

David Roberts' Egypt and Nubia as Imperial Picturesque Landscape

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Abstract

This thesis examines and contextualises historically significant aspects of the ways in which David Roberts' lucrative lithographic publication *Egypt and Nubia* (1846-49) represented the "Orient". The analysis demonstrates that Roberts used tropes, particularly ruins and dispossessed figures, largely derived from a revised version of British picturesque landscape art, in order to depict Egypt as a developmentally poor state. By establishing how this imagery was interpreted in the context of the early Victorian British Empire, the thesis offers an elucidation of the connection between British imperial attitudes and the picturesque in Roberts' work.

The contemporary perception of *Egypt and Nubia* as a definitive representation of the state is argued to relate, not only to the utility of the picturesque as an "accurate" descriptive mode, despite its highly mediated nature, but also to the ways in which Britain responded to shifting political relationships with Egypt and the Ottoman Empire between 1830 and 1869. This political element of the research also suggests a more problematised reading of Robert's work in relation to constructs of British imperialism and Edward Said's theory of 'Orientalism', than has been provided by previous art historical accounts.

A significant and innovative feature of the research is its focus on extensive analysis of textual descriptions of Egypt in early Victorian Britain and contemporary imperial historiography in relation to characteristics displayed in Roberts' art. This offers a basis for a more specific, contextual understanding of Roberts' work, as well as historically repositioning nineteenth-century British picturesque art practice and the visual culture of the early Victorian British Empire.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the work of the nineteenth-century British landscape painter David Roberts and some of the ways in which his work represents the “Orient”.¹ The project will highlight a number of gaps in existent scholarship, relating to Roberts’ relationship with the picturesque and British imperialism. Principal amongst these gaps is the lack of clear definition in art historical discourse, concerning the ways in which British picturesque art might relate to imperial attitudes towards Egypt in early Victorian Britain. Another significant gap is the lack of contextualised critical evaluation of Roberts’ possible use of picturesque formulae in relation to his representations of modern Egypt as developmentally inferior. This thesis sets out in part to fill some of these gaps and to explore some of the points of conjuncture between them.

Roberts travelled through Egypt, Nubia, and the Holy Land between 1838 and 1839. Upon his return to London, he set out to publish his Levantine imagery in two lithographic series; the first entitled *Holy Land* [1842-1846] and the second, *Egypt and Nubia* [1846-1849]. These two publications were exceedingly popular in the mid nineteenth century and served to augment Roberts’ success as an oil painter and watercolour artist. *Holy Land*’s subject matter was principally comprised of scenes of Christian significance, and was augmented by a letterpress describing the biblical

¹ While this term is commonly used to describe the Far East, in the nineteenth century it was used to describe the Levant. The Levantine connotation of the “Orient” is used throughout the thesis because Roberts and his contemporaries used it. Critics and theorists such as Edward Said have also used it in more recent times. No offence is intended in its use.

history surrounding each landscape written by Rev. George Croly.² *Egypt and Nubia* did not focus on biblical scenery; instead, the series depicted archaeological ruins, modern Islamic architecture, and colourfully exotic Egyptians and Nubians. The antiquarian William Brockedon wrote the letterpress for this series. This thesis will not explore the imagery from *Holy Land*. As discussed by Briony Llewellyn in the catalogue to the 1986-1987 exhibition *David Roberts*, the subject matter and historical significance of that publication rest primarily in the Christian sentimentality of the early Victorians.³ The images do not necessarily relate to exotic or novel oriental subject matter, or address the contemporary state of the Levant. *Egypt and Nubia*, however, provides a wealth of information about British reception of exotic cultures, racial attitudes, and the reaction to Islam. I propose that Roberts presented this information via the language of the picturesque.

Three points of historical reference

In order to clarify the nature of this investigation, several definitions are required. Firstly, we must define the term “picturesque” as it relates to this thesis. Within this thesis, picturesque refers to a genre of British landscape art that flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Influential theorists such as William Gilpin [1724-1804] and Uvedale Price [1747-1829] positioned this genre as an interstice between the better-known sublime and beautiful artistic categories of the eighteenth century. Picturesque imagery was composed of wild and uncultivated scenery, idle and

² Kenneth Bendiner, ‘David Roberts in the Near East: Social and Religious Themes,’ *Art History* 6, No. 1 (March 1983): 71.

³ Briony Llewellyn, ‘Roberts’s Pictures of the Near East,’ in *David Roberts*, eds, Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 72.

“wretched” peasant figures,⁴ and textural variety known as ‘ruggedness,’⁵ sought out in scenery that represented alterity – the backward, pre-industrial, rural life that was rapidly disappearing in late eighteenth-century Britain. Artists, writers, and tourists mobilised the picturesque as a descriptive mode that related landscape scenery to an aesthetic template inspired by seventeenth-century artists Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa. This descriptive mode was not limited to painting, but extended into garden design and estate maintenance as well.⁶ Despite the significance of picturesque landscaping in the eighteenth century, I will not focus on it. This is because my interest in the picturesque is based on Roberts’ relationship to it, and his art was not explicitly related to landscape gardening.

The second term requiring definition is “imperialism.” Imperialism, specifically as it related to Britain in the nineteenth century, has been the subject of numerous studies with a variety of ideological positions. Generally, John Darwin’s definition, ‘Imperialism may be defined as the sustained effort to assimilate a country or region to the political, economic or cultural system of another power,’ is acceptable.⁷ However, as Bernard Porter noted in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* [2004], ‘Most of the phenomena to which we attach the word were complex mixtures of various factors, different in different circumstances, forever shifting, and always amenable to

⁴ The term “wretched” is clearly contentious. I use the term because it was part of the vocabulary used to describe picturesque figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Roberts frequently used the term as well in his journal and letters. I do not use the term pejoratively, or in a derogatory manner.

⁵ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), 7.

⁶ Mavis Batey, ‘The Picturesque: An Overview,’ *Garden History* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 122; Hazel Fryer, ‘Humphrey Repton’s Commissions in Herefordshire: Picturesque Landscape Aesthetics,’ *Garden History* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 162; Stephanie Ross, ‘The Picturesque: An Eighteenth-Century Debate,’ *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 221.

⁷ John Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion,’ *The English Historical Review* 112, no. 447 (June 1997): 614.

deconstruction in terms of other influences and interests.⁸ As such, I will define imperialism as it related to Roberts' work, as well as explore what other historians, critics, and theorists have said about its early-Victorian British forms. At the time, imperialism manifested itself in a variety of ways, but it was principally related to the value of foreign territories as vehicles and partners for British trade. This can be seen in the then-popular doctrine of free trade. While at first glance concepts such as imperialism and free trade seem to be at odds, in the early-Victorian world they were interconnected, more through influencing foreign governments than through territorial annexation. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson described this 'loose' form of imperialism in their seminal 1953 essay 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' as the occasional use of military force to provide 'satisfactory conditions for commercial or strategic integration,' between Britain and overseas markets, but not direct rule.⁹ This definition will prove to be significant, as the territory that Roberts depicted in *Egypt and Nubia* was of great commercial interest to Britain at the time, yet no formal military or governmental presence was maintained there. This loose imperialism was distinct from late Victorian forms of imperialism, in which direct rule was more commonplace. The loose form has been acknowledged as the dominant imperial mode in early-Victorian Britain by historians such as Porter,¹⁰ Darwin,¹¹ M.E. Chamberlain in *Pax Britannica? British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* [1988],¹² Ronald Hyam in *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914* [2002],¹³ and economic historian Bernard Semmel in *The Rise of*

⁸ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.

⁹ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade,' *The Economic History Review*, n.s. 6, no. 19 (1953): 6.

¹⁰ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 8.

¹¹ Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians,' 614.

¹² M. E. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica? British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 125.

¹³ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914*, 3rd ed. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002), 108.

Free Trade Imperialism [1970] and *The Liberal ideal and the Demons of Empire* [1993].¹⁴

Finally, the term “Orientalism” must be defined. The term has many meanings, including the study of Asian languages and history, modes of imperial governance, and artistic representations. As it relates to this thesis, Orientalism refers to a large group of Western artists, mainly French and British, who depicted Near Eastern and North African subject matter. These artists worked between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, producing diverse types of history paintings, portraiture, genre scenes, and landscapes. Much of the imagery was produced during periods of European imperial expansion. Often, but not always, Orientalist subject matter was drawn from places and cultures that were controlled by imperialist European states. This set of historical circumstances has encouraged some art historians to connect orientalist subject matter to imperialist ideologies. Specifically, a number of art historians, such as Linda Nochlin, have suggested that all Orientalist art is tantamount to imperialist propaganda.¹⁵ This analytical position holds that this type of art invariably presents “Oriental” societies as inferior to Western societies and encourages European control of Levantine territory. This position is, however, contentious because it does not allow for modes of representation to change over time or to be motivated by contextual events. This controversy will be discussed below.

¹⁴ Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal ideal and the Demons of Empire* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 22; Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 158.

¹⁵ Linda Nochlin, ‘The Imaginary Orient,’ in *The Politics of Vision* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 37.

Strengths and weaknesses of the literature surrounding Roberts' practice

The clarification of what “picturesque”, “imperialism”, and “Orientalism” mean within this thesis elucidates the research gaps and points of conjuncture that I will explore. All three concepts are contextual and draw meaning from their surroundings. Research gaps emerge when an incomplete view of these concepts are mobilised in the context of Roberts' work. Largely, art historical scholarship has been concerned with a partial view of the picturesque. There exists a lack of research into the ways in which picturesque artists responded to Levantine scenery in the nineteenth century. This gap is especially germane to Roberts' work. During the nineteenth century notions of the picturesque were commonly mobilised both by art critics when discussing *Egypt and Nubia* and not least by Roberts himself. More pressingly for the purposes of this thesis, I suggest that the legibility of this series was based on knowledge of the picturesque shared by artist and audience.

It is at this point that we can identify a set of parallel omissions in the configuration of imperialism as a tool to understand nineteenth-century art. Imperialism as a critical tool has often been highly generalised in its application to Victorian imagery. This arguably is a problem for any analysis of nineteenth-century visual culture but especially problematic in Roberts' case. I propose that the artist both represented a nation that was important to British commercial interests but also – of central concern for this thesis – did so using picturesque conventions. Here, the furniture of the picturesque – the ruin and the indigent peasant - was potentially used as a tool to show the nation as backward and ripe for development. This sentiment would be distinct from other manifestations of imperialism at other points in the nineteenth century. The general tendency with scholarship on Roberts – to ignore his picturesqueness and generalise the imperialism

that surrounded him – presents a set of research issues that will be explored in the following chapters.

The central issue of this project – David Roberts’ use of the picturesque as a tool to represent an exotic state with strategic commercial importance – raises a set of methodological questions that are largely defined by existing literature. There exists only a small amount of literature devoted to the artist – only two serious biographies of Roberts exist. The first, *Life of David Roberts, R.A.* [1866] was written two years after his death by James Ballantine, one of his patrons. This work was based on Roberts’ journals, letters, and Ballantine’s personal recollections. This fascinating work included a partial transcription of Roberts’ *Eastern Journal*, the diary that he kept while travelling through the Levant. *Life of David Roberts, R.A.* serves as an index of his daily activities and provides a wealth of information on the creation and publication of *Egypt and Nubia*.

There are, however, several problems with Ballantine’s book. Two of the main sources for the book, Roberts’ journal and letters, are believed to have been compromised by Roberts’ daughter Christine, who was given Roberts’ ephemera prior to his death.¹⁶ Before passing it to his biographer, Christine possibly destroyed documents, including the original journal that contained negative reference to her mother, Roberts’ estranged wife Margaret. Roberts and his wife had a tempestuous relationship; they separated between 1831 and 1834 again, permanently, in 1835.¹⁷ This would have left Ballantine with an incomplete set of records. Additionally, Ballantine insisted on portraying Roberts in a positive light. Considering their friendship, there is little critical evaluation

¹⁶ Katherine Sim, *David Roberts, R.A.* (London: Quartet, 1984), 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-55, 190.

of the artist's work in the *Life of David Roberts, R.A.* – when Ballantine discussed Roberts' work, his tone never wavered from the celebratory mode in which he presented the rest of the artist's life. This suggests that Ballantine's biography is an incomplete record and analysis of Roberts' Egyptian lithographs.

The problems with Ballantine's book were partially resolved by Katherine Sim, who wrote the second major biography of the artist, *David Roberts, R.A.* [1984]. Sim conducted interviews with Roberts' descendents, and was given unparalleled access to his personal letters and journals. She presented a more complete view of the artist's life, including a wealth of personal information that Ballantine left out of his biography. Although Sim presented a rich picture of Roberts' life, she did not adequately contextualise his life and work. Her book ignored the historical and artistic framework of *Egypt and Nubia*, and like Ballantine's biography, ignored the artist's bias against Egyptians, fear of Islam, and reliance on picturesque conventions. However, these are all to be found in the *Eastern Journal*.¹⁸ The central aim of this thesis is to examine closely the significance of that series.

In order to identify some of the shortcomings in the two biographies, I have examined the copy of Roberts' *Eastern Journal* in the National Library of Scotland. This is not the original copy; it is Christine Roberts' transcription. Study of this document has yielded a wealth of information left out of both Ballantine's and Sim's biographies. It has proven to be an invaluable resource for information on Roberts' personal opinions and artistic practice.

¹⁸ See J. Harris Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' *The Muslim World* 88, no. 1 (January 1998): 66 footnote 6.

Ballantine and Sim addressed Roberts' work as biographers, not as art historians. Several exhibitions in the last twenty-five years have focused on the aesthetics and context of Roberts' work. The most significant was the 1986-87 Barbican exhibition, *David Roberts*, a retrospective of the artist's work. The curators, Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn, positioned Roberts as a traveller/artist and focused on the novelty of his landscape imagery. The exhibition plotted a trajectory of the artist's travels and imagery, beginning in Scotland and moving through France, Belgium, Germany, and on to Spain in 1832. Guiterman and Llewellyn highlighted the artist's voyage to Spain, and his engravings published in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* in the late 1830s, as significant. It was here that Roberts became involved in Islamic subject matter, having painted the remains of Moorish Spain.¹⁹ The success of his work in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* encouraged Roberts to travel to the Levant in order to find even more novel subject matter. According to the curators, the success of *Egypt and Nubia* was owing to the artist's 'daring and obduracy in venturing to parts of North Africa and the Middle East that were rarely penetrated by Christians and even more rarely seen through artists' eyes.'²⁰

The conception of Roberts' success being based in part on the novelty of his images is significant for this thesis. As an artist who made use of the picturesque, Roberts produced images of novel subject matter within a readily identifiable format. This, I argue, was part of the secret of his success. *Egypt and Nubia* was not the only early-Victorian pictorial description of the Levant. It was, however, the most popular and considered to be the most accurate. Although the curators of the 1986 exhibition *David*

¹⁹ Briony Llewellyn, 'Roberts's Pictures of the Near East,' in *David Roberts*, eds, Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 76.

²⁰ 'Forward', in *David Roberts*, eds, Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 7.

Roberts, Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn, came to this conclusion, they did not sufficiently address the picturesque nature of Roberts' Egyptian art.

I suggest that Roberts' use of the picturesque increased the popularity of the series; his audience was more willing to accept exotic imagery that was presented within a familiar compositional template. Additionally, the above mentioned exhibition did not position Roberts within the framework of Anglo-Egyptian relations at the time. This is a major issue; I suggest that Roberts' work can be seen a visual negotiation of contemporary British impressions of Egypt. Without this contextual framework meaningful elements of Roberts' imagery could be overlooked.

Other recent exhibitions, such as *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered* at the National Gallery of Ireland in 1988, have engaged more closely with the aesthetics and cultural significance of Orientalist art in general and Roberts in particular. The premise of this exhibition was that artists 'first imagined the East, then travelled there to experience it, and afterward mixed the memory of [the] visit with elements of earlier fantasy.'²¹ Utilising the theories of Edward Said, the exhibition's contributor David Scott posits that artists such as Roberts represented the Levant as an 'alluring Other' and as 'essentially a work of fiction.'²² This innovative interpretation acknowledges that Roberts' work fits into a rubric of preconceived and negative notions of Egypt, an acknowledgment that has been instructive for this project. The curators state that

The social and religious undercurrents of the illustrations... have been seen to include a sense of the destructive effect of Islamic domination and Christianity's

²¹ James Thompson, 'Mapping the Mind: The Quest for Eastern Metaphors and Meaning,' in *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered*, ed. James Thompson (Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland 1988), 19.

²² David Scott, 'The Literary Orient,' in *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered*, ed. James Thompson (Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland 1988), 4, 6.

lost inheritance, as well as the contrast between ancient grandeur and modern decadence, in a way breaking the Egyptian's link with his past...²³

This interpretation has proven to be deeply informative for this project, as I will argue that Roberts' work is predicated on this judgmental tone. Interestingly, the curators also note that, 'In a sense [Roberts'] talent "tamed" or reconstituted the East according to personal picturesque formulae that made its landscape accessible to many less-gifted artists.'²⁴ This also is a significant statement, as no other authority on Roberts establishes an explicit connection between the artists' work and the picturesque. However, the curators stop short of explaining the nature of his 'personal picturesque formulae' or the public's reception of his works.

Fascinatingly, Briony Llewellyn's contribution to the catalogue for the 1983 Brighton Museum exhibition *The Inspiration of Egypt* highlights the timely nature of Roberts' publication.

Roberts' *Egypt and Nubia* was certainly not the first large illustrated publication devoted to that country, but it represented an attitude to its subject which differed from that of its predecessors... By the end of the 1830s, however, tastes were changing. With the spread of a network of railways through Europe and the increasing number of steamships came a quickening interest in historic sites which were now within the reach of a wider public.²⁵

This is a major point with regard to this thesis. I will argue that Roberts' work was existed within the context of negative stereotype and a heightened British interest in the region. The changing tastes to which Llewellyn refers could relate to the commercial novelty sought by the artist and manifested in what I will refer to as 'revisionist picturesque'. Unfortunately, Llewellyn does not consider the artistic templates that

²³ James Thompson, 'David Roberts,' in *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered*, ed. James Thompson (Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland 1988), 134.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁵ Briony Llewellyn, 'The Victorian Vision of Egypt,' in *The Inspiration of Egypt* ed. Patrick Connor (Croydon: Croydon Printing Company, 1983), 115.

