

Archaeology Among the Ruins: Photography and Antiquity in mid-nineteenth-century Levant

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace

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Dr Amara Thornton, University College London

Hello, this is a special Royal Collection Trust podcast on the extraordinary work of photographer Francis Bedford, who accompanied the Prince of Wales on his tour of the Middle East in 1862. In this podcast, Dr Amara Thornton from University College London gives a lecture written by Dr Debbie Challis on Bedford entitled 'Archaeology Among the Ruins' to an audience at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. Although Bedford's work fits into a long Western tradition of picturing the Orient, during this period photography was becoming increasingly respected as a science. Dr Thornton will be exploring the effect photography had on the emerging science of archaeology. This is an enhanced podcast so make sure you look at the images when they appear on the screen of your device.

[00:49]

Dr Amara Thornton: Good afternoon everyone. It's a pleasure to be here today. During the 19th century, what was understood by the Orient was basically defined by the geographical limits of the Ottoman Empire. British archaeological exploration took place in the Ottoman ruled lands around the Mediterranean. At the height of its power, from the 14th to the 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire stretched from the edge of modern day Iran in the east across Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Greece and the Balkan states, to Hungary in the west. By the 1860s, part of what is now Greece was independent after the War of Independence in 1829, but the Balkan territories were a part of the Ottoman lands until 1878 and ostensibly most of North Africa, including Egypt,

were supplicant states. During the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was considered as 'the sick man of Europe'. The phrase comes from Czar Nicholas I, 'Sick man, seriously ill', in conversation with the British naval commander, Sir Hamilton Seymour, in 1853. Its apparently unchanging traditions were contrasted by Europeans with contemporary Western progress. However, it was an empire equal in diplomatic terms, if not military might, to the British Empire. It is in this context that we need to set the photography and the archaeology that took place in its borders during the 19th century. Speaking of the Orient naturally means speaking of Orientalism. There is not time here to interrogate this idea in depth. Following Ali Behdad, I am going to position the archaeology and photography as taking place in an Orientalism that is, 'A network of aesthetic, economic and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries'. Understood this way, Orientalism is indispensable to the understanding of 19th century photography in the Middle East. Both archaeologists and photographers working in this region 'constantly re-inscribed it and its peoples with colonialist narratives of adversity overcome and heroic endeavour'. However, such narratives are not simple reflections of European racism or a validation of Euro imperial dominance since, as we have seen, the Ottoman Empire was an independent power. The archaeologists working in the region in the mid 19th century had to position themselves as heroic in order to attract media attention, public acclaim and government support in Britain. Photography and reproduction of illustrations from photographs played a large part in this endeavour. By 1862 Francis Bedford was following in a relatively long line of artists and even photographers making the same or similar journeys from Cairo to Constantinople. The artist, David Roberts, popularised an already popular genre in the 1830s and forties, that of picturesque scenes of ruins and landscapes in Europe and the Orient. Robert's first trip to Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Jordan was made in 1839. He was the first independent professional British archaeologist to travel so extensively in the Near East. Roberts used his sketches for the basis of the 247 large coloured lithographs that were published as 'The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia', and also painted a number of oils of the East. He had previously worked as a set designer and painter for the theatre and had produced scenes for public panoramas. His lithographs set the scene for 19th century images of the Near East: ruins amid an arid oriental landscape with picturesque figures for local colour and some prosaic object from the modern world, whether a boat or a cart,

to depict the scale of the colossal monuments. The fact that Roberts produced colour lithographs meant that these images were distributed more widely, though they were of course costly, and he was aware of their commercial potential.

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There were many other artists working in the region, as any of you who have visited Tate Britain's 2008 exhibition, 'The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting', will be well aware. I'm drawing attention to the importance of Roberts due to the distribution of his work in a public and commercial context, something photographers and archaeologists followed. It is worth remembering that Constantinople was the first modern cityscape to be featured at the Leicester Square Panorama in 1801. There had long been a public appetite for images of the Orient as entertainment and Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly had several exhibitions of panoramas, dioramas and models of the Holy Land, Egypt and Constantinople in the 1840s and fifties, so it fits in very well. At the same time as artists were further establishing the conventions of representing Oriental landscape, the artist George Scharf recorded Charles Fellows' excavations in Lycia and sharpened up Henry Layard's drawings of Nineveh. Visual representations of archaeological excavations were informed by Orientalist landscape drawing and painting, but there was also a growing use of photography as documentation. Deborah Cherry has argued that landscape painting in a colonial context could perform a double framing act, both formalising the landscape as an art object and visually framing the land painted within Western visual systems. This double framing can be applied to formal pictures and prints of excavations that are depicted within an Oriental landscape but with the new modern Western technology of archaeological fieldwork centre stage, stressing European progress in the Orient. We see these Western traveller archaeologists mastering the landscape and salvaging the otherwise lost vestiges of ancient civilisation. The photographs and photolithographs in these travel journals pictured Victorian technological innovation within a backdrop of both the Orient and the ancient past. The Lion from Knidos is photographed lying on its side. The pulley to raise it is also pictured and then it stands upright wrapped in ropes with the archaeologist, Charles Thomas Newton, and the architect who located it, Richard Pullan, by its side. This remarkable image vividly emphasises the achievements of these traveller archaeologists. These images highlighted the aesthetic worth of the antiquities discovered. The

