The building proved inadequate. The collections continued to grow and space was lacking. The endangered masterpieces had to be moved. A Khedivial palace, built by Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) to house his harim became their new home. The sumptuous residence was named the Gizeh Museum. However, the building was not well constructed and also thought to be some distance for visitors to Cairo. A new, proper structure would have to be built to solve the problem. On November 15, 1903, gala festivities marked the opening of the new Egyptian Museum at Cairo to house the largest collection of Egyptian antiquities in the world. The dream of Auguste Mariette, called “the father of the Cairo Museum,” had been fulfilled.

Figure 2.
Sarcophagus of Khufuankh in the Boulaq Museum
Old Kingdom, Dynasty IV
Sepia toned silver print
Photographer: Émile Brugsch
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier, 1934

The surface of the rose-granite coffin of an Egyptian nobleman is covered in perfectly incised hieroglyphics. In relief on all sides of the bottom, quite appropriately, are beautifully executed architectural details representing the facades of a domestic house, or eternal house, of the deceased. The owner’s name appears near the corner at the end of the sarcophagus. The blocks holding up the lid are modern and were inserted by the Museum. The handsome coffin was first exhibited at the Boulaq Museum.
Diadems of Princess Khnumet in the Gizeh Museum

Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII.
Sepia toned silver print
Photographer: Émile Brugsch
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier, 1934

The delicate, gold crowns were among the finds at Dashur in 1895 by French archaeologist Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924). One circlet (left) is composed of rosettes and lyre-shapes, while the other (right) has fine interlaced gold wires, with tiny star-shaped flowers and spaced Maltese cross forms.

Prince Rahotep and Princess Nofret in the Boulaq Museum

Old Kingdom, Dynasty III.
Sepia toned silver print
Photographer: Unidentified
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier, 1934

The painted limestone statues, approximately four feet high, appear lifelike. An ancient Egyptian artisan has skillfully modeled and colored their physical features to make the couple appear real. The statues were found in 1880 in the mastaba tomb of Rahotep at Medum.

Statue of the Goddess Taweret in the Boulaq Museum

Late Period, Dynasty XXVI
Albumen print
Photographer: Abdullah Frères
Gift of an anonymous donor, 2002

Taweret ("the great one" in Greek) was the feared and beloved hippopotamus goddess of fertility and childbirth. Standing upright, she is depicted in composite form, with tapered, flat, human breasts, large round tummy, and lion’s legs. A long crocodile skin that abuts the back edge of her striated triparte wig and extends down her back. At her sides, human arms with lion forepaws rest on an Isis knot, symbol for protection.
The most compelling force for travelers to Egypt was being able to enter another world, an Oriental one. There they would be filled with sights of colossal, exotic, architectural structures, masterpieces in art, and mysterious royal tombs hidden deep within the desert.

Lasting memories would be collected as they visited various sites, including the towering, so-called, Pompey’s Column in Alexandria, the Great Pyramid at Gizeh, the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes, the imposing temples on the island of Philae, and the monumental, mortuary temples of Rameses II and his wife Nefreti at Abu Simbel, to name but a few.

Visitors arrived at these sites by boat and or carriage and then they explored by foot or donkey. They were advised to travel between mid-November and mid-April as the weather was usually quite hot otherwise. When arriving to see the grand temples at Luxor and Karnak, visitors stayed on the eastern side of the Nile. Boats were always ready to take them across to the western side of the great river, where donkeys and carriages waited to transport them to the tombs and temples situated there.