Roberts likely followed in *Egypt and Nubia*. Instead she interprets the artist's images as individualised and realist responses to Egyptian landscape. 'Previous artists had tended to interpret Egypt through a veil of western culture... There was more demand for realistic views of buildings in their natural settings, as opposed to fanciful compositions conjured out of the artist's imagination.'²⁶ Despite Llewellyn's claims, it is possible that Roberts did view Egypt 'through a veil of western culture', reconfiguring the landscape to fit an existent British template. Both *The Inspiration of Egypt* and *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered* provide a partial view of Roberts work. While both contextualise the artist within aesthetic and political frameworks, neither exhibition fully explores the ways in which Roberts may have engaged with these frameworks. However, both exhibitions have been useful for understanding the culture in which the artist worked.

Roberts' work has also been explored in a recent exhibition at Tate Britain entitled *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, held in 2008. The exhibition's curator, Nicholas Tromans, suggests that Roberts attempted to present a panoramic view of Egypt.²⁷ Tromans writes: 'Roberts allowed the mid-Victorian public to feel they had a clear picture of Egypt, a clearer picture indeed even than those who lived near the ruins...'²⁸ Sadly, this remark is not qualified by contextual evidence. While Tromans provides several paragraphs in the exhibition catalogue concerning Anglo-Egyptian relations, he does so within the broad framework of all artists represented in the exhibition. This includes several centuries of history. Such a generalised historical

²⁶ Llewellyn, 'The Victorian Vision of Egypt,' 115.

²⁷ Nicholas Tromans, 'The Orient in Perspective,' in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publications, 2008), 103.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

context is inadequate for understanding the popularity of *Egypt and Nubia* in the mid nineteenth century.

The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting placed Roberts within the tradition of European landscape art. Tromans correctly acknowledges that Roberts was a pioneer of translating ‘the conventions of European landscape painting’ to the Levant,²⁹ and further states that, ‘Having to dispense with the formulae for generating landscape compositions defined in the seventeenth century by Claude, Rubens and others, Roberts turned to particular architectural monuments to structure his views...’ It is possible that the formulae to which Tromans refers could relate to the picturesque – particularly considering that he acknowledged Claudian landscape as one of the models for it. If so, Tromans would suggest that Roberts’ art was a move away from the British picturesque tradition. This position would then be exceedingly informative to my own research. Unfortunately, Tromans does not explain this point, or unpack Roberts’ relationship with the picturesque. This is a shortcoming shared by all the literature reviewed. Indeed, some recent large-scale Orientalist exhibitions, such as the National Gallery of Canada’s 1994 *Egyptomania*, have ignored *Egypt and Nubia* altogether, listing the publication in the ‘Other References’ section of the bibliography, but not discussing the work in the catalogue itself.³⁰ This is unfortunate, given that *Egypt and Nubia* resonates with the curators’ definition of Egyptomania, that, ‘artists must “re-create” [Egyptian forms] in the cauldron of their own sensibility and in the context of their times, or must give them an appearance of renewed vitality, a function other than the purpose for which they

²⁹ Nicholas Tromans, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publications, 2008), 17.

³⁰ ‘Other References,’ in *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930* ed. Jean-Marcel Humbert (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 587-593.

were originally intended.’³¹ Both the exhibitions and the biographies present incomplete views of Roberts’ Egyptian work.

A handful of art historians have critically addressed *Egypt and Nubia*. The most useful analyses align themselves with the historiography of the British Empire as well as art historical context. Before Roberts’ position within this scholarship can be determined, critical responses to British imperialism must be explored. As A.L. Macfie notes in *Orientalism: A Reader*, attacks on Western imperialism in the Levant is almost as old as Western imperialism itself.³² Despite this, sustained intellectual criticism of European imperialistic attitudes multiplied during the dawn of decolonisation after the Second World War, beginning with Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* [1965]. As Robert Young notes in *White Mythologies* [1990], ‘The book is both a revolutionary manifesto of decolonisation and the founding analysis of the effects of colonialism upon colonized peoples and their cultures.’³³ Fanon explored the power structure inherent in colonial encounters, suggesting that

The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing ‘them’ well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system.³⁴

From within the context of the Algerian struggle for independence, Fanon postulated that the process of decolonisation was interested in an overthrow of imperialist governments as well as the ways in which native populations were “known” to those governments. According to Young, *The Wretched of the Earth* had the effect of,

³¹ Jean-Marcel Humbert, ‘Egyptomania: A Current Concept from the Renaissance to Postmodernism,’ in *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930* ed. Jean-Marcel Humbert (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 21.

³² A.L. Macfie, *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 45.

³³ Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1990), 119-120.

³⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1965), 28.

‘decentring and displacing the norms of Western knowledge: questioning, for example, the assumptions of Western historicist history as an ordered whole with a single meaning...’³⁵

Following Fanon’s lead, critics such as Anouar Abdel-Malik [‘Orientalism in Crisis’], A.L. Tibawi [‘English Speaking Orientalists’] began to critique the modes and institutions through which the Levant was understood in the West, stating that imperialist strategies were implicit within seemingly objective academic disciplines.³⁶ Abdel-Malik suggested that, as an object of study, the “Oriental” was fundamentally denied a subjective voice, but was instead:

...passive, non-participating, endowed with a “historical” subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign, with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or “subject” which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined – and acted – by others.³⁷

Within this critical rubric, literary critic Edward Said has produced the most significant work. Said’s *Orientalism* [1978] fundamentally altered the ways in which Western study of the Levant took place. Said claimed that Western understanding of Eastern cultures, particularly in the Levant, has for two centuries been the creation of a discourse that posits the West as culturally and developmentally superior to the East. Basing this theory on Foucault’s notion of discourse and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Said suggested that the stereotypes and falsehoods propagated by Orientalism have its basis in the Western literary tradition extending back to Chaucer and Dante.³⁸ For Said, by the end of the eighteenth century, European stereotypes of

³⁵ Young, *White Mythologies*, 125-126.

³⁶ Anouar Abdel-Malik, ‘Orientalism in Crisis,’ *Diogenes*, no. 44 (Winter 1963): 104-112; A.L. Tibawi, ‘English Speaking Orientalists,’ *Islamic Quarterly* 8, nos. 1-4 (1964): 25-45.

³⁷ Abdel-Malik, ‘Orientalism in Crisis,’ 107-108.

³⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), 12.

Levantine Muslims had become entrenched and commonly accepted. This literature encouraged and justified Western control of the Levant. Said furthered his theory in *Culture and Imperialism* [1993]; here he claimed that imperialist sentiments manifested themselves in British literature that was not expressly concerned with the British Empire. Essentially, Said used *Culture and Imperialism* to apply his theory of hegemonic orientalist knowledge to the wider spectrum of nineteenth-century literature. He suggested that imperialism was one of the overarching themes of all British literature at the time.³⁹

Both the strengths and weaknesses of Said's theories have been instructive for this thesis. In a number of ways, Said provides a useful tool for understanding *Egypt and Nubia*. The presentation of culturally biased views, the reiteration of stereotypes, and the milieu of orientalist discourse in the mid nineteenth century, all of which were explored by Said, can be seen in Roberts' art. Evidence for the utility of Said's approach can be seen in the work of Homi Bhabha, particularly his essay, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism' from his book *The Location of Culture* [1994]. In this essay Bhabha investigates the utility of stereotype in imperialist representations, stating that stereotype

Is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.⁴⁰

This assertion can accurately describe Roberts' willful misrepresentation of the Egyptian population as lethargic and sensual.

³⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁴⁰ Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

However, there are also several shortcomings to Said's approach. It has been argued that Said essentialised elements of Western culture, analysed his sources ahistorically, misinterpreted his source material and ignored the potential for cross-cultural interaction.⁴¹ The potential for oversight within this framework can be seen in the work of Linda Nochlin, who applied Said's theories to the visual arts. In her essay, 'The Imaginary Orient' [1989], Nochlin related Roberts' work to a broad and imprecise network of French orientalist painters who had little relation to Roberts. Nochlin's presentation of Roberts would suggest that he and French painters such as Jean-Leon Gérôme shared a set of racial, imperial, and artistic assumptions, which is not the case. Nochlin concludes that Roberts, as well the majority of orientalist painters, were imperialist agents.⁴² This conclusion is problematic in that it is not feasible to cast all orientalist artists as imperialists. The suggestion that "imperialism" is a homogenous concept in the nineteenth century is also contentious. Nochlin's application of Saidian theory highlights some of the shortcomings of *Orientalism's* conclusions when used as a tool for understanding Roberts' work.

The shortcomings of a Saidian interpretation have directed much of the research methodology for this thesis. I question the assumption that imperialist sentiments in nineteenth-century Britain were homogenous. Instead, I suggest that imperialist ideology was shifting, uncertain, and dependent on contemporary events. Specifically, I propose that the imperialism evident in *Egypt and Nubia* stemmed from British responses to Anglo-Egyptian conflicts in the 1830s. In order to prove this, extensive research into contextual material such as British journals and travel literature has been

⁴¹ See Ernest Gellner, letter to the editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 April, 1993: 15; David Kopf, 'Hermeneutics Versus History,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (May 1980): 495-506; John MacKenzie, *Orientalism, History Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 11.

⁴² Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' 35, 38.

undertaken. I have researched journals, including *The Times*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Art Journal*, as well as volumes of travel literature related to the state. Within these journals and books, articles relating to the Levant and to Roberts have been scrutinised. From this data set, it is possible to see a cross section of British impressions of Egypt with at the time. This information will serve as a corrective to the generalised and ahistorical tendencies of Saidian theory.

In order to understand the dominant perception of Egypt at the time, a short explanation of the journals reviewed in this project is necessary. Central to this enquiry is the perception espoused by widely circulated and influential British newspapers and journals. *The Times*, the most widely read newspaper in the period under review, serves as an index for what information was available.⁴³ According to historian Hartley Withers, it was the principal journal of record for the newspaper-reading public of the 1830s,⁴⁴ and the quality of their overseas reporting at the time was considered second to none.⁴⁵ Also, *The Times*, unlike many newspapers, kept forwarding agents and correspondents in Alexandria and Malta to keep the newspaper up-to-date.⁴⁶ This positioned the newspaper to be an authoritative source on Egypt in the period under review.

In addition to *The Times*, journals such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Quarterly Review* serve as indices of available knowledge that informed popular

⁴³ Hartley Withers ed., *A Newspaper History 1785-1935* (London: The Office of The Times, 1935), 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁵ G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society From Caxton to Northcliffe* (London: Longman Group, 1978), 163.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

opinions about Egypt in the 1830s. In the early nineteenth century, the majority of popular journals, such as the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and the *Quarterly Review*, were overtly politically oriented and therefore admittedly biased in their editorial policies.⁴⁷ The *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* were both, broadly, Tory publications. Both the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* were founded, in 1809 and 1817, respectively, to combat the Whiggish *Edinburgh Review*,⁴⁸ and both often displayed a conservative bias towards liberal, reformist politics. Examples of this can be seen in 1833 and 1835 when an anonymous critic for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* explicitly blamed Whig politicians for mishandling British international relations in the Levant.⁴⁹ As the introduction to Jonathan Cutmore's recent edited volume *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis* explicitly states, the *Quarterly Review* was exclusively a conservative publication.⁵⁰ The *Edinburgh Review* was consistently more liberal and openly championed causes such as the Reform Bill of 1832.⁵¹

Both the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* provide a less party political picture of perceptions of Egypt than the other journals. This is not to say that either the *Athenaeum* or *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* were completely unbiased, but they had no overt party affiliation. Writing in *Early Victorian England*, E.E. Kellett stated that the *Athenaeum* was non-partisan, and held the

⁴⁷ Lititia Elizabeth Landon, 'L.E.L.: The Literary Gazette Collection,' Sheffield Hallam University, <http://www.2shu.ac.uk/corvey/cw3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=23> accessed on 30 August, 2006.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Cutmore, 'The Quarterly Review Under Gifford: An Overview,' University of Maryland, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/founding/intro.html> accessed on 30 August, 2006; 'Blackwood Magazine,' Spartacus Schoolnet, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jblackwood.htm> accessed on 30 August, 2006.

⁴⁹ 'The Fall of Turkey,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 303, no. 209 (June 1833): 945; 'Foreign Policy,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 307, no. 238 (August 1835): 209.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Cutmore, ed, *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 1.

⁵¹ Joanne Shattock, 'Politics and Literature: Macaulay, Brougham, and the "Edinburgh Review" under Napier,' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, no. 16 (1986): 32.

superlative of being the most ‘honest’ Victorian literary journal.⁵² *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* was its only rival in the 1830s in the field of non-partisan journals.⁵³ Its editor, William Jerdan, had a background in journalism and regularly mixed literary reviews with news ‘scoops.’⁵⁴ A writer for the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* explicitly stated on 24 December 1836 that it was divorced from politics.⁵⁵ Both journals inserted regular updates on Egypt in their reviews and notices.

All the above journals addressed the people that would later make up Roberts’ audience and enjoyed wide circulation.⁵⁶ Also, these journals regularly reviewed travel literature written about the Levant. These reviews flagged up specific points of interest raised in both the books reviewed, and the news on Egypt published in *The Times*. Both the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* also published letters written by travellers in Egypt. Significantly, the *Athenaeum* published a letter written by Roberts during his Levantine trip.⁵⁷

This thesis is not the first project to question Said’s methodology specifically in relation to Roberts. Chief amongst these critics is historian John MacKenzie. In his book, *Orientalism, History Theory and the Arts* [1995], MacKenzie systematically attacks Said on a number of points, principally ‘his binary approach to the “Other”... his notion

⁵² E.E. Kellett, ‘The Press,’ in *Early Victorian England*, ed. G.M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 2:77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁴ L.E.L.: The Literary Gazette Collection, Sheffield Hallam University, <http://www.2shu.ac.uk/corvey/cw3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=23> accessed on 30 August, 2006.

⁵⁵ ‘Review of *History of the War Between Mehemed Ali and the Ottoman Porte, in Syria and in Asia-Minor*, by M/M. de Cadalvene and E. Darrault,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1040 (24 December 1836): 821.

⁵⁶ It is difficult to assess how wide their circulation was, owing to vagaries of the Stamp duty and the fact that all editions were issued both weekly and annually in bound volumes.

⁵⁷ David Roberts, ‘Foreign Correspondence: David Roberts’ Letter from Cairo,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 590 (16 February 1839): 133.

of unchallenged western dominance and his handling of the character of imperial hegemony; his vacillations between truth and ideology and his lack of theoretical consistency.⁵⁸ MacKenzie claims that it is not academically viable to presuppose grandiose generalisations about several centuries of imperial culture. He notes that:

Said and his followers purport to write about certain arts within the matrix of imperialism. But they are not imperial historians, and their “imperialism” has a disturbing vagueness about it. It becomes a generalised concept inadequately rooted in the imperial facts, lacking historical dynamic, innocent of imperial theory or the complexities of different forms of imperialism and varieties of economic and political relationship.⁵⁹

This is a significant point, and one that has been instructive for this thesis. My methodological structure, based on close reading of contextual literature, is rooted in MacKenzie’s criticism of Said. He addresses Roberts in the third chapter of *Orientalism, History Theory and the Arts*, entitled ‘Orientalism in art.’ His interpretation of Roberts is diametrically opposed to Nochlin’s. At no point does he claim that Roberts’ was an imperialist; instead, he notes that the majority of British orientalist art was created before Britain maintained any formal imperial presence in the region.⁶⁰ This is a more historically informed reading of Roberts’ work than Nochlin’s generalised interpretation and has been extremely informative for my own research, although there are shortcomings within MacKenzie’s methodology as well.

In spite of the relative subtlety of MacKenzie’s approach, his interpretation of Roberts raises a number of issues. While MacKenzie corrects Said’s tendency to see nascent imperialism where it may not exist, he tends to ignore all imperialism that was not ‘the high point of [British imperialism] between 1890 and 1914.’⁶¹ My research suggests that while Britain did not maintain a formal imperial presence in the Levant during

⁵⁸ MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 12.

⁵⁹ MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, xv.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

Roberts' lifetime, a form of loose imperialism can be seen.⁶² MacKenzie does not address the possibility that this loose form of imperialism impacted Roberts' perception of the Egypt and the subsequent imagery.

Scholarship on Roberts has yet to address the effect of Britain's commercial interest in the region and subsequent interventions into Egyptian policy on his work. Historians of imperialism have, however, studied this situation. Despite the fact that Britain maintained no formal imperial presence in Egypt during Roberts' lifetime, my research has suggested that there existed a great deal of commercial interest in the state owing to its strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean. This interest manifested itself in private entrepreneurship and governmental maintenance of trade routes, both diplomatically and militarily. This is the position maintained by G.D. Clayton in *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli* [1971],⁶³ A.L. Macfie in *The Eastern Question 1774-1923* [1989],⁶⁴ Afaf al-Sayyid Marsot in *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* [1984],⁶⁵ Rashad Rushdie in *English Travellers in Egypt During the Reign of Mohamed Ali* [1952],⁶⁶ and J.C.B. Richmond in *Egypt 1798-1952 Her Advance Towards A Modern Identity* [1977].⁶⁷

Subsequent research into Viscount Palmerston's foreign policy in the 1830s has been helpful here. It can be seen that Palmerston used British military and diplomatic

⁶² The "loose imperialism" to which I refer is the type discussed by Gallagher and Robinson in their essay, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade.' See Gallagher and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade,' 6-7.

⁶³ G.D. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli* (London: University of London Press, 1971), 11.

⁶⁴ A.L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923* (Harlow: Longman Group, 1989), 20.

⁶⁵ Afaf al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cairo: Fouad I University Press, 1952), 1, 35.

⁶⁶ Rashad Rushdie, *English Travellers in Egypt During the Reign of Mohamed Ali* (Cairo: Fouad I University Press, 1952), 1.

⁶⁷ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1953 Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity* (London: Methuen & co., 1977), 54.

influence to shape Egyptian policy at the time.⁶⁸ Specifically, Palmerston prevented Egypt from breaking with the Ottoman Empire and creating an independent state. While Palmerston neither invaded the state nor maintained an overt ruling presence there, his influence with the Ottoman Empire allowed Britain to assert its commercial needs. This was the period in which Roberts travelled to the Levant and would have experienced loose imperialism first-hand.