'remote and perilous lands' in which they were situated and generated interest in them.

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In order to fully understand how archaeological photography developed, we need to have some context on how such photographs were placed into scientific, education and public arenas and not disassociate these images, 'from other visual forms and cultural productions'. Photographs taken for archaeological purposes were usually turned into photo-lithographs or engravings copied by an artist of varying degrees of quality for inclusion in travel journals written by the lead archaeologist. Travel journals were often inter-textual, which means written in response and in dialogue with previous accounts of the area, ancient and modern. Arguably many of these images used were too, since the text accompanying them frames them within a certain context. This was true even when the photographs were centre stage, for example, Francis Frith's photographs taken in 1856-57 in Egypt, Sinai and Jerusalem, which were published in 1860, had accompanying text by Mrs Sophia Lane Poole and her son, the Egyptologist and numismatist at the British Museum, Reginald Stuart Poole, who was later one of the founders of the Egypt Exploration Fund. Illustrations of ruins and antiquities could have a distinct purpose while at the same time forming part of the same continuum of Orientalist painters and painting. In Charles Fellows' first journal about Lycia, published in 1839, the illustrations are by Fellows himself and he explicitly stated that he used them to alert the British Museum and the wider public to the value of the antiquities. Later, the camera could 'visually rescue the remnants of the Orient's antiquities and make the case for the removal of sculptures'. And even whole tombs and buildings for removal to museums in Europe. Photographs were used in these journals to depict a moment and a point of view. Archaeological photographs were often exhibited in a publisher's gallery as Francis Bedford's were, or in an educational or scientific institution, thus inscribing them with the potency of esteemed learning. Crucial to the greater publicity around archaeological excavation and images of antiquity was media coverage, and particularly, at least in the 1840s to the 1860s, in *The Illustrated London News*. The ILN was formed in 1842 and was the world's first illustrated newspaper. It combined words and images which allowed 'meaning to be produced linguistically and visually' and images were used to buttress and clarify news stories, adding to an idea of real news.

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There are examples of the coverage of the Prince of Wales's visit to Egypt in the exhibition and the growth in numbers of the reading public and the expansion of leisure time in which to read during the mid 19th century meant that the sale and distribution of periodicals increased. The ILN sold 140,000 copies a week in 1852, but it's estimated that a further three readers would read each copy. The ILN contributed to the interest in travel journals, they were advertised in its pages and some of these journals were sold to circulating libraries and railway bookshops. The engravings used in the ILN were often similar to those used in the travel journals and the press were fed images by the traveller archaeologists. These images were used as a, 'handmaid to the news' and often there was almost a poster pull-out of significant excavations on the back page. This was the case for Lycia, Assyria, Halicarnassus and Cyrene. An indication of the paper's and the public's interest in archaeology can be seen in the 13 inch column, 'Archaeology of the Month' series that ran for decades. This archaeological interest was related to the acquisition of antiquities from museums until the 1880s. Photography became a tool of budding archaeologists to make their case for archaeology as an objective science and to promote their labours. Photography was perceived as a great technological advancement, more a science than an art. Its development was tandem to the growth of archaeology from dilettantism to a professional practice that would become embedded in museums and universities. The thematic uniformity of early photographs of Greece and how even after technical developments in photography, the depiction of ruins followed the same iconographic traditions with the ruins centre stage with some native figure added to the shot for picturesque effect and the sense of skill has been well attested. The same can be applied to Egypt, as you can see from this picture.