Although the lofty, granite pillar has long been named for the Roman general Pompey (106-48 B.C.), it was, nevertheless, probably erected in A.D. 247 by the emperor Diocletian (A.D. 245-313). At one time it supported an equestrian statue of him. On one side of the base is an inscription in Greek honoring the emperor, which in translation reads: To the very just Emperor, tutelary god of Alexandria, Diocletian, the Invincible, Postumus, prefect of Egypt....*

Figure 7.
Sphinx and Pyramid of Khafre at Gizeh

Old Kingdom, Dynasty IV
Albumen(?) print
Photographer: Zangaki, Cairo, Egypt
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Louis Bailey Audiger, 1934

Almost all the original overall, white, Tura limestone casing is missing from the pyramid. The wind swept Great Sphinx, carved from an outcrop of limestone, had been cleared of a continuous buildup of sand several times before this photograph was taken. The sand was removed in 1818 by the Italian explorer Giovanni Caviglia (1770-1845) and in 1886 by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846-1916). Theories persist regarding the identity of the Sphinx, but most scholars still believe it is of King Khafre (Chephren in Greek).

Figure 8.
Wall Relief of the Temple of Seti I at Abydos

New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX
Albumen(?) print
Photographer: Zangaki, Cairo, Egypt
Gift of Friends of Egyptology, 1996

In a detail from the doorway of the Sanctuary of Isis, the pharaoh Seti I receives a blessing from the goddess. The enthroned Isis holds towards him a “roqxute,” an ankh-sign flanked by a was-scepter, symbol for life and for stability. Seti I wears the Khepresh-crown, the so-called blue war-crown, and Isis the vulture headdress, with its circle of cobras surmounted by a horned sun-disk.
Travelers arriving in Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea, a usual first stop in Egypt, would soon board a steamship or train, to Cairo to stay in one of the city’s excellent hotels. Once in the capital, they would be surrounded by a bustling and noisy atmosphere of horse drawn carriages, donkey and camel riders, men in colored turbans, or the red tarbush, and women in black cloaks, their dark eyes flashing from their burko (bugur), or veil. Markets and cafés filled with exotic and aromatic enticements would beckon. Haunting prayers drift down from the muezzins high atop minarets of the splendid mosques which pervade the city. Astonishments appeared at every turn. In the distance the desert setting of the Great Pyramids and Sphinx at Gizeh could be seen. A dahabiyeh (sailing ship), train, or steamship was available to take them along the Nile to see the marvels at Denderah, Abydos, Luxor, Karnak, the Valley of the Kings, and beyond.

Special, organized tours to Egypt had begun by the 1880s. Many were arranged through Thomas Cook & Sons, a popular travel agency of the time. But it seems sightseeing was focused on visiting the historic Orient, and not in making any true sense out of the modern Middle East. That would have to be an individual quest. Therefore, photographic images of Egypt were limited to subjects chosen by numerous photographers and publishers and what they decided would best sell to the traveler. Fortunately, travelers did not have to bother lugging their own cumbersome photographic equipment. They could buy images at a museum, bookseller and stationer, or at shops.
Figure 11.
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier at Gizeh, 1913
Sepia toned silver print
Unknown photographer
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier, 1934
The couple, from Knoxville, Tennessee, and a friend pose before the Great Sphinx, hewn out of a natural outcropping, in 1913. Mr. Audigier, a photographer for The New York Times, holds his twin-lens camera. As is the case for visitors of today, they pose on camels attended by local keepers and their guide. In the background is the pyramid of King Khufu (Cheops in Greek).

Figure 10.
Panoramic View of Cairo

Nineteenth Century
Color tinted silver print
Photographer: Lichtenstein & Harari, Cairo, Egypt
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Bailey Audigier, 1934
The mosques of Cairo were a great attraction and a favorite subject for commercial photographers. Dominating the skyline in the far distance is the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, an important religious center and must-see site for visitors to Cairo. High above the city, it is supported by a spur of the Moqattam Hills. Mohammed Ali Pasha (1805-1848) and founder of modern Egypt, had the buildings on the summit of the Citadel of Sultan Saladin (1137-1193) swept away to allow for the construction of his great "alabaster mosque," completed in 1857.
A Beduin man and a young boy pose before their humble, desert home. They are members of nomadic Arabs who settled in the Nile Valley. The easily portable hut was essential to their endless quest for grazing areas for their sheep and camels. The two culture groups of Beduin that widely dispersed in the desert valleys were the Bisharin and Ababda. In 1927, there were twenty-seven thousand Beduins in Egypt.