The public manifestation of this loose imperialism consisted of a general trend towards negative reportage of Egypt in the British press by the late 1830s. During this time, the majority of British journals described the state as backward and requiring British commercial and infrastructural assistance. Roberts shared this view.⁶⁹ In addition to discussing this situation in his journals, Roberts' lithographs highlight both the decayed ruins of ancient Egypt and the debasement of the modern state. This suggests an affinity between the artist's work and the contextual reportage in British journals. Additionally, the language used in 1830s negative reportage bears a similarity to the visual language of British picturesque art, with its insistence on ruins and decay. This affinity does not, however, suggest that the British government wished to rule Egypt or that Roberts would have endorsed such a situation. The appearance of loose imperialism based on independent commercial interest instead of direct military or political intervention problematises both Said's and MacKenzie's interpretation of imperialist sentiments in early Victorian Britain.

While the majority of recent scholarship on Roberts has focused on elements of Saidian theory, a handful of essays have critically addressed Roberts' work without turning his

⁶⁸ M.E. Chamberlain, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 40.

⁶⁹ James Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts R.A.* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1866), 91-92.

legacy into an ideological battleground. The most significant of these is Kenneth Bendiner's 1983 essay 'David Roberts in the Near East: Social and Religious Themes' from the journal *Art History*. Bendiner positions Roberts within his historical framework, and references British social and legal developments when discussing *Egypt and Nubia*. Specifically, he addresses anti-slavery legislation and growing religiosity in early Victorian Britain, and suggests that Roberts' tendency to moralise was reflective of early Victorians' sense of religious and social superiority.⁷⁰ This approach is distinct from most other recent scholarship on Roberts' work in that Bendiner partially addresses the timeliness of the lithographs. However, although he investigates some of the social context of the series, Bendiner does not address the full implications of *Egypt and Nubia*'s aesthetics.

While this interpretation is more satisfying than others, it is still incomplete. Bendiner fails to interpret the full historical and artistic framework in which the series was created. This is a significant issue; *Egypt and Nubia* was successful not as reportage, but as a work of art. Not only does Bendiner insufficiently engage with the political context of Anglo-Egyptian relations, he also ignores several salient features of the lithographs' compositional framework. Bendiner, as well as the majority of recent scholars writing on Roberts, fail to adequately address the specific ways in which Roberts' work was artistically legible. Bendiner likens Roberts' approach to the realism 'of a mechanical or architectural draftsman.'⁷¹ MacKenzie agrees with this, and positions Roberts within a context of 'topographical and archaeological "realism".'⁷² While Roberts did utilise archaeological ruins as artistic subject matter, he also made use of other forms such as modern Islamic architecture and figures in exotic dress. I argue that his interest in

⁷⁰ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 68-69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷² MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 51.

archaeological ruins and architecture was not related to “realist” artistic practice. Instead I propose that Roberts engaged with this subject matter in order to create picturesque art. This proposal would problematise a realist interpretation. The dilemma between the artist’s perceived picturesqueness and accuracy will be discussed below.

Despite the fact that Roberts’ contemporaries frequently commented on the picturesque quality of his Levantine art,⁷³ there has been no in-depth study of Roberts as a picturesque artist. One of the aims of this thesis is to provide that study. Therefore, it is necessary to examine existent scholarship on the history of picturesque art in order to understand where Roberts might fit into it. The first major work in the last fifty years is Malcolm Andrews’ *The Search for the Picturesque* [1989]. Andrews describes the picturesque as a representational mode that made use of seventeenth-century landscape artists Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa.⁷⁴ Within this mode, artists sought out wild British landscapes and reconfigured these scenes in imitation of the seventeenth-century landscape masters. From Rosa, picturesque artists drew rugged, uncultivated scenery and wild figures. Claude provided the tripartite compositional structure based on fore-, middle-, and backgrounds as well as, ‘the foreground framing trees, or... ruins, or

⁷³ See ‘Review of Roberts’s Views in Egypt. Published by Alderman Moon 1847,’ *Art Journal*, no. 9 (January 1847): 39; ‘Review of ‘Roberts’s Sketches in Egypt And Nubia. Published by F.G. Moon,’ *Art Journal*, no. 10 (September 1848): 288; ‘Review of Roberts’s Egypt and Nubia. Published by Alderman Moon,’ *Art Journal*, no. 12 (February 1850): 66; ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 1032 (7 August 1847): 843; ‘Roberts’s Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Part 5,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 1048 (27 November 1848): 1224; ‘Roberts’s Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts VI. To XIV. Moon,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 1104 (23 December 1849): 1302-1303; ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia Parts IX & X. F.G. Moon,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1615 (1 January 1848): 13-14; ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia Part XI. Moon,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1650 (2 September 1848): 587-588; ‘Roberts’ Egypt and Nubia. Parts XV. And XVI. Moon.’ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1671 (27 January 1849): 63; ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts XVII. And XVIII. Moon,’ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1700 (18 August 1849): 611; ‘Roberts’ Egypt and Nubia,’ *Times* (London) 1 April, 1847.

⁷⁴ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque* (London: Scolar, 1989), 3.

mountain sides, to prevent one's eye from straying outside the canvas and to push it into the middle distance.⁷⁵

This 'quasi-Claudian British landscape' was developed over the course of the eighteenth century,⁷⁶ but found its most significant application in the theories of writer and tourist William Gilpin. Andrews positions Gilpin as the first writer to distinguish between beautiful and picturesque imagery; this distinction was based on the difference between scenes that are attractive in their natural state and those that 'please from some quality, capable of being illustrated in painting.'⁷⁷ This distinction related to Gilpin's suggestion that picturesque artists should not record an accurate or complete image of the landscape scene, but instead should reposition, add, and delete elements of the scene in order to make their composition fit the picturesque template.⁷⁸ This aspect of Gilpin's theory is significant for my investigation of *Egypt and Nubia*, as part of its appeal was based on its perceived accuracy as well as its picturesqueness. Gilpin's theories of the picturesque, particularly his discussion of what subject matter was picturesque and what was not, were hugely influential for eighteenth-century British landscape art.

According to Andrews, Gilpin's chief critic Uvedale Price further developed these ideas, elaborating on Gilpin's predilection for ruination. Price suggested that figures or objects became picturesque over time. Additionally, the same figures or objects would lose this quality over time. What he described as 'correct' decay was observable after the process had begun and the original features became weathered and indistinct, yet

⁷⁵ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 29.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁷ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, reprinted in Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 57.

⁷⁸ William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of 1770* (London: R. Blamire, 1782), 18.

still recognisable.⁷⁹ Price applied this theory to architecture, wildlife, plants, and figures.⁸⁰ The theorist also maintained that the picturesque had a political element. For Price, British Gothic ruins were indicative of the overthrow of Catholicism in Britain during the reign of Henry VIII.⁸¹ Andrews states that the final two decades of the eighteenth century saw a wellspring of picturesque imagery following Gilpin's and Price's rubrics. Following this exploration of picturesque theory, Andrews provides a survey of British picturesque locales, such as the Wye Valley, North Wales, the Lake District, and the Highlands. He concludes that the picturesque was a short-lived, albeit popular, British landscape trend and that the strictures of the movement limited the kinds of landscape that were eligible for contemplation.⁸² Andrews also notes that the vocabulary of picturesque representation – the ruins, rustic figures, framing devices, and positionality – was excessively restrictive and ultimately rejected by nineteenth-century British artists.⁸³ This conclusion has been significant for the methodology of this thesis.

My project is rooted in several of Andrews' assertions; that Gilpin and Price were the movement's two main theorists; that picturesqueness was based on existent landscape templates; and that ruined and wretched subject matter formed the bulk of the picturesque's visual vocabulary. Andrews' thesis becomes problematic, however, when his periodisation is considered. He posits that the picturesque was a medium for representing British landscape and was considered obsolete circa 1800. My research contradicts this.

⁷⁹ Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque*, 3rd ed. (London: Mawam, 1810), 1:79.

⁸⁰ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 59.

⁸¹ Price, *Picturesque*, 301.

⁸² Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 34.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 33.

In order to understand the significance of early and mid nineteenth-century picturesque art I have extrapolated Andrews' methodology. He examines dozens of images, tourist guidebooks, and travel literature, all of which engaged with eighteenth-century British picturesque art. I extended his search in two ways. Firstly, my research expanded into literature and images produced in the early and mid nineteenth century. This was done in order to understand the level of interest in picturesque art in Britain in the nineteenth century. Secondly, I included imagery and literature that described more exotic subject matter, such as Continental Europe and North Africa into my search. This was based on the possibility that the picturesque remained in vogue long after it ceased being a popular mode for representing specifically British landscape.

There exists a large body of images and literature delineating exotic landscapes using the structure and vocabulary of the picturesque throughout the early and mid nineteenth century. These landscapes include images of Continental Europe, North Africa, the Near East, India, Australia, and North America as well as Britain, produced throughout the century. There exists a complex relationship between each of these places and the picturesque in the nineteenth century. The majority of them, particularly those related to India, Australia, and North America, fall beyond the framework of this thesis. I have focused on Continental European, North African, and Near Eastern subject matter because these are the landscapes that Roberts delineated. The existence of such a wide range of picturesque imagery suggests that the picturesque was not exclusively utilised to delineate British scenery.

In addition to the shift in subject matter that can be seen in nineteenth-century picturesque art, I have researched what the picturesque signified at the time as well. I

suggest that picturesqueness, as it applied to Egypt, was mobilised as a vehicle for fidelity as well as aesthetics. Several of *Egypt and Nubia*'s reviews stated that the series was both picturesque and accurate.⁸⁴ Initially, these two concepts appear to be opposed to one another. Accuracy suggests veracity, exactitude, and totality. An accurate representation would not omit salient information. A picturesque representation, obversely, would be predicated on the omission of information that did not fit the aesthetic. The possibility of a connection between picturesqueness and accuracy suggests a radical shift in the significance of the movement as it became a representational mode for exotic landscape and potentially relates to the acceptance of Roberts' lithographs as authoritative.

Research questions and answers

The application of the methodology outlined above prompts the following research questions, all of which circulate around Roberts' use of the picturesque and his relationship to British imperialism. To what extent did he use picturesque tropes to present Egypt as a backward and unenlightened state? Was his representation of the state considered accurate in the mid nineteenth century and if so, on what grounds? How are the histories of British picturesque art and the visual culture of imperialism changed by the inclusion of Roberts into these histories? These questions form the basis for each chapter of this thesis.

Chapter two serves as an introduction to the artist and his early work. Using biographical data and contextual information, this chapter establishes Roberts' early practice, centring around his entrepreneurial nature and keen eye for profitable imagery.

⁸⁴ See 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1032 (7 August 1847): 843; 'Roberts' Egypt and Nubia,' *Times* (London) 1 April, 1847.

This interpretation will be relevant to the thesis in that Roberts' Levantine journey resulted in the production of marketable imagery. The following sections establish some of the ways in which Roberts produced that imagery, specifically his artistic debt to the picturesque.

In the second section I argue that the artist drew inspiration from the tradition of British picturesque landscape art. I propose that Roberts drew on the landscape theories of Gilpin and Price, basing his art in the conventions of the picturesque. Beginning with Gilpin's *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape*, this chapter explores the crucial features of the picturesque landscape, specifically ruins, wretched figures, and the reconfiguration of a natural landscape scene in order to conform with the picturesque template. Gilpin equated the picturesque with ruined Gothic architecture, decay, and tonal and textural variety.⁸⁵ The resultant art celebrated wild, uncultivated scenes that were distant geographically and culturally from the viewer.

Price's contribution to this rubric, specifically his theory that picturesqueness was the result of a process of decay and that the picturesque contained moralistic elements, will then be examined. The moralistic quality of Price's picturesque theories is significant for the later exploration of Roberts' possible involvement with the picturesque. Price suggested that picturesque and ruined Gothic architecture was a symbol of British perseverance against Catholic tyranny resulting in the separation of England from the Catholic Church under Henry VIII.⁸⁶ It will be argued in subsequent chapters that

⁸⁵ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 7-8.

⁸⁶ Price, *Picturesque*, 64.

Roberts adapted this concept to decayed Islamic structures such as mosques as a way to condemn Islam as a tyrannical religion and Egypt as debased.

Roberts, along with his colleagues Clarkson Stanfield and Samuel Prout, appeared to have applied this rubric to increasingly exotic scenes in Europe and North Africa. I will refer to this new and expanded practice as ‘revisionist British picturesque’, and explore the ways in which Roberts could have engaged with it through the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*, a series of steel engravings with text produced in the 1830s. These publications provided the artist with his first taste of commercial and critical success as a picturesque artist, possibly impacting his decision to travel to Egypt in search of novel subject matter.

The final section of this chapter is concerned with some of the ways in which Roberts’ audience may have understood his engravings. Critics frequently commented not only on the picturesque quality of the engravings, but also their accuracy. In exploring the possible connection between these two concepts, greater understanding of the ways in which the ‘revisionist picturesque’ may have functioned can be gained. This study will conclude with a consideration of how Roberts’ use of exotic subject matter and essentialised imagery can be understood through the medium of Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism.

Once Roberts’ early practice and potential involvement with the ‘revisionist picturesque’ has been established, I explore some of the ways in which he could have concluded that the state was picturesque, as well as some of the ways in which Egypt was understood in Britain prior to Roberts’ journey. Chapter three ascertains the extent

to which *Egypt and Nubia*'s legibility could have been helped along by the wealth of visual and textual information available in the early nineteenth century.

The chapter begins by exploring the nature of Anglo-French rivalry in the region, and focuses on French imagery from Dominique Vivant Denon's *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte pendant les campagnes du général Bonaparte*⁸⁷ [1802] and *The Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les orders de Sa Majesté l'empereur Napoléon le Grand*,⁸⁸ [1809-1828] both published after Napoleon's failed invasion of Egypt in the 1790s. These images helped to codify the ways in which Westerners understood Egypt, and helped to pave the way for *Egypt and Nubia*. As Jean-Marcel Humbert notes in the catalogue to the 1994 *Egyptomania* exhibition, 'The importance given the visual documentation, evidenced by the size and quality of the engravings, was an original concept... Denon made them an integral part of his discourse, and complemented them with abundant captions.'⁸⁹ This model would be elaborated on and challenged by Roberts.

Following this investigation, focus will shift to the explosion of visual and textual information in early nineteenth-century Britain, with specific attention paid to the rise of Egyptology and the use of Egyptian motifs in visual art and architecture and some of the ways in which Roberts responded to these developments. This exploration will illustrate the increasing British interest in Egypt, based on its strategic significance and rich

⁸⁷ *Travels in Lower and Upper Egypt during the campaigns of General Bonaparte.*

⁸⁸ *Description of Egypt, or Reports of observations and research that were made in Egypt during the expedition of the French army, published by the orders of His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon the Great.*

⁸⁹ Jean-Marcel Humbert, 'Denon and the Discovery of Egypt,' in *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930* ed. Jean-Marcel Humbert (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 204.

historical legacy. Egypt's utility as a trading partner, its developmental state, and position within Mediterranean geopolitics were all fiercely debated in Britain at the time. The nature of these debates will be argued to form a significant aspect of *Egypt and Nubia*'s context and inform the artistic choices made by Roberts.

In chapter four the line of inquiry shifts to popular British perceptions of Egypt between 1830 and 1840, in the context of the Ottoman-Egyptian conflicts of 1831-33 and 1838-41. This was the immediate context in which Roberts travelled and made the sketches that would become *Egypt and Nubia*. In this chapter I suggest that the British perception was shifting and uncertain, largely dependent on military and commercial concerns. The Ottoman-Egyptian conflicts pitted the Ottoman Empire, a British ally, against Egypt. At the time, Egypt was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The conflicts were based on its attempts for independence from the Empire. The Melbourne Government and Viscount Palmerston believed that independence would upset British trade in the region, and actively attempted to maintain the unity of the Ottoman Empire.

I propose that during this decade the British perception of Egypt drifted away from the impression that the state was a positive, modernising part of the Ottoman Empire and towards the perception that it was a decayed state in need of rehabilitation. I argue that this is evident from reportage in influential journals such as the *Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and *The Times*, all of which are examined in this chapter. The apparent existence of a broad consensus, spanning the political spectrum of 1830s' Britain, suggests that what was considered to be the 'true' Egypt underwent great changes based on recent events and helped to prime the British public

for scenes of picturesque decrepitude such as those presented by Roberts. This data will then be interpreted through recent analyses of Egyptian historiography, produced by both Egyptian nationalist historians such as Afaf Lufti al-Sayyid Marsot and Western historians such as A.L. Macfie. Their polarized interpretations of Anglo-Egyptian relations in the 1830s help to elucidate the information provided by the nineteenth-century journals.

Chapter five looks closely at the imagery and letterpress of *Egypt and Nubia*. In this chapter I argue that Roberts presented Egyptian figures, ancient ruined temples, and modern Cairo within a revisionist picturesque framework. Drawing inspiration from the eighteenth-century theories of Gilpin and Price, the artist appears to have created a set of novel and commercial lithographs that reinforced dominant British stereotypes of Egypt. The presentation of the state as almost exclusively picturesque and decayed reflected Roberts' personal sentiments about modern Egypt and Islam. Many in early Victorian Britain shared his opinion, that it was a debased state and that Islam had a degenerative effect on the Levant. As Kenneth Bendiner states in his 1983 article 'David Roberts in the Near East: Social and Religious Themes', Roberts' lithographs illuminated 'early Victorians' willful objectivity, ethnic biases, social conscience, opulent taste, anti-Classicism, international rivalry, self-confidence, sense of history, and perpetual religious questions.'⁹⁰ The ways in which these social themes are addressed in the lithographs will be examined.

The final chapter surveys the critical reception of *Egypt and Nubia* and looks at the ways in which the publication may have impacted British understanding of Egypt

⁹⁰ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 78.

between 1846 and 1869, the year of the Suez Canal's opening. In this chapter I argue that critics in the 1840s considered the lithographs to be definitive. Proof of this reception can be seen in relevant artistic and literary journals and in *The Times*. What the reviews highlighted about the publication – that the state was comprised of ancient ruins and a debased population – will be explored.

The possibility that it could be acceptably described using the picturesque raises an interesting set of issues. If Roberts' lithographs codified a negative impression of Egypt via picturesque imagery, then the conclusions drawn from the lithographs were necessarily erroneous, considering that picturesque representation did not, by definition, present an accurate or complete view. I argue that in order for *Egypt and Nubia* to be accepted as accurate, Roberts' audience would have to believe that it was a naturally decayed and picturesque place.