[13:02]

Photography played a major part in archaeological excavations from the 1850s. Adolf Michaelis credited photography with transforming the scientific analysis of archaeological excavation. We shall see that the archaeologist, Charles Thomas Newton, was a pioneer in the use of photography. His use of it in excavations was a significant development in archaeological technique and aided his comparative analytic approach to ancient art. Photography shaped the landscape of the Orient, giving precedence to the emblems of Western excavation technique; a pickaxe lying against steps, a crane lowering a sculpted lion. As early as 1839

photography was posited as a tool that could 'enhance understanding of antiquity' in the French Academy. The Lycian expedition caught the attention of the pioneering photographer, William Henry Fox Talbot, who wrote to Fellows in April 1843 expressing a desire to assist him with photographing the Lycian antiquities in situ. 'Nothing excels the photographic method in its power of delineating such objects as from your researches as ruins, statues, bas-reliefs, etc, and I should think it would be highly interesting to take a view of each remnant of antiquity before removing it and while it still remains in situ and surrounded with stones and bushes and all the other accompaniments of wild nature.' Fellows was deeply interested and went so far as to buy photographic equipment, but in the end the pinhole cameras he purchased were used to produce more accurate drawings, since after experiments he felt that the 'science was not ripe enough for the use of the rough traveller'.

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Talbot published a pamphlet on the use of the calotype in taking images of hieroglyphs in 1846. In 1851 the wet collodion process of developing photography was invented by Frederick Scott Archer but not patented. This transforms the practice of photography as it reduced the length of time needed to take a photograph, though it was still time-consuming and needed a great deal of equipment. Photography became a military skill and a weapon. It was taught to Royal Engineers at Chatham from 1856, then at Woolwich and rolled out to other military, particularly naval establishments. Bedford's portable dark tent can be seen in the photograph in Medinet Habu in the exhibition. The Prince of Wales's tour in 1862 was a large enterprise with 50 soldiers who could guard and carry the equipment and it's comparable to Newton's excavations in Turkey six years earlier. A brief background on Charles Thomas Newton. In the 1840s he was an assistant at the British Museum, he was well connected, he'd attended Christ Church College, Oxford, he was a friend of Ruskin's, he was Vice-Consul at Lesbos in 1852 and he excavated small sites and then campaigned to be allowed to search for a Wonder of the World. He was interested in mapping the process of discovery. Late in 1856 Newton received the appropriate paperwork from the Ottoman authorities to begin excavations at Bodrum. The naval ship, HMS Gorgon, picked him up at Mytilene and on 17th November 1856 the ship reached Bodrum Bay. As well as the naval ship, the HMS Gorgon, there was 150 men on board and Newton received £2,000 for equipment and hiring local workers. He

also had an officer from the Royal Engineers, Robert Murdoch Smith, who was sent as a commander of a small group of sappers on the expedition. Newton capitalised on the fact that photography was taught to the Royal Engineers and requested the military photographers, Corporals B Spackmann and J McCartney. Also on board the Gorgon were the artist George Frederick Watts, Valentine Cameron Prinsep and John Roddam Spencer Stanhope who travelled to Bodrum from England to make sketches of the excavations and finds of the classical antiquity. The combination of these resources and skilled people signalled the birth of a collective large-scale excavation that would become associated with professional archaeology. Photography was an integral part of this process. Newton's interest in the new discipline was influenced by the presence on Lesbos of his friend and keen photographer, Dominic Ellis Colnaghi, son of the fine art gallery owner, Dominic Colnaghi whose gallery published fine art photographs from the 1850s. Colnaghi often accompanied Newton's ramblings round Lesbos and many of his photographs appear as engravings in Newton's 1865 travel book, 'Travels and Discoveries'. The images here give two different perspectives of Rhodes and one is, on the top, is an illustration and the one on the bottom is a photograph.

[18:16]

In addition, Newton would have been well aware of Roger Fenton's work in the British Museum. Fenton was appointed photographer in 1853 and between 1854 and 1856 he produced over 8,000 prints. Fenton was appointed war photographer in the Crimea in 1855 by the print dealer, William Agnew, of the art sales company, Agnew & Sons. Fenton's photographs were exhibited for the company in the same year. Jennifer Green-Lewis stresses Fenton's importance as the exhibition of photographs from the Crimea changed the way that current events were perceived. Similarly to the impact of the London Illustrated News there was a new perception that news stories could be told through pictures and so events could be seen almost as they occurred. Photography could aid the archaeologist's endeavour to capture as complete a visual picture as possible of antiquities in situ. Newton saw that photography was useful in recording archaeological practice, for example, he describes the way in which Corporal Benjamin Spackmann took photographs of a Roman tessellated pavement in Halicarnassus. 'The photographs were taken from a moveable stage on which the lens was placed so as to command a vertical view of the area below. Notes of the

colours were afterwards taken by hand. From the impossibility of keeping the lens to the same focus the views vary in scale, but with the aid of the plans they could easily be reduced to the same scale by a skilful draughtsman and a perfect facsimile of the whole thus presented to the eye. In this instance the photographs produced were aided by artists as well, the artists Watts, Prinsep and Stanhope helped add colour to the images.’ However, Newton wrote to Panizzi, Principal Librarian of the British Museum, that ‘apart from Watts, the artists were useless and their only assistance was to help colour in the photographs’. This is a Watts’ painting of Rhodes.