The Luxor Hotel was a comfortable and most pleasant place to stay, particularly from December to March. Situated on the East Bank near the Luxor and Karnak temples, it was just a short walk for transport across the Nile to see the monuments and tombs on the West Bank. Its spacious park-like setting surrounded by lovely greenery offered cool from the sun. Several grand, ancient Egyptian royal statues, which stood at either side of the garden and decorated the façade, and a church with clergy, were additional attractions on the property.
Early Postcards of Egypt: Writing Memories, 1912-1913

The craze for postcards swept across Europe and America from the late nineteenth to the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. Egypt was in the forefront as a tourist attraction and postcards sales were brisk. Postcard production illustrating the marvels of Egypt was in full swing, but about 1910 started to fade. Plenty were in stock, as attested by those subsequently collected by travelers for their private collections, or those donated to museums and libraries.

A new upsurge arose after the discovery in 1922 of the Tomb of Tutankhamen in the Valley of the Kings by British Egyptologist Howard Carter (1874-1939) and patron Lord Carnarvon (1866-1923). Postcards were once more on the move.

There were a variety of postcard styles, including actual photographic prints, reproductions in black and white and color, drawings and paintings. The work of leading photographers of the time, designers, and master and lesser artists were hired to create images that were sure to sell. Often postcards imitated the scenes found in the larger photographic formats. Some cards were sent, but others were un-posted and kept by buyers for their postcard collections.

Local scenes and sites were desired and in plentiful supply as numerous companies competed for the postcard market. Some of them, such as Lichtenstern & Harari of Cairo, Max Rudmann of Cairo, Leon Levy of Paris, Raphael Tuck & Sons of London, and Römmler & Jones of Dresden, were very successful.

Cards bore beautiful images, whether by artists or by photographers. They were sometimes un-signed and only the name, or logo, of the publisher was printed on the card, while others did not bear any identification of the publisher. Postcards were produced as a commercial commodity and, therefore, it was not necessarily important the artistic creator be identified.

* Unless otherwise noted, the postcards in the exhibition are in the collection at the Frank H. McClung Museum, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, donated in 1934 by Mr. & Mrs. Louis Bailey Audiger in memory of his wife Eleanor Deane Swan Audiger of Knoxville. The couple collected them in Egypt in 1912-1913.

** A note of appreciation to Dr. Terry Balanger, Professor and Honorary Curator of Special Collections, University of Virginia, for his generous explanations of postcard printing techniques.

Figure 14.
Femme Arabe.

Publisher: Ephtrimios Frères, Port Said, Egypt
(55986) Black halftone relief over flat colors

Arab peasant women stood elegantly upright, no doubt due to the large, earthenware water jugs they must keep in balance. They wore a burko, a long panel of cloth, which covered the face except the eyes. It was stitched to a bound head cloth and decorative nosepiece.
In the background is the charming kiosk, named after the Roman emperor Trajan (A.D. 56(?)–117), seen on the island of Philae during the inundation. Small sailing vessels possibly carry travelers who wished to visit the site.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the stereoscope had become quite a popular method of at-home travel, entertainment, and learning in the parlors of the upper and middle classes. Stereoview collecting became all the rage, surpassed only by postcards.

Stereoscopes provided a three-dimensional experience as opposed to two-dimensional images. The viewing apparatus, the stereoscope, allowed a card, with two photographs mounted on it, to be inserted in a holder. When looked at through the stereoscope lenses, the two views were seen as a single image. An amazing, three-dimensional illusion was created, which appeared before the eyes. One was entertained and at the same time informed and educated about almost any subject of choice. Thousands of stereoview cards about all sorts of topics were published by various companies in the United States and abroad. Many varieties of stereoscopes were manufactured in different countries, in all sizes and styles, to captivate both the armchair explorer and the well traveled.