In order to test the acceptance of Roberts' images, other contemporary representations of Egypt will then be examined. Volumes of British newspapers, magazines, and books published information related to the state, both visual and textual. Further proof of *Egypt and Nubia's* impact will be sought from a wide array of Egyptian imagery that emerged after Roberts' publication and echoed his lithographs. These images furthered the negative stereotypes of Egypt in the 1850s and 1860s. Furthermore, travel literature published after *Egypt and Nubia* reinforced its conclusions. This can be seen particularly in the nascent Egyptian tourist industry. Tourist guidebooks published in the 1850s and 1860s suggested itineraries almost identical to Roberts' and highlighted the same archaeological sites that he delineated. These tours were advertised as being safe and comfortable. The Egyptian modernisations that allowed for comfort and safety

were not, however, included in tourists' descriptions. The disparity between perception and reality arguably highlights the pervasiveness of Egypt as picturesque, providing further evidence for the perceived veracity of Roberts' imagery.

Finally, I will explore aspects of contemporary writings focusing on Egyptian politics and development rather than aesthetics. This section examines the ways in which the negativity implicit in picturesque description may have filtered down into political and developmental discussions, and the ways in which Egyptian infrastructural development may have been acknowledged within that discourse. Particular attention will be paid to discussions about the construction of the Suez Canal. This investigation will help to explain the ways in which the notion of Egypt as a backward and decayed state, visually reinforced by Roberts' lithographs, became standardised in mid-Victorian Britain.

Conclusions

In response to my research questions, I conclude that Roberts made extensive use of British picturesque tropes in his representations of Egypt. One of the outcomes of this research is substantial evidence proving that these tropes helped the artist to present Egypt as a backward and unenlightened state in *Egypt and Nubia*. The research also demonstrates that this presentation was widely accepted in mid nineteenth-century Britain, and that it was based on the assumption that the state was a naturally decayed and picturesque place. Understanding Roberts' compositional framework helps to explain his motivation for depicting ruins and wretched figures. These conclusions strongly suggest that the histories of both British picturesque art and the visual culture of imperialism share points of conjuncture, hitherto inadequately explored in the context of *Egypt and Nubia*.

My contribution to knowledge centres on an analysis of *Egypt and Nubia* that contextualises the lithographs' aesthetics within political as well as social attitudes in early Victorian Britain. Roberts' voyage and publication occurred at a time when Anglo-Egyptian relations were undergoing great changes. My research outcomes will provide a deeper understanding of the grounds for the popularity of this series of lithographs during the artist's lifetime, based on their topicality. This understanding is based on the conjuncture between the vocabulary of the 'revisionist picturesque' and the rise of loose imperialism. *Egypt and Nubia* utilised the former and reified the latter – a position that proved to be very popular in mid-Victorian Britain. The investigation of the timely nature of the lithographs has also yielded the first in-depth examination of journalistic descriptions of Egypt in the 1830s. This detailed contextualisation contributes to the debates on Orientalism and to the further problematisation of Said's approach and his attitude towards the British Empire. The conclusions that I draw reconfigure several issues surrounding the historiography of the nineteenth-century Empire, specifically regarding the position that it was a singular, discursive entity.

This research has potential impact in a range of academic areas, including historians of nineteenth-century British art, historians of the British Empire, post-colonial theorists, and cultural geographers. Art historians can utilise both my genealogy of the picturesque as well as my in-depth examination of *Egypt and Nubia* in order to further their understanding of nineteenth-century Orientalist and picturesque art. Historians of the British Empire may benefit from the research related to loose imperialism and textual representations of Egypt between 1802 and 1869, in addition to the analysis of Anglo-Egyptian relations during the period. Post-colonial theorists and cultural

geographers can engage with my critique of Saidian theory and my study of the early and mid nineteenth-century British Empire.

Chapter Two

David Roberts' early practice and the 'revisionist picturesque'

Introduction

This chapter serves as a biographical introduction to David Roberts and his early artistic work. In relation to the argument of the thesis overall, the chapter has several functions. Firstly, it establishes Roberts' approach to making art and reasons for doing so. The initial section uses available biographical data and contemporary reportage to identify Roberts as a self-made man, lacking in formal training, but having a keen eye for profitable imagery. This section will chart his rise from the deprived Edinburgh suburb in which he was born through his early career as a theatrical scene painter and decorator to his commercial success in the 1830s through oil painting and the lucrative steel engraving market.

The subsequent sections will establish the nature and basis of the artistic style that he chose, and the possible significance of the choices of subject matter. Throughout the 1830s Roberts' work was frequently referred to as 'picturesque', a trend that would continue with *Egypt and Nubia* in the 1840s. This term was often mobilised within eighteenth-century British landscape practice; it was less theorised in the nineteenth century, as discussed by Malcolm Andrews in *Search for the Picturesque*. Andrews writes of this eighteenth-century idea of the picturesque as being passé by 1815, the date of the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo.⁹¹ However, the continued use of the term, as a means of describing and approving art works produced post-1815 may also have denoted an untheorised but tacitly recognised mutation of the term's meaning in relation to its early nineteenth-century context.

⁹¹ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 33.

The second section of the chapter will explore Roberts' possible engagement with what I will argue to be a 'revisionist British picturesque'. This pictorial mode, espoused by his already successful acquaintances Clarkson Stanfield and Samuel Prout, is argued to have been based partly on the original, and slightly conflicting eighteenth-century theories of William Gilpin and Uvedale Price. Within this mode, artists such as Roberts appeared to use eighteenth-century British picturesque formulae as a way to capture the essence of exotic locales. Places such as Germany, France, and especially Spain and North Africa appear to have been in vogue following the contemporary, easier access to Europe and its scenery after 1815. The focal objects of investigation in this section are the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* of the 1830s to which Roberts contributed. These popular publications gave Roberts his first taste of artistic fame in the steel engraving market of the 1830s, paving the way for his lithographs in *Egypt and Nubia*, and arguably reinforced his allegiance to the 'revisionist picturesque' as the pathway to financial gain.

The third section of the chapter will consider the curious contemporary conflation of the 'picturesque' image with 'accurate' representation of foreign contexts, in particular, contexts identified as Islamic. This consideration relates to the notion of essential accuracy, the communication of 'truths' within a landscape image irrespective of its verisimilitude. This section is significant in that *Egypt and Nubia* was considered to be both picturesque and accurate by the reviewers of that series. This discussion leads on to a final consideration of this aspect of the 'revisionist picturesque' through the medium of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism.

Early Biography

Throughout Roberts' life, he was known as a striving, self-made artist. His obituary in *The Times* bears this out, describing him as a man who 'from small beginnings fought [his] way upwards to fame, wealth and station.'⁹² Roberts' biographers, Ballantine and Sim, reinforce this reputation,⁹³ suggesting that the artist was raised in meagre circumstances and was entrepreneurial from an early age. This is significant as *Egypt and Nubia* was a commercial, as well as artistic, venture.⁹⁴ The artist's desire for commercial success possibly emerged from his relatively deprived upbringing.

Roberts was born on 24 October 1796 to John Roberts, a shoemaker and his wife Christina in Stockbridge, then a poor suburb of Edinburgh. He was the first of five children, three of which died at an early age. Despite the relative lack of opportunity, Roberts' parents sent him first to a home school run by a local woman. Roberts recollected that this was 'more to keep me out of the way of being run over by carts or drowned in the Water of Leith, than for anything she could or would teach me,'⁹⁵ and he learned little from the experience. Following this, he was sent to another local school where he was 'cruelly treated, often getting the skin flayed off [his] legs and fingers.'⁹⁶ As a result of these experiences, the artist left formal schooling and decided to learn a trade aged ten. Even at this early age, Roberts wanted to be a painter.

He hoped to become a student at the Trustees' Academy in Edinburgh, where he would learn the fundamentals of drawing and painting, but was advised against it by Thomas Graham, the Academy's Master. Instead, Graham suggested that as Roberts was from a

⁹² *Times* (London) 28 November, 1864.

⁹³ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 1; Sim, *David Roberts*, 1.

⁹⁴ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 64.

⁹⁵ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

poor family, it would be better to take an apprenticeship as a house painter.⁹⁷ Ballantine quoted Graham, as stating: ‘When his apprenticeship is completed, he can attend the Academy, and if his love of art and his acquirements warrant him, he can then endeavour to support himself as an artist.’⁹⁸ This advice was taken, and Roberts became an apprentice to a local house painter named Gavin Buego, of whom little is known.⁹⁹ Roberts recalled that he was required to open the shop and grind colours in his first years and was paid two shillings per week, with a six-pence weekly pay rise each subsequent year.¹⁰⁰ Later in his apprenticeship, the artist became a ‘slusher’, covering surfaces with base coats and washes.¹⁰¹ Roberts continued this apprenticeship until he was seventeen, at which point he departed for Perth to find employment painting Scoon Palace.

At the end of his sojourn in Perth, aged nineteen, Roberts returned to Edinburgh and decided to try his hand at scene painting for theatres. Undertaking his first job for a travelling entertainer named James Bannister, the artist's first work was a set of wings for a palace set, now lost.¹⁰² Indeed, owing to the ephemeral nature of set design, no examples of Roberts' backdrops remain today. Both Ballantine and Sim noted the significance of this new employment, that this was his first professional artistic endeavour.¹⁰³ Roberts believed that:

This was the commencement of my career as a scene-painter – at that time the highest object of my ambition; for my knowledge of art was chiefly derived from the scenery of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal, as seen from the shilling gallery. I knew little of the ancient and still less of the modern masters.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Sim, *David Roberts*, 12.

⁹⁸ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 3.

⁹⁹ Ian Gow, ‘House-painting and Architecture,’ in *David Roberts*, ed. Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Sim, *David Roberts*, 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰³ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 7; Sim, *David Roberts*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 7-8.

With his employment by Bannister, Roberts believed that he had reached the apex of a professional artistic career at nineteen years of age.

It was under these circumstances that he perfected his talent for drawing and painting quickly under difficult circumstances, a talent that would serve him well on his later artistic journeys to Europe and the Levant. As there was no space at the theatre for painting sets, the work had to be done late at night after the evening's performance, and completed for the following evening's show. It was this ingenuity that by 1820 brought Roberts to the Theatre Royal, Glasgow and the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, the best-known theatres in Scotland. After a further two years of shuttling between theatres, Roberts moved to London, where his career would thrive.

In 1821 Roberts made one of his longest lasting artistic friendships when he met the painter Clarkson Stanfield in Edinburgh. Stanfield, the elder of the two, found artistic success earlier than Roberts and encouraged the younger artist to exhibit in Edinburgh and London.¹⁰⁵ The pair worked together at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in the 1820s and on the British Diorama at the Royal Bazaar in London during 1828.¹⁰⁶ They also made use of the same lithographers, particularly Louis Haghe, who collaborated with Roberts on *Egypt and Nubia*. Additionally, they shared a love of novel European landscape scenery. In the catalogue to the 1967 Guildhall Art Gallery exhibition *David Roberts and Clarkson Stanfield*, J.L. Howgego noted, 'That two painters so similar in

¹⁰⁵ Despite this, the two artists were often at odds with one another. Beginning with their shared time as set-painters in the 1820s, Stanfield often quarrelled with Roberts, undercutting his friend for artistic work and overpainting his sets. J.L. Howgego, *David Roberts and Clarkson Stanfield* (London: Guildhall Art Gallery 1967), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield 1793-1867* (Newcastle: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), 26.

style should enjoy a close friendship which lasted over forty years is noteworthy in itself.¹⁰⁷ This friendship would help to direct Roberts' art and career as it escalated in the 1820s.

In London, Roberts received his first taste of artistic notoriety. After beginning his employment with the Drury Lane theatre in 1822, Roberts became an inaugural member of the Society of British Artists, with Stanfield, in 1823. This artist-led society was intended to act as a competitor to the Royal Academy and the British Institution,¹⁰⁸ and provided Roberts with an entrance into London's art world. The following year he successfully submitted works for exhibition in London galleries. The first work, *Dryburgh Abbey*, was shown at the British Institution. That work is now, sadly, untraced.¹⁰⁹ He additionally exhibited and sold two small works at the Suffolk Street Gallery,¹¹⁰ and exhibited at the Society of British Artists.¹¹¹ This trajectory continued in 1826 when Roberts' work, *Exterior of Rouen Cathedral*, was shown at the annual Royal Academy summer exhibition.

Roberts' involvement with major London artistic associations led him to acquire the first of many influential patrons, John Rushout, 2nd Baron Northwick. Northwick was one of the leading art-buying aristocrats of the early nineteenth century known for wide ranging and novel purchases.¹¹² His association with Roberts is interesting in that

¹⁰⁷ J.L. Howgego, *David Roberts and Clarkson Stanfield* (London: Guildhall Art Gallery, 1967), 7.

¹⁰⁸ Roberts took a leading role in the governance of the Society, serving as its president in 1831. Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁹ The British Institution, founded in 1805, was a London art society exhibiting both old master and living artists. The gallery maintained a friendly rivalry with the Royal Academy in the early nineteenth century. 'David Roberts – A Chronology of his Life and Related Events,' in *David Roberts*, ed. Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 92.

¹¹⁰ Sim, *David Roberts*, 42.

¹¹¹ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 24.

¹¹² Oliver Bradbury and Nicholas Penny, 'The Picture Collecting of Lord Northwick: Part I,' *The Burlington Magazine* 144, no. 1193 (August 2002): 485.

Northwick also had a longstanding friendship with the eighteenth-century theorist Richard Payne Knight [1751-1824] and Roberts' colleagues Samuel Prout and Clarkson Stanfield, all of whom maintained an involvement with the picturesque. Northwick's first purchase in 1826 was of two now untraced works,¹¹³ *Chancel of Church of St. Jacques, Dieppe*, and the aforementioned *Exterior of Rouen Cathedral*. Northwick paid £200.00 for the set, £60.00 over the asking price,¹¹⁴ which suggests the patronly attitude that Northwick took with Roberts over the course of their long relationship. They remained close well into the 1840s, when Roberts sketched the picture gallery at Northwick's Thirlestaine House.¹¹⁵ His involvement with the artist was more than just financial, however. He took an interest in the hanging of Roberts' work both at the British Gallery and the Royal Academy. In 1826 he wrote to the artist, stating

justice has been done to [your work] by giving it an advantageous situation, where it has met with such well-merited praise... I trust that your success on this occasion will be an encouragement to you to devote more of your time in future to this most attractive style of painting, on which your fame as an artist will hereafter eventually depend.¹¹⁶

Following this encouragement, in 1829 the aristocrat commissioned Roberts to paint his first – and one of his only – large-scale history paintings, *The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt*. [Fig.1] Intriguingly, the artist made no claims for historical accuracy with this work; instead he suggested the painting was ‘more as a Vehicle for introducing that grand, although simple style of architecture “the Egyptian” than for any other reason.’¹¹⁷

¹¹³ ‘David Roberts – A Chronology of his Life and Related Events,’ 92.

¹¹⁴ Sim, *David Roberts*, 44.

¹¹⁵ Oliver Bradbury and Nicholas Penny, ‘The Picture Collecting of Lord Northwick: Part II,’ *The Burlington Magazine* 144, no. 1195 (October 2002): 612.

¹¹⁶ Lord Northwick to David Roberts, London, 4 February, 1826, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 26.

¹¹⁷ Sim, *David Roberts*, 47.



Fig 1. David Roberts, *The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt*, 1829, oil on canvas, Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

The work was greatly admired in London, and was lent to the Scottish Academy in 1830. The painting can be seen to feature an amalgam of classical architectural styles, including Greek and Roman, along with Egyptian – which suggests that Roberts was appealing more to a generalised historical sensibility than any archaeological accuracy. In *The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt* these myriad architectural styles are displayed in the context of the Old Testament, firmly establishing the painting within the history genre. This could possibly have been an attempt by Roberts to ingratiate himself with the Royal Academy, where history painting was held in higher esteem than landscape or architectural drawing, which were Roberts' forté. Northwick believed that the work would be 'extensively appreciated' at the Royal Academy and would 'secure for [Roberts] the highest patronage in the kingdom'.¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that ultimately the work was not shown at the Royal Academy but at the Suffolk Street Gallery the artist had become well known through his work as a set painter and artist by 1830.

¹¹⁸ Lord Northwick to David Roberts, London, n.d. in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 33-34.

Also in 1830, Roberts traveled through Holland and Germany on a sketching trip. While this was not his first artistic journey,¹¹⁹ it served as a preface for his first large-scale artistic expedition, to Spain, via France. The artist undertook this trip because he believed that it would yield novel imagery that would be financially rewarding.¹²⁰ The commercial viability of this trip was seconded in the *Athenaeum*. A writer for the journal noted, ‘Roberts is making a tour in Spain, in search of the picturesque: a Spanish Annual will make his fortune: we are well nigh wearied of Italy.’¹²¹ Upon his return, the fruits of this search were published in the *Jennings Landscape Annual* between 1835 and 1838.

The *Jennings Landscape Annual* was a series of lavish steel engravings produced between 1830 and 1839 by publisher Robert Jennings. The series included illustrations of Italy, France, and Switzerland by J.D Harding and Samuel Prout, with images of Spain and Morocco contributed by Roberts. The antiquarian Thomas Roscoe provided the accompanying text to the volumes. As Diego Saglia notes in his 2006 article ‘Imag(in)ing Iberia: Landscape Annuals and Multimedia Narratives of the Spanish Journey in British Romanticism’, ‘Jennings’ venture was immediately successful, as it was a new type of Annual that capitalized on the public’s fascination with visual artifacts and the equally irresistible pleasures of (virtual) travelling.’¹²² *The Jennings Landscape Annual* fed the public desire for high-quality, novel imagery that was readily

¹¹⁹ In 1824, he took his first trip abroad, sketching at Dieppe, Rouen, and Le Havre and in 1829 he travelled to Paris. ‘David Roberts – A Chronology of his Life and Related Events,’ 92.

¹²⁰ David Roberts to D.R. Hay, Cordova, 30 January, 1833, in James Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 47.

¹²¹ ‘Our Weekly Gossip,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 264 (17 November 1832): 747.