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Photography and its claim to realistic documentation contributed to the status of archaeology as a science. The documentary nature of these photographs contributed to the 19th century culture of realism, which despite its links to the teleological narrative of scientific progress, also had an element of theatricality. The exposure time of about three seconds needed for these photographs meant that each image was carefully framed and staged, particularly those with people in them, whether the naval workers, the Turkish homeowners or Newton himself. The photographs are presented as capturing a moment, much like Newton’s travels purports to present a series of letters written at the time, but they are staged and framed within the landscape of excavation and the Orient. In 1860 the photographs taken of the excavations by Spackmann and McCartney were exhibited in Rome at the Palazzo Caffarelli, the home of the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica. Newton was Consular in Rome at the time. Claire Lyons has argued that Newton used the photographs in the exhibition and the extensive use of them in his expansive first book, ‘A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus and Branchidae 1862’, to publish ‘the solution to a topographical conundrum, the site of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus’. The book was published by Day & Son, the same publisher gallery for Bedford’s Middle East photographs and travelogues. Excavation photography differs from photographs of ruins as they depict not just a picturesque scene but a moment of physical interpretation, a modern intervention within an ancient site. However, Newton did not feel that the photographs adequately captured the detail of the sculpture he had excavated with his team from Halicarnassus and elsewhere. So he commissioned artist, Mary Ann Severn to make drawings of the sculpture material he brought to the British Museum. Severn became Newton’s wife after his

appointment as Keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in 1862. These are two of Mary Ann Severn's drawings. Her drawings were photographed by Francis Bedford for use in Newton's second account of his excavations and travels, 'Travels and Discoveries in the Levant' published in 1865, which was also produced by Day & Son.

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These are a selection of images. I'm an admirer of Severn's work and Bedford's photography. Bedford's photographs were probably made at around the same time that he took the still lifes of antiquities from Cyrene. Arguably, Bedford's background as an architectural draughtsman and lithographer for Delamotte's Crystal Palace photographs clearly assists his command of photographing both two-dimensional and three-dimensional artwork. After working with Charles Newton on the excavations at Bodrum and Knidos the engineer Robert Murdoch Smith was stationed on the island of Malta while waiting for his next post. Later in 1859, still craving adventure, he applied to serve in China, but this request was turned down. The next year he continued to be stationed at Malta where he met Lieutenant Edward Porcher who had returned from assistant Nathan Davis at the tail end of excavations at Carthage. The pair planned an exhibition to Cyrene and Libya at their own expense and applied for leave of absence. This leave was granted and they obtained support for their plans from both the military authorities and the British Museum and were equipped accordingly. The backing of Charles Newton, then Consul in Rome, but likely to replace the aged and increasingly irascible Edward Hawkins as one of the curators to manage the unwieldy Department of Antiquities at the British Museum, assisted in this diplomatic process. Especially thanks Newton 'for his advice while we were in the country' and assistance with the publication. Soon after Smith and Porcher arrived in Libya, Newton became Keeper of the newly created Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities. The expedition included four freed African slaves to assist with the physical labour, whom Smith recounted were initially happy to have their liberty, but then became convinced the foreigners were taking them to the desert to cut their throats. Smith stresses the fact that these slaves were freed as part of the British global mission against slavery at the time and debates about slavery would have been in the public consciousness due to the American Civil War which was 1861-65. When they reached the necropolis outside Cyrene in late December, Porcher and Smith set up residence in rock cut tomb. The top

plate shows the men with their two camp beds, a chair and a cooking cauldron, various tools and cooking equipment and a pinhole camera. Porcher, Smith and their expeditionary force were not alone in taking up residence in the necropolis. Many nomadic Arabs and their livestock also lived amongst the tombs. Porcher and Smith's expedition came to a close in November 1861 and the enterprise was seen as a national triumph. Porcher and Smith were thought to have accomplished their mission to investigate the Greek city of Cyrene and finding further links in the great chain of art.