One of the leading publishers of stereoscopic views in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was Underwood & Underwood, a company that had offices in New York, London, Ottawa and Toronto, Canada, Kansas, and branch agencies in the principal cities around the world as far as India and New Zealand. They sold sets of numerous "tours," which included view cards, the stereoscope, a guide book, and a detailed map, written by an expert on the particular country of the tour. As early as 1897, Underwood & Underwood had published a set of one hundred stereoviews of ancient and modern scenes of Egypt.
In 1905, however, they published an especially fine series on Egypt in a boxed-set of one hundred images. The views ranged from Pompey's Column in Alexandria to the pyramids and Great Sphinx at Gizeh to the modern Islamic city of Cairo, with its festivals, museums and mosques, to views of temples and tombs along the great Nile River. The guide book, *Egypt through the Stereoscope*, was written by the eminent American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted (1865-1935), Professor of Egyptology and Oriental History and also the Director of the Haskell Oriental Museum at the University of Chicago. The first edition was published in 1905 and the second edition in 1908.

* The 1908 stereoscope, boxed-set of stereoviews, guide book and maps, and plans, produced by Underwood & Underwood, are from the collection of the Frank H. McClung Museum, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Excerpts were taken from quotes on the backs of the stereoviews, written by the American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted.

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Figure 17.
(81)–2548
The sole survivor of a great city, the obelisk of Heliopolis, (S.), Egypt

Photographer: Unidentified
Publisher: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

"It was the oldest great religious center of ancient Egypt... It was called On by the Egyptians, and in this form it is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament. On all four sides... are recorded the full titles and names of King Sesostris I."

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Figure 18.
(69)–2586
Painted tomb chamber of Prince Sen-Nofer, hewn in a cliff at Thebes, Egypt.

Photographer: Unidentified
Publisher: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

"This is the tomb-chapel which has served as the abode of an Egyptian officer who lived early in the 16th Century B.C... Over his figure on the first pillar we read 'The hereditary prince, enduring in favor...favorite of the excellent heart of the king...overseer of the garden of Amon, Sen-Nofer, deceased.'"

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Figure 19.
(12)–2529
The body of Sethos I, who lived in 14th century B.C.

Photographer: Unidentified
Publisher: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

"But this king before us, upon whose actual features we look, almost as if he had died but yesterday, lived and reigned centuries before the Hebrew monarchy began... The process of preservation was easy in a country of so dry a climate... When the climate was aided by artificial means..."
Figure 20.
(27)—2544 The great Sphinx of Gizeh, the largest royal portrait ever hewn—Egypt.

Photographer: Unidentified
Publisher: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

"Its time-scarred, weather-beaten face looks out upon the plain and fronts the rising sun, as it has done these many thousand years, and still we question its mute lips in vain as to its age and origin... Out of this headland of rock the royal portrait was hewn...."

Rare Books and Souvenirs of Egypt

A Thousand Miles up the Nile, 1891
Publisher: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., London
Anonymous Collector

The first edition of the famous book by Amelia Blanford Edwards (1831-1892) was published in 1877, the second revised edition in 1891. During her well-documented journey up the Nile she made many sketches of sites, which were later carefully interpreted by experts as engravings for the illustrations.

Voyage dans la haute-Égypte. Explication de quatre-vingt-trois vues photographiées d'après les monuments antiques compris entre la Caire et le premier cataracte, 1878.
Publisher: A. Mourès, Caire, Egypt
Special Collections and the McClung Museum, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The handsome two-volume work by the eminent French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) has eighty-three fine photographic views by him of monuments along the Nile River. Many of the photographs document details now lost.

Egyptian Obelisks, 1882
Publisher: By the author, New York
Anonymous Collection

Egypt: Descriptive, Historical, and Picturesque, 1878
Gift of Dorothy and Mel Stulberg, 2001

Two grand volumes by the highly respected German Egyptologist Georg Ebers (1837-1898) of the over 200 books to his credit. Translated from the German, the beautifully illustrated work, with engravings, takes the reader on a remarkable journey into modern and ancient Egypt.