¹²² Diego Saglia, ‘Imag(in)ing Iberia: Landscape Annuals and Multimedia narratives of the Spanish Journey in British Romanticism,’ *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 12, nos 2-3 (August/December 2006): 126.

legible, and was a wonderful fit for a commercially-minded artist such as Roberts. Despite the fact that he was besieged with offers from rival Annual publishers, Roberts chose to publish with Jennings, as he offered the highest sum of £20 per drawing.¹²³ In a letter to his friend D.R. Hay the artist remarked, 'I am to receive four hundred and twenty pounds... This I incline to think is the highest price any artist, with the exception of Turner, has received for drawings of a similar nature.'¹²⁴ How did Roberts' approach this artistic venture? As David Howarth recently noted in *The Invention of Spain* [2007], 'Populism paid off, and [Roberts'] success was achieved by an artful insertion of drama into the quotidian...'¹²⁵ It is to this 'artful insertion,' or the ways in which Roberts delineated Spain and Morocco, that I will now turn.

'Artful insertion' and the revisionist picturesque

Howarth's assertion is interesting in that it acknowledges Roberts' recourse to dramatic elements highlighted within a conventional framework. What could constitute this framework? I propose that Roberts' work at this time made use of the British picturesque. My research suggests that a number of early Victorian writers, such as John Ruskin and Colonel Julian Jackson, as well as contemporary historians such as Diego Saglia, David Howarth, and Francesca Oresanto support the possibility that an untheorised and loose form of the picturesque was popular in early Victorian Britain. While their work will be discussed later in this section, the defining features of British picturesque art must first be explored.

Eighteenth-century British picturesque art has its origins in the writings of theorist and watercolour artist William Gilpin. As theorised by Gilpin, a picturesque scene would

¹²³ Saglia, 'Imag(in)ing Iberia,' 127.

¹²⁴ David Roberts to D.R. Hay, London, 25 November, 1833, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 67.

¹²⁵ David Howarth, *The Invention of Spain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 194.

display variety in tone and line and fit into a clear template following formulaic composition. The formula that Gilpin recommended was based on a central and characteristic ‘leading subject,’ such as a mountain, or ruined Gothic building set in a British landscape featuring wild fore- and backgrounds festooned with untended vegetation and rustic figures.¹²⁶ He identified these qualities as ‘rugged,’ and considered them to be central to picturesque composition.¹²⁷ Gilpin defined ruggedness in relation to classical beauty by way of an analogy¹²⁸

A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree. The proportion of its parts – the propriety of its ornaments – and the symmetry of the whole, may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet, instead of the chisel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin¹²⁹

Gilpin’s picturesque formula can be seen in *Picturesque Mountain Landscape* [Fig. 2] from his *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* [1792], in which the figures, barely visible in the lower left, serve to break up a patch of sunlight on the ground and provide a sense of scale for the ruins he inserted in the background. Additionally this image serves as a visual example of how he differentiated between ‘smooth’ and ‘picturesque’ landscape scenes. In the top, ‘smooth’ image, the mountains gently undulate from peak to peak with almost no additional landscape elements in the scene. The picturesque image below overflows with tonal variation, flora, ruined architecture, and two small figures in the lower left.

¹²⁶ Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 122-23.

¹²⁷ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 7.

¹²⁸ Gilpin defined the picturesque as an interstitial category of landscape art located between those of the ‘sublime’ and the ‘beautiful’ established by Edmund Burke in his 1757 work *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which Burke described the sublime as the passion caused by powerful nature manifested in rough, immense, angular natural features as opposed to the beautiful, which was defined by smoothness, order, and uniformity and manifested pleasure. See *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

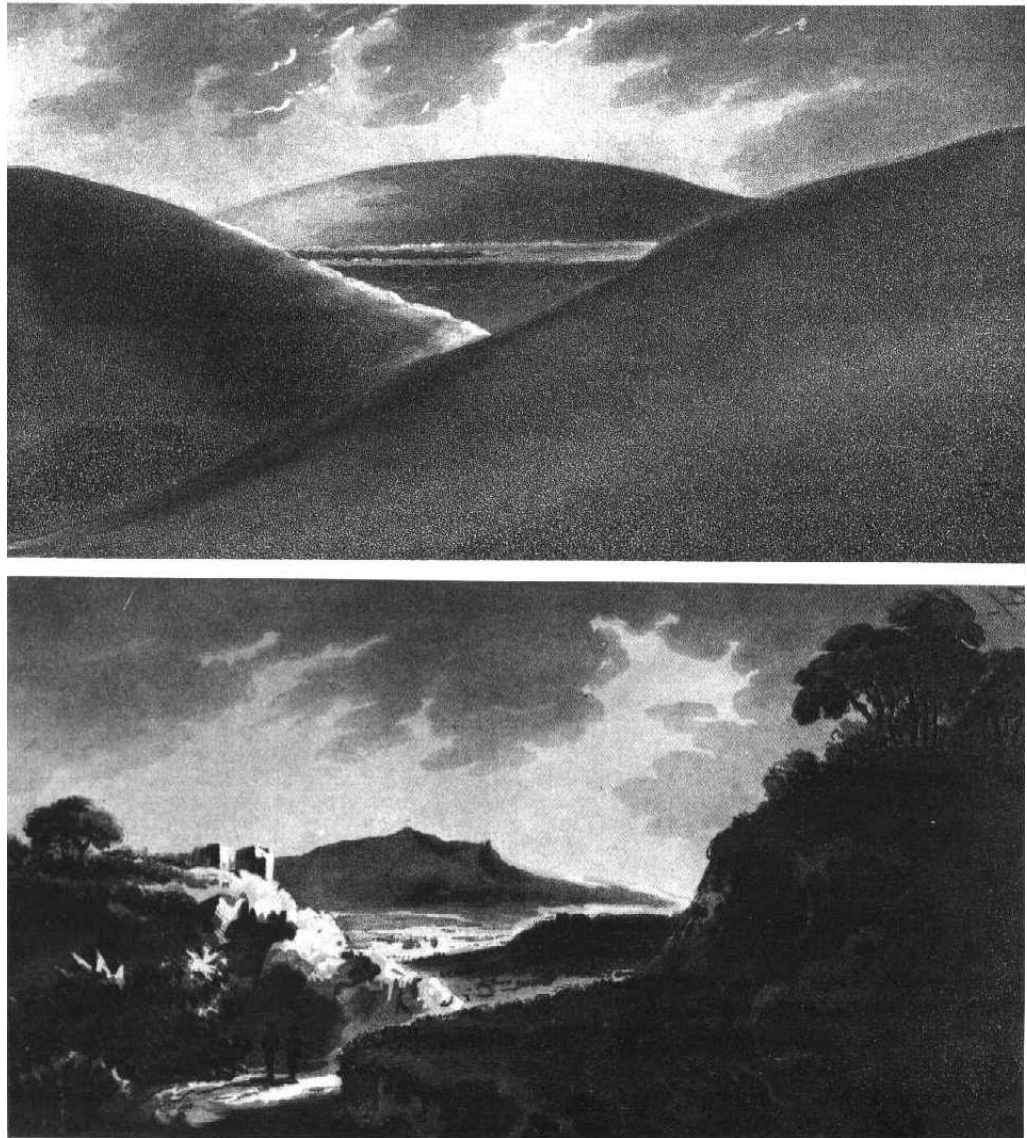


Fig 2: William Gilpin, *Smooth and Picturesque Mountain Landscapes*, 1792, aquatint, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape*

A number of compositional affinities can be seen between Gilpin's image and one of Roberts', *Tower of the Seven Vaults* [Fig. 3] from the 1835 *Jennings Landscape Annual*. The jagged lines and positioning of figures in Roberts' image recalls the earlier composition. Specifically, the figures, off to the left side are used to provide scale and break up harsh lines. Gilpin scholar Carl Paul Barbier has noted this as a hallmark of

British picturesque art.¹³⁰ Indeed, the two images share other affinities as well, specifically the 'distortion of the perspectives and a tendency to place eye-catching features in the foreground in order to increase the evocative potential of the image,' as Saglia noted of Roberts' Spanish work.¹³¹



Fig 3: David Roberts, *Tower of the Seven Vaults*, 1835, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

The combination of ruins, wild scenery and rustic figures are central to the British picturesque,¹³² as well as Roberts' work in the 1830s. This tendency can also be seen in *Egypt and Nubia*. There, Roberts emphasised the architectural ruins and exotic inhabitants of the region, and both the *Eastern Journal* and the letterpress of *Egypt and Nubia* contain numerous references to the term.¹³³ Similarly, in Europe he described several of the situations he found as picturesque. Before arriving in Spain, he described

¹³⁰ Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 122-23.

¹³¹ Saglia, 'Imag(in)ing Iberia,' 128.

¹³² Gilpin, *Instructions for Examining Landscape* 16, reprinted in Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 144.

¹³³ David Roberts, 29 September, 1838, 30 September, 1838, 9 October, 1838, 24 December, 1838 *Eastern Journal*, vol. I. NLS, ACC 7723, Box II National Library of Scotland.

the banks of the Loire near Orléans, and particularly ‘the old chateaux, whose towers seem made for the painter’ as picturesque.¹³⁴ Additionally, Roberts found a French public house as ‘antique and picturesque,’ especially the kitchen.¹³⁵ Upon reaching Spain, Roberts found the Sierra Morena Mountains to be picturesque and of Cordoba, he wrote, ‘one of the most decayed and miserable cities in Spain, to the artist and the antiquary it is rich beyond measure.’¹³⁶ He described innumerable anonymous Spanish villages as picturesque, along with Spanish dress.¹³⁷ He also found Grenada and the Alhambra to be picturesque.¹³⁸ The cathedral at Seville was described as ‘partly Moorish, partly Gothic, and partly bastard Roman; and is one of the most picturesque and magnificent structures in the world.’¹³⁹ In Africa, the artist described both the Atlas Mountains and North Africans as picturesque.¹⁴⁰

Despite the fact that there is no specific textual evidence for Roberts’ knowledge of British picturesque theory, there are suggestions that he was aware of the pictorial mode. In addition to Roberts’ frequent use of the term, he also sketched Tintern Abbey in the Wye river valley, a site known as one of the most picturesque in Britain, and was previously utilised by Gilpin. Gilpin’s *North-east View of Tintern Abbey* [Fig. 4] provides evidence for the function of ruins within British picturesque art, as rusticated, jagged, and ruined subject matter within the landscape scene. In this aquatint the Abbey lacks the symmetry and restrained order of classically inspired architecture, highlighted by the vantage point that the artist selected. From the North-east the ruin appears as an angular and irregular mass surrounded by wild vegetation. Natural elements, ruined

¹³⁴ Sim, *David Roberts*, 61.

¹³⁵ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 43.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

Gothic architecture, and ruggedness were all requisite parts of the British picturesque. Roberts emphasised many of the same features in his undated drawing *Tintern Abbey, Wales* [Fig. 5], such as the arches, encrusted with mossy vegetation and in an advanced state of decay.



Fig 4: William Gilpin, *North-east View of Tintern Abbey*, 1782, aquatint, *Observations on the River Wye, And Several Parts of South Wales Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of 1770*



Fig 5: David Roberts, *Tintern Abbey, Wales*, n.d., ink wash, private collection.

However, despite Roberts' engagement with conventional British picturesque subject matter, the vast majority of his work in the 1830s was based on novel European scenery instead of traditional British imagery. This novel imagery was popular in early nineteenth-century Britain, both in terms of painting and engraving. Following Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, huge parts of Western Europe became accessible for British tourists, heralding a fashion for European landscape imagery in Britain. As Peter Van der Merwe writes, in the early nineteenth century, 'Increasing tourism by a now wider and more varied section of the population created an apparently enormous demand for... Continental scenes, either to recall a trip made or to experience at second hand the picturesque beauty of a land as yet unseen.'¹⁴¹ For those who lacked the means to purchase original oil paintings, the revisionist picturesque engraving would

¹⁴¹ Van der Merwe and Took, *Clarkson Stanfield*, 115.

sate the demand. Writing about this trend, Sonia Hofkosh states that the engravings functioned as signs of ‘education, taste, luxury’,¹⁴² and were voraciously consumed through publications such as the *Jennings Landscape Annual*, *The Picturesque Annual*, *Italy*, *Classical Historical*, and *Picturesque*, *The New Waverley Album*, *The Keepsake*, to name but a few. Roberts’ colleagues, Samuel Prout and Clarkson Stanfield, illustrated several of these publications. Their successful involvement with the engraving trade possibly spurred Roberts on to publish with the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*; doubtless, an entrepreneurial artist such as Roberts would not miss out on such a lucrative prospect.¹⁴³

While Stanfield never produced work for the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* he did publish work based on Continental tours undertaken in 1824 and 1830 to Italy, Germany, and France in the rival *Picturesque Annuals*, published by Charles Heath between 1831-33.¹⁴⁴ Many of the images in these publications bear a striking resemblance to Roberts’ work at the same time. This is partially because both artists sought out marketable subject matter. As Peter Van der Merwe noted in the catalogue to the 1979 Tyne and Wear County Council Museum’s exhibition *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield*, ‘For those therefore who had not yet travelled abroad but who were through art developing an interest in travel, or even for those who had travelled widely, Stanfield was able to provide satisfaction and delight by these modern European

¹⁴² Sonia Hofkosh, ‘Disfiguring Economies: Mary Shelly’s Short Stories,’ in *The Other Mary Shelly* ed. A. Fisch, A. Mellor and E. Schor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206.

¹⁴³ This is despite the fact that Roberts left no detailed record of whose art influenced him in his early life, and as Jane Quigley notes, ‘one has to glean here and there from [Roberts’] records the connecting links of his experience.’ See Jane Quigley, *Prout and Roberts* (London: Philip Allan & Co. 1926), 120.

¹⁴⁴ Van der Merwe and Took, *Clarkson Stanfield*, 115.

views, recording in vivid, authentic and picturesque style.’¹⁴⁵ This can also be seen in Roberts’ work at this time.

In comparing Stanfield’s 1834 engraving *Mont. St. Michel* [Fig. 6] from *Heath’s Picturesque Annual* and Roberts’ *The Vermilion Tower* [Fig. 7] from the 1835 *Jennings Landscape Annual*, a number of similarities emerge. Both works feature low vantage points to the right of large and decayed architecture set on hilltops. Both engravings are peppered with vegetal outcroppings and dispossessed peasant figures in the foreground. However, despite these similarities, each engraving represents a geographically distinct European location. The images’ visual affinities are not only the result of the artists’ shared backgrounds, but also suggest the new ways in which these artists made use of picturesque landscape theory. Within each engraving, unique elements of each scene are surrounded by generic picturesque elements, allowing the viewer to understand exotic subject matter within a preexisting aesthetic framework. Cultural historian Nigel Leask recently noted the utility of this formula in *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing* [2002]. ‘Exotic subject matter [was] rationalised within the picturesque via the objective organisation of “curious” or unusual singularities within “typical” landscape.’¹⁴⁶ This can also be seen in the work of Samuel Prout.

¹⁴⁵ Van der Merwe and Took, *Clarkson Stanfield*, 26.

¹⁴⁶ Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 42.



Fig 6: Clarkson Stanfield, *Mont. St. Michel*, 1834, engraving, *Heath's Picturesque Annual*



Fig 7: David Roberts, *The Vermilion Tower*, 1835, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

Roberts' relationship with Prout, while shorter than his with Stanfield, was no less significant. It is unclear when the two met, but certainly they were friends, along with Stanfield, by the early 1830s.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Roberts and Prout enjoyed many of the same friends and acquaintances. Two of these friends, Lord Northwick and the antiquarian William Brockedon, would factor into Roberts' own artistic success.¹⁴⁸ As discussed above, Northwick was Roberts' first patron and Brockedon would eventually write the letterpress for *Egypt and Nubia*. Both artists worked for publications such as the *Jennings Landscape Annual* as well as the less popular *Italy, Classical Historical, and*

¹⁴⁷ Richard Lockett, *Samuel Prout* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd. 1985), 66.

¹⁴⁸ Lockett, *Samuel Prout*, 66-67.

Picturesque and *The New Waverley Album*, the latter being illustrated by Roberts, Prout, and Stanfield.¹⁴⁹

In addition to sharing publishers, Roberts and Prout shared a love of novel landscape scenery. In the 1820s Prout painted the urban and rural scenery of Western Europe, filling a gap in the art market and helping to pave the way for Robert's later success with the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*. Between 1819 and 1826 he travelled to Normandy, Touraine, Saxony, Bavaria, and Switzerland in search of the picturesque.¹⁵⁰ According to Richard Lockett, author of a 1985 monograph on Prout, the artist's wanderlust in the 1820s was unparalleled. 'It is easy to forget that Turner had yet to publicize the Rhine and Cotman to "discover" Normandy in the London exhibition room. None of the leading British landscapists had visited Saxony, Bavaria, or Bohemia.'¹⁵¹ Lockett argues that Prout was the first British artist to exploit Normandy and Holland in the nineteenth century.¹⁵²

Lockett's reading of Prout's work can be seen to correspond with the opinion of the *Somerset House Gazette*. In the 1 May 1824 edition, a contributor wrote, 'We had begun to tire of endless repetitions of Tintern Abbey from within and Tintern Abbey without,' and concluded that Prout's novel imagery and 'original examples of the picturesque give a new impulse to art.'¹⁵³ These original examples can be seen in a variety of early nineteenth-century publications.¹⁵⁴ One, from the *Jennings Landscape*

¹⁴⁹ See David Dundas Scott, *Italy, Classical, Historical, Picturesque* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son 1859); John Tillotson, *The New Waverley Album* (London: Darton & Co. 1859).

¹⁵⁰ Lockett, *Samuel Prout*, 10-11.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵² Roberts travelled to these places later in the 1820s. *Ibid.*, 56, 59.

¹⁵³ 'Exhibition of the Society of Painters in Water Colours,' *Somerset House Gazette* 2, no. 30 (1 May 1824): 46.

¹⁵⁴ See John Britton, *Beauties of England and Wales* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1803-1813); Samuel Prout, *Relics of Antiquity* (London: W. Clark 1811); Samuel Prout, *Picturesque Buildings in Normandy*

Annual, typifies Prout's revisionist picturesque style. *Swiss Cottage, Lavey* [Fig. 8] illustrates many of the revisionist picturesque tropes popular in early nineteenth-century Britain. Prout retained the dilapidated architecture of eighteenth-century picturesque views and adhered to the Gilpinesque use of side views and framing devices, via the peripheral architecture and rising mountains in the background, leading subjects, and rustic embellishments to soften the grandiosity of the mountain. As Francesca Oresanto notes in her article on the history of British picturesque art, 'Gilpin's lessons would provide material for Samuel Prout's urban sketches of markets and slums...'¹⁵⁵ Oresanto's remark suggests that Prout – and artist like him – reconfigured Gilpin's generalised remarks on the utility of picturesque subject matter to scenery that Gilpin would have never conceived of as picturesque. Despite the fact that Prout's image was features a conventionally picturesque composition, the novel and exotic subject matter position the engraving as revisionist picturesque.