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The Illustrated London News had a full page spread of engravings of some of the sculptures from Cyrene and an article on their artistic merit when the antiquities had reached the British Museum in November 1861. The journal began, the Cyrene marbles in the British Museum by commenting on the industry of the government in acquiring antiquities. 'During the last few years the Foreign Office has shown a zeal in the service of archaeology not second to that of the Continental governments and the national collection has in consequence received priceless additions that would have remained unnoticed or gone to enrich the museums of other countries.' A sculpture of Apollo was singled out as being the most important of the artworks found. In their publication accompanied by a photograph taken by Francis Bedford of the Apollo, Porcher and Smith described the 121 pieces in which they found the Apollo statue and hoped that 'the whole figure might afterwards be put together without difficulty. When this was actually done, the parts were all found to fit together so accurately that the fractures were barely perceptible'. Porcher and Smith's account, 'History of Recent Discoveries at Cyrene Made During an Expedition to the Cyrenaica in 1861' was published in 1864 by Day & Son, again, the same publishers that Charles Newton and Francis Bedford used. 'A History of Recent Discoveries at Cyrene' contained 12 maps or plans, 22 plates and double tinted lithography from sketches by Porcher, 26 woodcuts, ten lithographic plates of Greek inscriptions, and 16 photographs taken in the British Museum by Francis Bedford. As you will see, or you will have seen, two of these are included in the exhibition. It is an imperial sized volume and only 300 copies were produced, making it expensive and available only by public subscription. The Saturday Review waxed lyrical about the volume, describing it as 'beautiful', commenting that 'the photographs taken of the sculptures at the British Museum were one of the most interesting features'. This was especially

true as the public themselves did not have access to the sculptures until new rooms could be built at the British Museum, though special appointments were available for students or artists.

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Francis Bedford had, to some extent, taken up from where Roger Fenton had left off photographing the collections of the British Museum. It's worth looking at his photographs of the sculptures in order to admire his skill in creating these still lifes. Arguably these photographs also contributed to the cataloguing of museum collections that took place in the mid 19th century. The documentary role of Bedford's photographs of antiquities from Rhodes has been commented on in the exhibition catalogue by Alessandro Nasini, with Newton using it to negotiate for more money for the antiquities. I have a coda on Rhodes; in May 1859 when Charles Newton had finished his excavations at Cnidus, he joined HMS Aurelius with Prince Arthur to go back to Cos. On the way he stopped off at Rhodes to examine antiquities from an early Greek era that the Vice-Consul, Alfred Biliotti, had found there. Newton purchased the collection for the British Museum, which he thought significant since the vases, glassware and jewellery showed traces of Assyrian and Egyptian influence and encouraged Biliotti and his colleague, Auguste Salzmann, to continue their excavations. Later that year, Newton was instrumental in securing a firman for further excavations on Rhodes for Biliotti, commenting to Antonio Panizzi that, 'I consider this discovery one of the most remarkable finds that has ever been made in Hellenic archaeology'. When he became Keeper, Newton continued his interest in Rhodes by visiting it in 1863 and working on the excavations at Kalymnos. The fine art photographer, Leonida Caldesi, continued taking photographs of 'ancient marbles, bronzes, terracottas in the British Museum which were published in 1873-4 and the views were selected and supervised by Charles Newton'. Newton believed that museum photography was as important as photography in the field and he campaigned for illustrated catalogues of collections. There are more examples of pioneering archaeologists using photography, for example, Richard Pullan in Pyrhini [ph] in the 1860s.

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By the 1870s photography had become the norm on major excavations, such as Alexander Conze's in Samothrace, with the commissioning of photographs with 'equal regard for the utilitarian and the beautiful'. Even Heinrich Schliemann, not renowned for archaeological exactitude, though supported by Newton, brought a

photographer to Troy and had photographs of the objects he removed taken as a catalogue by Pangos Zaphopoulos [ph] in Athens, and these were later published. However, I obviously want to jump forward a few decades to the early 20th century and finish with William Matthew Flinders Petrie. Petrie began as an excavator for the Egypt Exploration Fund in the early 1880s and then he became an independent archaeologist, and then in 1892 he became the first Edwards Professor of Egyptology at University College, London and in which role he wrote a book called 'The Methods and Aims of Archaeology'. Photographs of objects in museums and even as part of fieldwork had become routine by the time Petrie wrote his 1904 handbook, 'Methods and Aims in Archaeology', though he recognised that often the methodology was not perfect and he gave instructions on the use of a camera, by which stage the camera was portable, and what shots to take and other suggestions. These instructions would not have been written without the pioneering work of previous archaeologists and photographers and Francis Bedford played an important role among them. Thank you.

[applause]

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