Publisher: The Religious Tract Society, London
Anonymous Collector

The small book by the Reverend James King contains many thoughts about the history of the obelisk of Alexandria, Egypt. It brings forward information about others in Egypt and abroad, and the pharaohs associated with them.

Egypt and Its Monuments, 1920
The Century Co., New York
Anonymous Collection

The author Robert Hichens begins with the pyramids of Gizeh, takes the reader along the Nile all the way to the island of Philae and back, ending at old Cairo, with its mosques, Coptic churches and latticed facades. Paintings by Jules Guerin and photographs from stereoviews by Underwood & Underwood illustrate the book.

Souvenir of Cairo, circa 1920
Publisher: The Cairo Postcard Trust/Max H. Rudmann & Co.
Cover: Black relief and black relief over flat colors
Anonymous Collection

The album-style book contains thirty-five fine images of monuments, mosques, festivals, street scenes, portraits of Egyptians, etc., including the work of early photographers such as Zangaki of Cairo.

Cameras Froze Time

Photographers preferred, for the most part, the larger plate camera of the box type due to its ability to capture more detail. Photographers looked through a glass plate at the rear of the camera covered by a black cloth to keep out light, and adjusted the focus with the collapsible leather bellows. Although they could use dangerous, explosive flash powder to illuminate a subject even in the field, in most cases natural daylight proved best.

At the time cameras were cumbersome, but they were carefully built. Most were made by craftsmen, who assembled and skillfully fitted each camera with mahogany bodies reinforced by brass. The glass plates, the “film,” were carried in wood or metal plate holders.

Photographers had to possess great perseverance under very difficult circumstances. There were many personal dangers, including the risk of exhaustion from the intense desert heat. They had to lug cumbersome photographic equipment from site to site, across impossible roads and treacherous paths. Much of the photographic process was done at the site.

Early photographers of Egypt documented many aspects of the antiquities removed from their original sites, later vanished due to erosion, or were plundered. Such important photographic records were taken and studied by scholars as well as by travelers interested in the subject. The resultant images could be carried and studied in places far from Egypt. Business boomed in Egypt until the small, mass produced, hand-held Brownie box cameras and the Kodak snapshot cameras were introduced in 1888, and became popular.

Stereoscopic photography began in earnest in the 1850s. A stereocamera was specially designed to produce two almost twin photographic images. The advantage of the photographic double image was its ability to capture forms at various distances in the eyes of the viewer that made a scene appear three dimensional, when seen through a stereoviewer.
A Photographer in the Field, 1880s Engraving

Photographers carried their equipment and set up tents to process wet collodion plates developed in the field. A photographer is shown under a cloth cover, to better see the landscape, while an assistant holds an emulsion coated glass plate needed to capture the image.

Cycle Poco, No. 1, 1896
Rochester Camera & Supply Company
On Loan through the Courtesy of Thompson Photo Products, Knoxville, Tennessee

This smaller field camera is similar to those used to photograph Egypt. The dry collodion camera uses 4 x 5 glass negative plates. Larger types used 8 x 10, 11 x 14 and 16 x 20 glass negative plates for processing larger prints.

Royal Ruby Stereocamera, 1896
Thornton-Picard, Altrincham, England
Anonymous Collection

This fine stereocamera has a "time and Instant" shutter, a "Busch Detective Applanat, No. 2" lens, and a 4-1/2 x 6-1/2 field of view.

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Selected Bibliography


Back Cover:
(94)—2811 The grotto-temple of Abu Simbel, seen N.W. from a boat on the Nile—Egypt.
Photographer: Unidentified
Publisher: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

Hand-held stereoscope
Manufacturer: Underwood & Underwood, New York, etc.

"Seen through the rigging of this feluka the temple does not here produce the impression of size... That front is 119 feet wide and over 100 feet high... The four gigantic colossi which adorn the façade are each 65 feet in height, and they... were hewn from the mountain as they stand."
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