(London: Rodwell and Martin 1821); Samuel Prout, *Illustrations of the Rhine* (London: R. Ackermann 1824); Samuel Prout, *Views in Germany* (London: J. Dickinson 1826); Samuel Prout, *Facsimiles of Sketches Made in Flanders and Germany* (London: self-published 1833); *Samuel Prout's Views in the North of England* (London: Ackerman 1921); *Jennings Landscape Annual* 1830-1832 (London: R. Jennings).

¹⁵⁵ Francesca Oresanto, 'The Revd. William Gilpin; or, Whose Afraid of Dr. Syntax?' *Garden History* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 168.

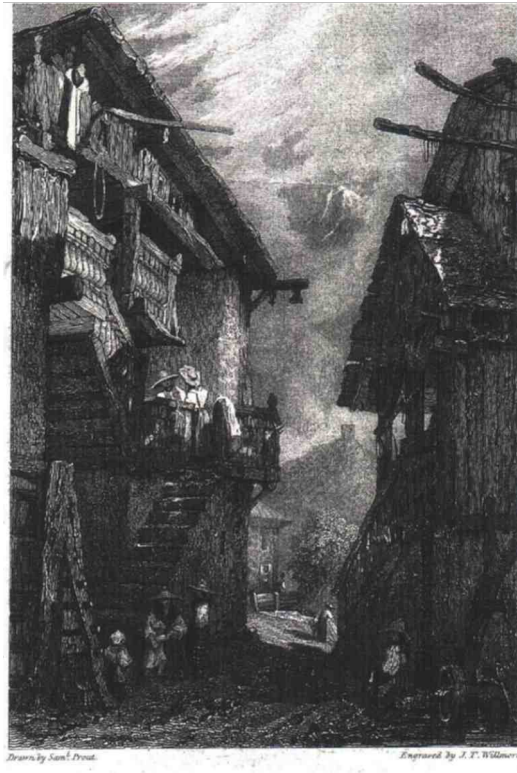


Fig 8: Samuel Prout, *Swiss Cottage, Lavey*, 1830, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

This reading corresponds to Victorian critic John Ruskin's interpretation of the revisionist picturesque. In 1849 Ruskin penned an anonymous article for the *Art Journal* about the painter, stating that, while ‘the picturesque had been sought, before his time, either in solitude or in rusticity,’ Prout found picturesqueness in the cities and towns of continental Europe.¹⁵⁶ Prout, Ruskin claimed:

found and proved in the busy shadows and sculptured gables of the Continental street sources of picturesque delight as rich and as interesting as those which had been sought amidst the darkness of thickets and the eminence of rocks; and he contrasted with the familiar circumstances of urban life, the majesty and the aerial elevation of the most noble architecture, expressing its details in more splendid accumulation, and with a more patient love than ever had been reached or manifested before his time by any artist who introduced such subjects as members of a general composition. He thus became the interpreter of a great period of the world's history, of that in which age and neglect had cast the interest of ruin over the noblest ecclesiastical structures of Europe...¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ John Ruskin (anon.), ‘Portraits of British Artists: S. Prout,’ *Art Journal*, no. 11 (March 1849): 77.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

Ruskin's interpretation of Prout is helpful for an understanding of revisionist picturesque practice. Instead of limiting himself to rural British scenery, Prout – and others – overwrote the central picturesque tropes of roughness and ruination on to a variety of urban and rural European scenes. This is a similar formula to the one Roberts utilised in Spain, as seen in *Leaning Tower of Saragossa* [Fig. 9].



Fig 9: David Roberts, *Leaning Tower of Saragossa*, 1838, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

This engraving shares several similarities with Prout's image. Both display rough and asymmetrical architecture, highlighted by the vantage point chosen by the artists. This can be seen particularly in the architectural elements that hang out onto the street in each scene. Both engravings also feature prominent backgrounds that confer a sense of relative size and scale to the scene. The similarity in style between Prout's and Roberts'

work was acknowledged by Roberts himself, who noted in a letter to the elder painter, ‘How often I have said I founded what little I possess on your good works.’¹⁵⁸

Following Prout and Stanfield’s success, Roberts set out to establish his own position in the lucrative landscape engraving market. His initial foray into the publishing world consisted of his engravings featured in the 1832 publication *Landscape Illustrations of the Waverley Novels*, a two-volume work that attempted to capitalise on the success of Walter Scott’s novels. This publication was very much a group effort, with Prout and Stanfield, as well as artists such as Copley Fielding, William Daniell, and others contributing illustrations. However, despite the multiplicity of contributing artists, all the engravings of Scottish scenery broadly adhered to British picturesque formulae. Roberts use of ruined castles, wildlife and human figures within a Gilpinesque template can be seen in *Caerlaverock Castle* [Fig. 10], from Volume I of *Landscape Illustrations of the Waverley Novels*.¹⁵⁹

Following this, Roberts produced a series of uncredited illustrations for Bulwer Lytton’s *The Pilgrims of the Rhine*, published in 1834. The volume was illustrated with engravings based on Roberts’ drawings, as well as works by H.B. Burlowe, E.T. Parris, T. Von Holst, and D. MacClise. As Michael Pidgley noted in his essay, ‘Travel, Topography and Prints’ from the 1986 Barbican catalogue, these engravings marked the beginning of Roberts’ career in mass-produced art.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ David Roberts to Samuel Prout, London, n.d, in Michael Pidgley, ‘Travel, Topography, and Prints,’ in *David Roberts*, ed. Helen Guiterman and Briony Llewellyn (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986), 47.

¹⁵⁹ Caerlaverock Castle featured in the Walter Scott novel *Guy Mannering*. See William Finden, *Landscape Illustrations of the Waverley Novels* (London: Charles Tilt, 1832), 1:8.

¹⁶⁰ Pidgley, ‘Travel, Topography, and Prints,’ 47.



Fig 10: David Roberts, *Caerlaverock Castle*, 1832, engraving, *Landscape Illustrations of the Waverley Novels*

Following this success, he illustrated four well-received editions of the *Jennings Landscape Annual*. The popularity of Roberts' engravings is born out by their publication figures. The 1836 *Jennings Landscape Annual*, for example, sold out its original 5,000 print edition and was followed by another edition of 2,000 copies that same year.¹⁶¹ Roberts, writing about his Spanish work, punned, 'My portfolio is getting rich, the subjects are not only good, but of a very novel character.'¹⁶² While it is likely that Roberts aimed to create commercially viable imagery of novel scenes, the tropes on which the artist relied must still be explored. I propose that two compositional elements – figures and architecture – feature heavily in Roberts Spanish work and that they were among the chief signifiers of revisionist picturesque art. I will first explore the human figure and its place in revisionist picturesque practice.

¹⁶¹ Saglia, 'Imag(in)ing Iberia,' 128.

¹⁶² David Roberts to D.R. Hay, Cordova, 30 January, 1833, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 48.

Figures feature heavily, but rarely were the focal point of Roberts' Spanish engravings. This situation echoed eighteenth-century British picturesque art, in which the figure was secondary to other landscape elements such as ruined architecture and natural features such as mountains.¹⁶³ While Roberts often included figures in his Spanish images, they were usually used as a vehicle for tonal variety and to break up architectural space, as seen in *Tower of the Seven Vaults* and *Leaning Tower of Saragossa* above. However, despite their chiefly formal use, figures could also be used to denote alterity. When Roberts foregrounded figures in his engravings, he often used them as a personification of the alterity of the scene itself through the incorporation of exotic dress and accoutrements. The functionality and significance of figures can be seen in *Grenada from the banks of the Xenile* [Fig. 11] in the *Jennings Landscape Annual* of 1835.¹⁶⁴

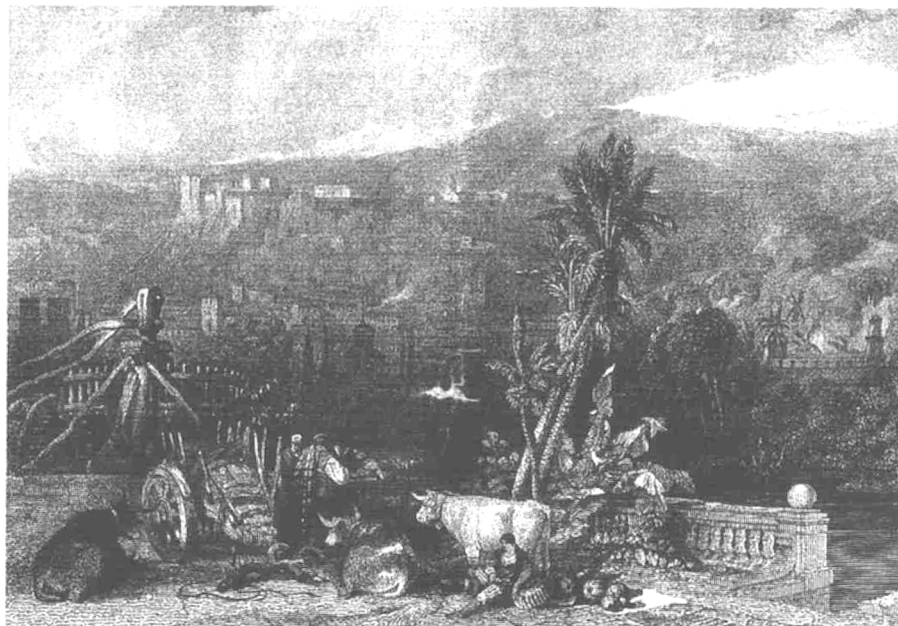


Fig 11: David Roberts, *Granada from the banks of the Xenile*, 1835, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

¹⁶³ William Gilpin, 'A Poem on Landscape Painting,' in Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 118-119.

¹⁶⁴ This scene, and others from the 1835 *Annual* that depict the Alhambra are also important in that Roberts believed he was the first Briton to sketch or paint it, thereby imbuing the scene with the novelty he so desired. Sim quotes from one of his personal letters, 'This with the fine old ruins of the Alhambra – (which has never been painted that I am aware of) – ought to make a picture at least of a novel Nature...' David Roberts personal letter, n.d. in Sim, *David Roberts*, 78.

The engraving is an interesting blend of urban and rural picturesque, with the interplay of cows and people reminiscent of Gilpin's suggestion that human and animal figures are equally suited to a scene.¹⁶⁵ What is most interesting is the central figure, reclining on a white bull. This is possibly a Spanish gypsy, a compositional cipher in which Roberts took great interest. He wrote, 'I had many opportunities of making sketches of country people, and particularly gipsies [sic], a distinct race from the Spaniards... They are even better suited to the painter than the Spaniard, and retain more of an African character than they do with us and are quite black...'¹⁶⁶ The 'African character's' suitability to artists could be a veiled reference to the picturesque as well as an indication of the figure's alterity to the 'us' to which Roberts refers. Roberts used the blackness of the gypsy, particularly evident in the right leg of the figure, to embody the cultural distance between the scene depicted and Britain. Additionally, Roberts used the white bull on which the black figure reclines as a visual device to highlight the blackness of the gypsy. This is one of the earliest examples of the artist cross-referencing otherness and picturesqueness.

Roberts' presentation of figures with dark skin in unfamiliar costumes suggests that the artist presented his Spanish subjects to be alterior to himself. While it is not readily evident from the engraving, Roberts looked down on the Spanish as inferior to the British. In recent years, writers such as Sim have noted this possibility: 'His almost chauvinistic patriotism and strictly Protestant upbringing seemed to cause distaste for... nearly all the races and religions of the lands he visited, however picturesque, "novel" and wonderful he found their buildings.'¹⁶⁷ From the images in the *Jennings Landscape*

¹⁶⁵ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 44-45.

¹⁶⁶ David Roberts to Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, Seville, 18 June, 1833 in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 59.

¹⁶⁷ Sim, *David Roberts*, 80.

Annuals, it appears that Roberts was uninterested in depicting Spanish people as modern – particularly considering his penchant for showing people surrounded by ruined buildings. Instead, he presented Spain as a backward nation and the Spanish as a set of novel compositional embellishments within a ruined landscape. The notion of all Spaniards in Roberts’ art existing as a lethargic singularity has been noted by Howarth in *The Invention of Spain*: ‘[Roberts] expressed a settled condescension towards the Spaniard as a racial type. It was an article of faith that the ordinary Spaniard was mulish...’¹⁶⁸ The notion of distaste for – and aesthetic appreciation of – otherness was to appear throughout *Egypt and Nubia*. This is foreshadowed by images such as *Grenada from the Banks of the Xenile*, in which he presented exotic figures as picturesque.

Roberts’ also made use of the novelty, alterity, and picturesqueness of the North African subjects he encountered on his journey across the Straits of Gibraltar, again bringing his prejudices with him. In his letter of 22 April 1833 to D.R. Hay he commented that Gibraltar would be an earthly paradise, ‘were it not for the savages that inhabit it; but even these, with their peculiarities of gesture and costume, had charms for me which none but a painter could appreciate.’¹⁶⁹ His depiction of North Africans can be seen in *Tower of the Great Mosque, Morocco* [Fig. 12].

The figures in this scene are indicative of the way in which Roberts employed the revisionist picturesque to denote alterity. The figure on the right recalls the blackness of the Spanish gypsy from *Grenada, from the Banks of the Xenile*, and is highlighted by the white steps on which he is seated. The standing figure with his back to the viewer

¹⁶⁸ Howarth, *The Invention of Spain*, 206.

¹⁶⁹ David Roberts to D.R. Hay, Gibraltar, 22 April, 1833, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 55.

exhibits the novelty and roughness of dress indicative of revisionist picturesque. The two figures in the lower left serve primarily to balance out the composition's activity on the right and therefore are compositional embellishments. Their North African dress – particularly those in the background left – remind the viewers of the scene's alterity.

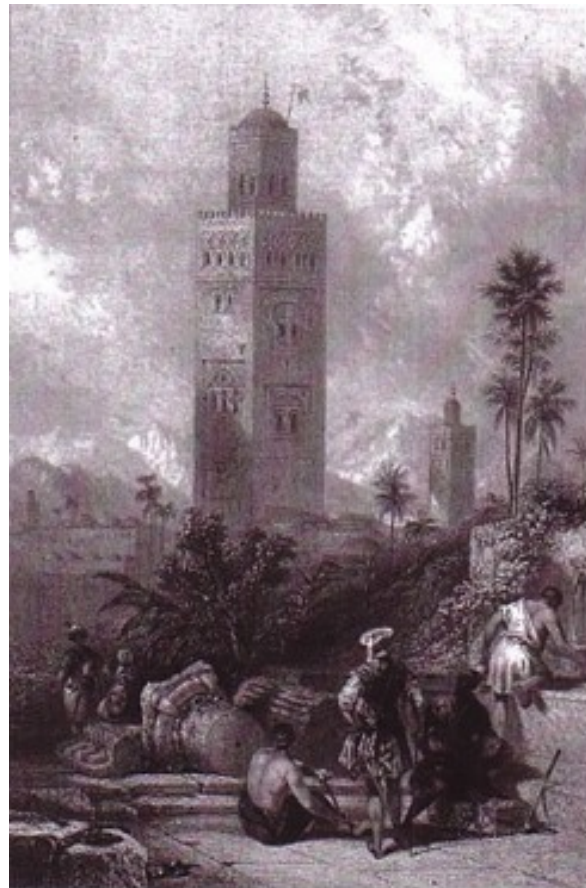


Fig 12: David Roberts, *Tower of the Great Mosque, Morocco*, 1838, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

Intriguingly, the artist's use of exotic figures can be seen to relate to British picturesque responses to rural figures in eighteenth-century art. Gilpin provided a model for the British picturesque figure in his influential book *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of 1770*. His description of this figure, sighted at Tintern Abbey, is significant

as so many British picturesque artists followed his lead in the use of figures. He recalled that the woman displayed age, backwardness, and decay – all crucial components of the picturesque.¹⁷⁰

She shuffled along her palsied limbs and meagre contracted body by the help of two sticks. She led us through an old gate into a place overspread with nettles and briars; and pointing to the remnant of a shattered cloister, told us that was the place. It was her own mansion. All indeed she meant to tell us was the story of her own wretchedness, and all she had to shew us was her own miserable habitation... [Her home in the ruin] was a cavern loftily vaulted between two ruined walls, which streamed with various coloured stains of unwholesome dews.¹⁷¹

Here, picturesque figures were presented as embodiments of the rugged landscape and ruined architecture. Gilpin's description of the woman equates her squalid appearance to the condition of the abbey itself, linking her 'palsied limbs' and 'two sticks' to the 'nettles and briars' and 'two ruined walls' of Tintern Abbey.¹⁷² This suggests that he saw her as a personification of the decayed architecture that surrounded her. Instead of understanding her as a dispossessed individual possibly in need of assistance, he reduced her to a minor aesthetic element in his experience at Tintern Abbey. As seen in *Grenada from the Banks of the Xenile*, Roberts similarly reduced his figures to minor compositional elements in his scenes, using them for a sense of scale and tonal variety in the scene.

Roberts was interested in the aesthetics of exotic figures, and at the same time emphasised their wretchedness. A similar notion can be found in the work of eighteenth-century picturesque theorist Uvedale Price, critic of Gilpin. In the 1790s Price began to reconfigure Gilpin's theories of the picturesque, adding new elements to

¹⁷⁰ Gilpin, *Wye*, 36.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 36.

the theory.¹⁷³ Price linked moral and social decay with the physical decay described by Gilpin.¹⁷⁴ He noted that picturesque figures were idle, lawless, anti-social and amoral.¹⁷⁵ The same qualities that made the person picturesque also made them unsavoury. Roberts appears to have endorsed a similar dualism in his images and correspondence. While he remarked on the aesthetic pleasure that he took from the people, he also noted that Spaniards were ‘idle and indigent from long habit and misgovernment’ and lived in ‘filth’.¹⁷⁶ The ‘habit and misgovernance’ to which Roberts referred was likely related to Catholicism, which the artist was prejudiced against.¹⁷⁷ As Sim noted, Roberts had no compunction about reducing the people he met while abroad to a series of colourful picturesque tropes.

Along with the exotic or rustic figure, architectural ruins played a part in both Roberts' imagery and other picturesque modalities of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century British artists. Gilpin highlighted the ‘variety of little irregularities, which the eye examines with renewed delight... the richest decorations from the various colours which it acquires from time,’ as being essential to picturesque ruins, and stated that Gothic ruins were more picturesque than Classical.¹⁷⁸ The decayed ruin typically featured mossy incrustations, ivy-clad Gothic windows, and broken arches adorned with pendant wreaths.¹⁷⁹ In terms of the British picturesque, ruins were at their most pleasing when the natural process of decay was captured at the right moment.¹⁸⁰ The visual

¹⁷³ The nationalistic elements of Price's theories pertained specifically to Gothic ruins and will be discussed below.

¹⁷⁴ Price, *Picturesque*, 1:64.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷⁶ Roscoe, *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1838*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Sim, *David Roberts*, 80.

¹⁷⁸ William Gilpin, *Observations on several parts of the counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on several parts of North Wales, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, in two tours, the former made in 1769, the latter in 1773* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), 121.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁸⁰ Price, *Picturesque*, 1:79.

manifestation of this moment, referred to as ‘a proper state of decay’ by Ian Ousby in his book *The Englishman’s England* [2002], was a key feature in Price’s picturesque theory.¹⁸¹ Price referred to this state as ‘correctly picturesque decay.’¹⁸² What constituted ‘correct’ or ‘proper’ decay? ‘Correct decay’ was observable after the process had begun and the original features of the architecture, tree, or person became weathered and indistinct. However, they had to retain their original features. For example, ruins would feature a rough edges, encroaching vegetation, and signs of collapse, although not being so indistinct as to resemble pile of rubble.

Roberts’ work on the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* both borrows from and extrapolates extant British picturesque architectural formulae. This formulation is evident in illustrations from the Grenada edition of the *Jennings Landscape Annual* published in 1835 such as *Hall of Judgment* [Fig. 13]. This image displayed several aspects of the British picturesque, particularly the pointed arches and ruined architecture in the foreground. The image echoed elements of Gilpin’s drawing of Tintern Abbey, and indeed his own, especially the way in which the ornamental ceiling of the hall recalls the ruined pointed arches of the Abbey.

¹⁸¹ Ian Ousby, *The Englishman’s England: Taste Travel and the Rise of Tourism* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 83.

¹⁸² Price, *Picturesque*, 1:79.

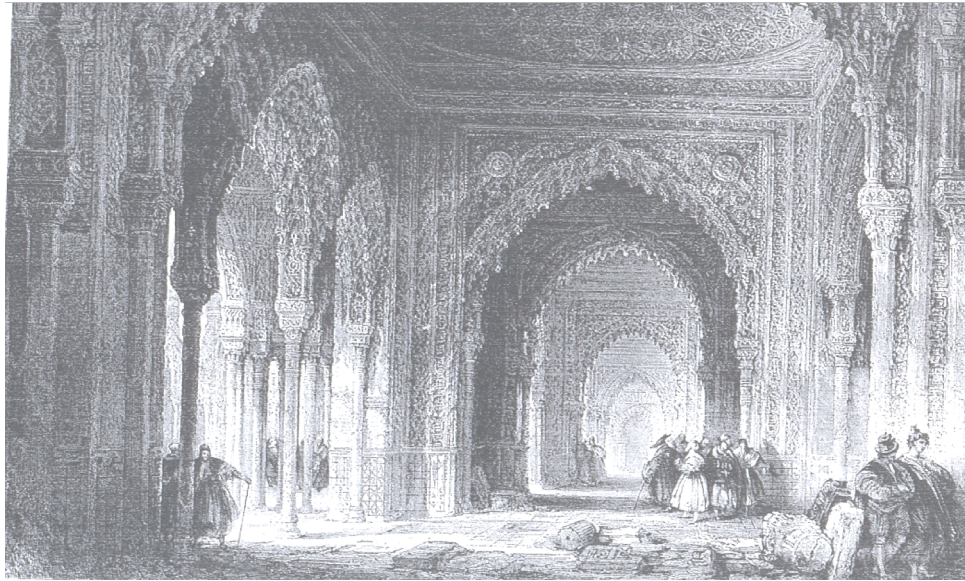


Fig 13: David Roberts, *Hall of Judgment*, 1835, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

This image of decayed Moorish architecture is informative. *Hall of Judgment* implicitly references the older British picturesque style seen in Roberts' and Gilpin's drawings of Tintern Abbey, while at the same time introduces revisionist tropes, such as the exotically dressed figures and non-European architecture. The Hall of Judgment was a room in which the North African rulers of Moorish Spain would receive visitors. It is possible that Roberts' depiction of a symbol of Moorish power in a ruined state bears a similarity to Price's theory on the significance of Gothic ruins in British picturesque art.

Price believed that decayed and ruined Gothic monasteries were symbols of England's expulsion of the Catholic Church during the reign of Henry VIII. Price wrote, 'The ruins of these once magnificent edifices [Gothic monasteries] are the pride and boast of this island; we may well be proud of them, not merely in a picturesque point of view – we may glory that the abodes of tyranny and superstition are in ruin.'¹⁸³ Reviewers of Roberts' work in the 1830s echoed Price's interpretation. While discussing his

¹⁸³ Price, *Picturesque*, 1:301.

engravings in the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* an anonymous reviewer wrote

...every artist, *quoad* artist, must lament the Reformation. As a man he may be rejoiced at the liberation from the superstitions, bigotry, and intolerance of the Romish Church, but, as a painter, he cannot reflect without regret on its magnificent and picturesque ceremonials, and on the facilities which the noble edifices where these ceremonials were performed afforded for the exhibition of the finest productions of the pencil and chisel.¹⁸⁴

Roberts was equally disdainful of Spain's Catholic present and Muslim past. He wrote that Cordoba, one of the capital cities of Moorish Spain, 'is one of the most decayed and miserable cities in Spain,' yet its ruins were picturesque.¹⁸⁵ Similar examples of Roberts' engravings have already been discussed. These include *Tower of the Seven Vaults*, which features the crumbling ramparts of a centuries-old castle, and *Leaning Tower of Saragossa*, comprised of rough and rugged urban architecture framing a precariously-angled tower. This trend can also be seen in *Gate of Justice, Entrance to the Alhambra* [Fig. 14], a depiction of the entrance to the seat of Muslim rule in Spain in a state of ruination.¹⁸⁶ Within the *Jennings Landscape Annual* moral judgment appears to have been applied to Moorish Spain, extrapolating Price's eighteenth-century judgment related to Catholic structures to Islamic architecture, possibly paving the way for Roberts' harsh critique of modern, Muslim Egypt in *Egypt and Nubia*.

¹⁸⁴ 'Picturesque Sketches in Spain,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1053 (25 March 1837): 195.

¹⁸⁵ David Roberts to D.R. Hay, Cordova, 30 January, 1833, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 46.

¹⁸⁶ Howarth, *The Invention of Spain*, 208.



Fig 14: David Roberts, *Gate of Justice; Entrance to the Alhambra*, 1835, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

The use of decayed and ruined scenery in Roberts' work suggests that he did not equate prosperity to the picturesque. Instead, the artist highlighted the picturesque at the expense of modern, productive scenery. Leask notes the restrictive nature of picturesque representation, stating that 'the picturesque eye could skim over any features which disturbed the composure of aesthetic form, as well as utilitarian traces of industry, improvement, or modernity.'¹⁸⁷ While this restrictive vision could enhance the viewer's aesthetic pleasure, it could also encourage the viewer to conclude that Spain was bereft of a modern, functioning infrastructure. It seems that while Roberts saw unpicturesque urban and rural scenery he was disinclined to delineate it. It is possible that modernity would decrease the picturesque quality of the work, thereby reducing its salability.

¹⁸⁷ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 168.

Despite the fact that this editorial process resulted in the presentation of biased imagery, it was still considered accurate in the 1830s. A reviewer for *the Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* remarked in 1834 that Roberts had captured ‘the peculiar character... which distinguishes Spain from the rest of Europe’ through his ‘faithful and masterly pencil.’¹⁸⁸ In 1836 another reviewer for the same journal stated that the engravings in the *Jennings Landscape Annual* ‘are almost as good as seeing the things themselves.’¹⁸⁹ Other journals, such as *The Eclectic Review* and *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* maintained similar positions.¹⁹⁰ How could this be?

‘Accuracy,’ Orientalism, and the revisionist picturesque

Colonel Julian Jackson, an early member of the Royal Geographic Society, explicitly linked the picturesque to accuracy in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. In his 1835 article, ‘Picturesque Description in Books of Travel’, Jackson stated that picturesqueness was a necessary component of geography. He wrote that geographical and topographical works benefited from picturesque description because the picturesque aided in communicating an accurate visual representation.¹⁹¹ In his view, the picturesque highlighted the visual qualities that differentiated one specific location from all other locations while at the same time providing a readily legible framework. As Colonel Jackson noted:

When we are told in general terms that houses are well built, that their interiors are comfortable, that the people display much taste in their adjustment; it is evident that every reader will judge of this comfort, this taste, &c., according to his own standard in such matters; a standard probably different for every

¹⁸⁸ ‘Review of *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1835, or Tourist in Spain*,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 919 (30 August 1834): 595.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Review of *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1837*,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1032 (29 October 1836): 691.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Jennings Landscape Annual,’ *The Eclectic Review*, no. 1 (December 1837): 662.

‘A word on the Annuals,’ *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 16, no. 96 (December 1837): 757-763.

¹⁹¹ Colonel Julian Jackson, ‘On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel,’ *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, no. 5 (1835): 382.

reader... [the picturesque] gives a more correct idea of objects mentioned in the text.¹⁹²

In effect, Jackson stated that the addition of picturesque description to geographical works aided in the creation of a 'correct idea' of the landscape and the reader's understanding of a specific location.¹⁹³ This suggests that he saw the picturesque editing of subject matter as a useful geographical tool, provided that the description presented a picture of exotic territory that represented the perceived essence of the location. The description need not be exhaustive so much as representative. As Jackson noted, 'A cold detail of the usages of different nations, though the information may be exact and its result attended with utility, is far from having the same influence as when the personages are made to speak and act, as it were, in our immediate presence.'¹⁹⁴ The insertion of picturesque details into an exotic scene could, in Jackson's view, inform the viewer of the essence of a specific location. These details could be exaggerated or even invented, but their inclusion aided the perception of accuracy.

The British media's acceptance of Roberts' edited views as essentially true suggests that he was appealing to an extant representational mode for depicting Islamic societies. As Deborah Cherry acknowledges in her 2002 essay 'Earth Into World, Land Into Landscape', 'To represent North Africa in the Western conventions of landscape was not only to (re)inscribe it, but to frame it within preexisting pictorial order.'¹⁹⁵ The order to which Cherry refers is the centuries-long European tradition of Orientalist art, of which Roberts was a part. British Orientalist art enjoyed its greatest popularity in the

¹⁹² Jackson, 'On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel,' 383.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 384.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 382.

¹⁹⁵ Deborah Cherry, 'Earth Into World, Land Into Landscape: The "worlding of Algeria in Nineteenth-century British Feminism,' in *Orientalism's Interlocutors*, eds Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham: Duke University Press 2002), 122-123.

nineteenth century. Its nexus was, as V&A curator Melanie Vandenbrouck-Przybylski notes, based on the fascination with the exotic and novel, particularly ‘obligatory landmarks of mosques, schools, harems, bazaars, and deserts.’¹⁹⁶ This mode of art existed in myriad forms,¹⁹⁷ and over a variety of media, including painting, printmaking, sculpture, architecture and design to name but a few. As discussed above, one of Roberts’ earliest attempts at large-scale oil painting fits into the British Orientalist rubric, *The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt*. Additionally, it is clear from the engravings in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* that Roberts relied on many of these ‘obligatory landmarks’ in his depictions of Moorish Spain and Morocco.

There are elements of the contemporary critique of British Orientalism that apply to the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* and Roberts’ practice in the 1830s. Specifically the ways in which the engravings present an essentialised picture of maladministrated Muslim societies encouraged their interpretation in the context of Edward Said and his influential book *Orientalism* [1978]. Orientalism, in Said’s view, was the system by which Western culture dominated the Islamic world in the eighteenth through to the twentieth century. In Said’s opinion centuries-old stereotypes of Islamic societies such as backwardness, ignorance, and misgovernance aided in the European conclusion that the ‘Orient’ required Western leadership and governance. These conclusions were based, not on actual experience of Levantine culture, but instead on well-worn stereotypical notions. European powers such as Great Britain and France, in their

¹⁹⁶ Melanie Vandenbrouck-Przybylski, ‘Exhibition Reviews: The Lure of the East,’ *The Burlington Magazine* 150 (August 2008): 559.

¹⁹⁷ I use the word ‘mode’ self-consciously here, as Orientalist art in Britain is notoriously hard to pin down, as it included landscape, portraiture, genre scenes, and history painting, therefore it cannot be referred to as a genre in the academic sense. Nor can it be construed as a period, as it was produced between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. It also cannot be considered a style, in that there were as many stylistic varieties of British Orientalist art as there were British Orientalist artists. See MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 43-7.

imperial aggrandizement, legitimised these stereotypes by acting on them. According to Said, this was possibly because the West viewed the East as fundamentally unchanging, timeless and eternal, as opposed to the West, which was perceived as dynamic.¹⁹⁸ In Said's view, this binary opposition was the basis for the hegemonic descriptions of the Levant and North Africa that furthered the Western discourse on the region, and encouraged Western imperialism.

While there are many elements of Said's critique that are useful for interpreting Roberts' work, at this point I am specifically interested in the ways in which the revisionist picturesque, as a representational system, could support Said's understanding of Orientalism. The revisionist picturesque encouraged the removal of modern and utilitarian subject matter, and in its place, artists delineated hovels, crumbling architecture, and wretched or exotic figures. These were presented within a legible framework that viewers could readily understand. In this way, artists such as Roberts were capable of capturing Eastern, Western, urban, and rural landscapes. Similarly, the only descriptions of the Levant acknowledged by Said's conception of Orientalism were those that fit into an extant template that also disallowed modern and productive elements. According to Said, selective descriptions had been made of the Levant for centuries, in a process of essentialising the Orient.¹⁹⁹

The consonance between Said's conception of Orientalism and Roberts' early work can be seen in images such as *Tower of the Great Mosque, Morocco*. In examining this scene's component parts, we see all the primary components of the picturesque, decayed architecture and figures and formulaic composition, projected onto an Islamic culture.

¹⁹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 72.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

Within the context of *Tower of the Great Mosque, Morocco*, Said's theory of Orientalism is useful, particularly his assertion that Orientalist description 'melt[ed] away the Orient's geographical identity by dragging the Orient into the West...'²⁰⁰ The formulaic nature of the engraving – its ruins, figures, and landscape – link it to indigenous British picturesque and imagery with which Roberts' audience would be familiar. The artist reduced complex Moroccan visual culture – dress, religious architecture – into an aesthetic singularity without regard for its functionality or meaning. This image presents only a partial view of the state; the engraving's carefully edited subject matter ignores elements of Moroccan life that existed beyond the pale of British perceptions of what was “essentially” Moroccan. Morocco was thus stripped of meaning and inserted into the aesthetic framework of revisionist picturesque.



Fig 15: David Roberts, *Gate of the Marchán, Citadel of Tangiers*, 1838, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

²⁰⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 92.



Fig 16: David Roberts, *General View of Morocco*, 1838, engraving, *Jennings Landscape Annual*

A similar situation can be seen in two additional Moroccan engravings, *Gate of the Marchán, Citadel of Tangiers* [Fig. 15] and *General View of Morocco* [Fig. 16] both from the 1838 *Jennings Landscape Annual*. These two images provide several interesting variations on the themes that the artist employed in this series. The orientations of the two images are different: one portrait, one landscape. The subject matter varies from urban imagery to a panoramic rural view. Perhaps most significantly, *Gate of the Marchán, Citadel of Tangiers* is a representation of a geographically specific location, whereas *General View of Morocco* is, as suggested in the title, an imagined scene comprised of elements of various Moroccan landscapes.

With these images, a tendency within Roberts' use of the revisionist picturesque emerges. He simultaneously relies on geographical specificity, and the reiteration of stereotypical imagery. *Gate of the Marchán, Citadel of Tangiers* overflows with exotic picturesqueness – the figures, crumbling architecture, jagged and rugged Islamic arches

– while at the same time appealing to the fidelity of a specific location. *General View of Morocco*, conversely, presents minarets and exotic dress within a generalised composition that relates to eighteenth-century British picturesque practice through the use of figures, natural features, and architecture as elements within an existent template. When viewed in tandem, these images can be seen to present two different, but connected, modes of Orientalist picturesque imagery: both a generalised and ostensibly “accurate” orientalist and picturesque view of Morocco. Nicholas Tromans has also made this point. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue for *Lure of the East*, he states, that British Orientalist art ‘was accepted in its own day as a peculiarly truthful form of art,’²⁰¹ based in part on the reiteration of the essence of Islamic cultures.

These images reified preconceptions and were highly marketable. Howarth reaches similar conclusions when discussing the Spanish imagery in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*:

Roberts was driven by an overwhelming desire to make money, not to push boundaries. It was said he returned from Spain dripping with honey: he gave clients what they expected, what they understood, and what they wanted. It was observed more than once how Roberts turned the Alhambra into Windsor Castle.²⁰²

By domesticating the Alhambra and the mosques of Morocco, Roberts can be seen to ‘drag the Orient into the West.’ Howarth’s opinion – particularly that Roberts ‘returned from Spain dripping with honey’ is born out by reviews of his 1830s engravings. The *Athenaeum* and the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* – both influential literary and artistic journals, and frequent reviewers of the Annual and Keep-sake genre – heaped praise on Roberts’ Spanish work. Both journals noted that the work was ‘picturesque’, and that it imparted an accurate impression of Spain and Morocco. The

²⁰¹ Tromans, ‘Introduction: British Orientalist Painting,’ 10.

²⁰² Howarth, *The Invention of Spain*, 193.

Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres singled out Roberts' figures in the 1838 edition for praise as being particularly picturesque.²⁰³ The reviews of Roberts' work in the 1830s suggest that there was a consonance between what he presented of Spain or Morocco and what the reviews of these journals expected from a picturesque scene.

This possibility was specifically noted in the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, in which one reviewer wrote, 'This volume [1838], we regret to say, will complete the series of views in Spain. We regret this, because we know it will be difficult to select any other country so abounding with magnificent and picturesque subjects, both of nature and of art.'²⁰⁴ What is interesting here, is that the reviewer made no distinction between the Spanish and Moroccan subject matter represented in the 1838 *Jennings Landscape Annual*. The subject matter of this volume was largely Islamic, with the Spanish subject matter featuring the ruins of Moorish buildings and the Moroccan scenes depicting a contemporary Muslim nation. This subject matter was deemed to be picturesque, and Muslim Spain was supposed to be abounding in this type of material. At no point in this, or any other, review of Roberts' work on the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* was the modern condition of the places he depicted mentioned. In effect, the whole of Spain and Morocco, as Roberts depicted it in the 1830s was designated exclusively as revisionist picturesque, with all the concurrent negative connotations discussed in above.

²⁰³ 'Review of the Landscape Annual for 1838,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1079 (23 September 1837): 613.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 613.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a biographical sketch of the artist's life from birth to 1838. The periodisation of this chapter is significant – 1838 was the year that Roberts travelled to the Levant in search of the picturesque. We have seen the development of Roberts' entrepreneurial spirit and artistic style, from house painting to the stage and finally to the genesis of his fine art practice. He has been seen to focus on landscape art, presenting popular compositions of exotic subject matter within a framework that the audience could understand. This framework had its origins in eighteenth-century British picturesque art, although Roberts and his colleagues such as Prout and Stanfield extrapolated the strictures into a variety of urban and rural European and North African subject matter. It was this format that brought Roberts his first artistic success in the lucrative London print trade through the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*.

The imagery in these publications establishes the way in which the artist would present the Levant in *Egypt and Nubia* later in the 1840s. This study has shown that Roberts appears to have conflated aesthetics and moral judgment in his revisionist picturesque Spanish imagery. Despite Roberts' biases, which spilled over into his imagery, his work in the 1830s was considered to present an accurate impression of Spain by journals such as the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*.²⁰⁵ This artistic mode served Roberts well in his initial foray into art publication, and he would duplicate this success with *Egypt and Nubia* in the following decade.

The images in *Egypt and Nubia* present the state as exclusively picturesque, decayed and backward, described by *The Times* as a series of 'picturesque and truthful

²⁰⁵ 'Review of the Landscape Annual for 1838,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1079 (23 September 1837): 613; 'D. Roberts, Esq.,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1186 (12 October 1839): 652.

delineations.’²⁰⁶ *The Times*’ juxtaposition of the terms ‘picturesque’ and ‘truthful’ is intriguing, as well as the artist’s selection of the Levant as commercially lucrative subject matter. Roberts’ connection to the picturesque has been established, as well as the possibility of “picturesque accuracy”. In order to ascertain how Roberts’ Egyptian work could be considered truthful – and how he could conclude that there was an audience for picturesque Egyptian imagery – the next chapter will investigate what was known of Egypt in Britain by the 1830s. This investigation will elucidate how *Egypt and Nubia* could be perceived in contemporary terms as at once truthful and picturesque.

²⁰⁶ ‘Roberts’s Sketches in the Holy Land,’ *Times* (London) 29 June, 1842.

Chapter Three

Early nineteenth-century British perceptions of Egypt

Introduction

Now that Roberts' involvement with the revisionist picturesque has been established, the discussion will move on to investigate the significance of Egypt in Britain prior to Roberts' journey, and the ways in which popular perceptions of the state appeared to have impacted the production of *Egypt and Nubia*. This chapter will explore the knowledge Roberts and his audience had of Egypt in the decades prior to his publication, focusing the ways in which the political and social conditions of the state were presented to the British public from the turn of the nineteenth century to the early 1840s. This chapter sets out to explore the extent to which *Egypt and Nubia*'s legibility may have been predicated on its reiteration of the contemporary perception of Egypt as an archaeologically rich, but developmentally poor, state.

The artist travelled to the Levant during a period of turmoil. Both Britain and France spent much of the early nineteenth century jockeying for commercial superiority in the region while Egypt's Pacha, Mehemet 'Ali, consolidated his own political power.

Although Roberts wrote relatively little in his *Eastern Journal* about European-Egyptian relations, what he did note suggests that he was well aware of recent events there. Tracing exactly what the artist knew about Egypt prior to this trip and how he came by this information is, unfortunately, somewhat a matter of conjecture.²⁰⁷ It is important to remember that he was not an Egyptian or Eastern scholar.²⁰⁸ As a literate

²⁰⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, there is no detailed record of Roberts' reading habits. Additionally, with the exception of Lord Lindsay's *Letters on Egypt*, Roberts did not mention any specific literature that he read prior to his Levantine journey.

²⁰⁸ Debra Mancoff, *David Roberts: Travels in Egypt & the Holy Land* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1999), 39.

and cosmopolitan Briton, however, he would have had access to a wealth of visual and textual information. I argue that this information was filtered through a range of British concerns such as free trade, Anglo-French competition, the interest in Egyptian antiquities, and picturesque descriptions of the state in travel literature. It is possible that these concerns coloured textual and visual representations of Egypt, paving the way for revisionist picturesque descriptions of the state by the late 1830s. In relation to this, the “truthfulness” of Roberts’ revisionist picturesque description arguably rested in its reinforcement of assumed “truths” about Egypt, widely circulated in contemporary Britain.

The origin of nineteenth-century British interest in Egypt was in Napoleon’s attempted invasion of the region. As Timothy Champion notes in his 2003 essay ‘Beyond Egyptology: Egypt in 19th and 20th Century Archaeology and Anthropology’, the invasion brought Egypt into the sphere of European geopolitics, and made the country more accessible than ever before.²⁰⁹ Following this aborted invasion, Britain encountered Egypt through archaeology, foreign relations, travel, and aesthetics. Egypt’s utility as a trading partner, its developmental state, and its position within Mediterranean geopolitics were fiercely debated in early nineteenth-century Britain. This formed a significant aspect of the context in which *Egypt and Nubia* was produced.

Britain and France in Egypt

In 1799 Napoleon sailed to Egypt with a force of approximately 25,000 soldiers. His aim was to conquer the region. There he would stop nascent British-Indian trade routes,

²⁰⁹ Timothy Champion, ‘Beyond Egyptology: Egypt in 19th and 20th Century Archaeology and Anthropology,’ in *The Wisdom of Egypt*, ed. Peter J. Ucko and T. C. Champion (London: UCL Press, 2003), 161.

and ultimately march on India, where he would undermine the East India Company's hold on the region. In this he was unsuccessful, suffering naval defeat at the Battle of the Nile in August 1799 and ultimately returned to France the following year, leaving his troops behind. Napoleon's military adventure had many long-term consequences, but the most significant for this project was the rise in European scholarship concerning Egypt.²¹⁰ Much of the information to which Roberts would have had access was based on French research.

Before departing for Egypt, Napoleon assembled a team of 167 experts from a variety of scholarly fields, including artists, astronomers, engineers, and scientists, known as the *Institut d'Égypte*.²¹¹ The aim of this group was to study and record all relevant information on the state in order to further knowledge of history and the natural world. One of the *savants*,²¹² the artist and museum director Dominique Vivant Denon was charged with delineating the buildings and landscapes seen on the expedition, particularly ancient Egyptian architecture. Following his return to France in 1799 he organised these drawings and his journal into the publication, *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte pendant les campagnes du général Bonaparte*, published in France in 1802. Within the next year it was translated into English, published as *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* and was immensely popular. As noted historian James Stevens Curl states, 'few publications have enjoyed such an extensive circulation so quickly. Not only did Denon write a readable and extremely interesting account of the expedition, but provided a series of reasonably accurate views of the great buildings of Egypt...'²¹³ Denon's publication is significant to this project as it was responsible for informing

²¹⁰ James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival* (Abingdon: Routledge 2005), 204.

²¹¹ Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt* (London: Vintage 2008), 38.

²¹² *Savant* was the official title of the experts brought to Egypt by Napoleon. Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 200.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 204.

British perceptions of the region and thereby possibly helped to inspire *Egypt and Nubia*.

Despite having different objectives – not least political – both Denon’s and Roberts’ publications share a number of affinities. As Abigail Harrison Moore notes in her 2002 article, ‘*Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon and the transference of images of Egypt*’, Denon ‘reconstructed Egypt’s archaeology using a scientific system of standardization, a legible language of signs recognizable to both his French and English audiences.’²¹⁴ This language consisted of a variety of aesthetic frameworks, including the sublime and the picturesque.²¹⁵ The same can be said of *Egypt and Nubia*. Denon used these European frameworks to present a pseudo-panoramic view of Egypt, encapsulating what he believed was the sum total of the state.²¹⁶ Again, Roberts’ work was similarly arranged.²¹⁷

Visual similarities between Roberts’ and Denon’s publications can be seen in two images of the Sphinx. Both artists depict the monument in profile, surrounded by human figures to provide a sense of the scale and grandeur of the site. Both images feature jagged backgrounds framing rugged and decayed architecture in the middle ground. This compositional style would have been familiar to both Denon’s and Roberts’

²¹⁴ Abigail Harrison Moore, ‘Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon and the transference of images of Egypt,’ *Art History* 25, no. 4 (September 2002): 532.

²¹⁵ In addition to the images in *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, Denon also made use of the term in his text when describing Egyptian women and at least one village. Dominique-Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, translated by Arthur Aikin (New York: Heard and Forman, 1803), 1:88, 89, 125.

²¹⁶ Denon stated that his purpose was to ‘describe every thing’ as he was ‘engaged in travelling through a country which was known to Europe by name only.’ Dominique-Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1:vii.

²¹⁷ Roberts’ perception of Egypt was considered to be so accurate that the *Art Journal* definitively stated that there was ‘nothing to be done hereafter in the way of pictorial description of Egypt.’ See ‘Review of Roberts’s Egypt and Nubia. Published by Alderman Moon,’ *Art Journal*, no. 13 (February 1850): 66.

audience as picturesque,²¹⁸ and would have provided useful subtextual information on the state of Egypt. While the significance of Roberts' use of the picturesque in Egypt will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapters, here I am interested in the types of information that Roberts would have had access to prior to his own trip.

It is possible that Roberts modeled his image partially on Denon's, although a number of interesting differences appear when viewing the images in tandem.

The artists chose different vantage points in relation to the monument, thus highlighting various aspects of the desert landscape. Both depict the Sphinx at eye level, surrounded by rugged and barren middlegrounds. Denon positioned himself to the north of the monument, whereas Roberts sketched from the south. In Denon's image, the Sphinx is surrounded by rocks, shrubbery and sand dunes; Roberts included the Pyramid of Khafre in the background. There is no firm evidence on which to base an explanation as to why the artists chose different vantage points, but it is possible that Roberts was interested in distancing his image from Denon's. More interestingly, Roberts' lithograph maintains a complete lack of Western figures in the scene, whereas Denon inserts several Europeans, presumably members of the *Institut d'Égypte*. Denon's figures are seen climbing and measuring the Sphinx, recording its dimensions. The lithograph from *Egypt and Nubia* presents the site as bereft of Europeans, in a state of melancholy decay. This disparity highlights the artistic and political differences between Denon's and Roberts' projects.

²¹⁸ Harrison Moore, 'Voyage,' 532; David Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:17; Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1:x.



Fig. 17: Dominique-Vivant Denon, *View of the Sphinx, near Cairo*, 1802, engraving, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*



Fig. 18: David Roberts, *Side View of the Great Sphinx*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia Vol. I*

Crucially, Denon's publication was the result of a large-scale military invasion – he was a state-sponsored scholar. The research undertaken by the *Institut d'Égypte* was

intended to reinforce and consolidate France's control of Egypt, and as Harrison Moore suggests, 'France's annexation of Egypt is illustrated and codified by Denon.'²¹⁹

The use of information as a symbol of ownership is also a major theme of Said's *Orientalism*: 'knowledge of Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.'²²⁰ According to Said, this was the underlying principle of the French invasion.²²¹ In a Saidian interpretation, the ultimate aim of Napoleon's invasion was to know Egypt, and therefore control it, rather than to conquer it militarily. This intention can be seen in Denon's image of the Sphinx above, which is surrounded by Europeans. Through their measuring and recording, it could be argued that they entitled themselves to a claim of ownership of the monument.

Conversely, Roberts takes pains in his lithograph to depict the Sphinx without any persons in Western dress, thereby highlighting the exotic and picturesque nature of the scene.²²² *Egypt and Nubia* did not function in the same way as Denon's work, described by Harrison Moore as part of a larger programme of French domination.²²³ Roberts' intention was to create aesthetically pleasing and commercially viable images, which were free from any official state remit. The difference between the artists' intentions can be seen by comparing their respective remarks on picturesque Philæ. Denon, for instance, wrote:

²¹⁹ Harrison Moore discusses this in relation to Roland Barthes' 'autonomous iconography of the object' from his essay 'The Plates of the Encyclopaedia.' While Barthes' theories are exterior to my investigation, I do acknowledge their utility for understanding Denon's images. Harrison Moore, 'Voyage,' 546.

²²⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 36.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²²² While it is true that Denon mobilised the picturesque in a number of his images, they do not conform to British picturesque conventions as closely as Roberts' do. Amongst these conventions was the deletion of Europeans in modern clothing, who rarely feature in *Egypt and Nubia*.

²²³ Harrison Moore, 'Voyage,' 534-535.

During the twenty-two days which I spent on this celebrated spot, I took possession of whatever was to be found in its vicinity. I continued my conquests as far as Nubia, on the other side of Philæ, that delightful island, where it was necessary to snatch by force from the inhabitants the curiosities with which it abounded; and the temples of which were not opened to me until after five days of siege and six journeys I had made thither.²²⁴

Concepts such as capture and conquest would have been alien to Roberts – he never claimed to own, intellectually or otherwise, what he saw in Egypt. Instead, Roberts described the site aesthetically, calling Philæ ‘a paradise in the midst of desolation. Its ruins, even at a distance, are more picturesque than any that I have seen.’²²⁵ Roberts’ Philæ lithographs will be discussed in chapter five.

While Roberts’ lithographs, as seen above, may bear certain similarities to Denon’s Egyptian imagery, they do not function in the same ways, nor did they have the same intentions, as evidenced by the preface to *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, in which Denon stated, ‘an artist who undertakes to travel, should, before he sets out, divest himself of all professional prejudices; and that he ought not to consider what may or what may not make a fine drawing, but the general interest which the aspect of the spot he proposes to draw may inspire.’²²⁶ The general interest to which Denon referred related to Egypt serving as symbol for French power. As Harrison-Moore notes, ‘*Voyage* established the Egyptian style as representing... a link between the present empire builders and the most long-lived period of rule in history.’²²⁷ Denon’s engravings existed as a visual record of French conquest primarily, whereas their artistic merit was a secondary concern. This was not Roberts’ position – it is arguable that he

²²⁴ Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1:xiii.

²²⁵ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 18 November, 1838.

²²⁶ See Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1:ix.

²²⁷ Harrison Moore, ‘*Voyage*,’ 534.

considered himself an artist first and foremost in Egypt, and his lithographs to be aesthetic objects.

Following the success of *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, the French government produced its own, much larger-scale record of the *Institut d'Égypte*'s findings. The *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de Sa Majesté l'empereur Napoléon le Grand*,²²⁸ published between 1809 and 1828, contained twenty-one separate volumes of text and image, containing 837 copper engravings and more than 3,000 illustrations in total. The volumes contained all the information recorded during the invasion, relating to archaeology, landscape description, historical astronomy, geodesy, cartography, mineralogy, botany, zoology, hydrology and hydrological engineering, urban mapping, mensuration, agronomy, historical geography, musicology, history, public administration, historical toponymy, optics, medicine, climatology, anthropology and pedology.²²⁹ Each volume of the publication purported to contain complete and accurate information with no detail omitted. In short, it was intended to be a comprehensive survey of the entirety of Egypt, fusing text and image. It is an important body of work within the context of *Egypt and Nubia*, as Roberts would almost certainly have been aware of it, and its detailed imagery would likely have inspired some of his own. As Said noted, 'The *Description* became the master type of all further efforts to bring the Orient closer to Europe...'²³⁰

²²⁸ *Description of Egypt, or Reports of observations and research that were made in Egypt during the expedition of the French army, published by the orders of His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon the Great.*

²²⁹ Anne Godlewska, 'Map, Text and Image. The Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the *Description de l'Égypte*,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s. 20, no. 1 (1995): 7.

²³⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 87.

One of the intentions of the *Description de l'Égypte* was to recontextualise the failed invasion as a success. In the preface to the text, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier stated that, irrespective of the military invasion, France would succeed in rehabilitating a country with strategic significance and a great past, albeit with an inglorious present.

Placed between Africa and Asia, and communicating easily with Europe, Egypt occupies the center of the ancient continent. This country presents only great memories; it is the homeland of the arts and conserves innumerable monuments; its principal temples and the palaces inhabited by its kings still exist, even though its least ancient edifices had already been built by the time of the Trojan War.²³¹

Fourier placed ancient Egypt within the sphere of Western artistic and cultural development, suggesting that its temples and hieroglyphics were evidence of ancient greatness. However, despite this heroic past, he asserted that Egypt 'is today plunged into barbarism.'²³² The following volumes of the *Description de l'Égypte* aimed to prove that France would undertake the resuscitation of Egypt, not necessarily because it was commercially advantageous to do so, but because it was obliged to. According to the authors of the *Description de l'Égypte*, Napoleon had to modernise Egypt for the Egyptians and also to cement his position as European ruler par excellence. 'No considerable power was ever amassed by any nation, whether in the West or in Asia, that did not also turn toward Egypt, which was regarded in some measure as its natural lot.'²³³

²³¹ L'egypte, placée entre l'Afrique et l'Asie, et communiquant facilement avec l'Europe, occupe le centre de l'ancien continent. Cette contrée ne présente que de grands souvenirs; elle est la patrie des arts et en conserve des monumens innombrables; ses principaux temples, et les palais que ses rois ont habités, subsistent encore, quoique les moins anciens de ces édifices aient été construits avant la guerre de Troie. [i] Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier, 'Préface historique,' *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de Sa Majesté l'empereur Napoléon le Grand*, 23 vols (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1809-1828), 1:1.

²³² Cette contrée, qui a transmis ses connaissances à tant de nations-, est aujourd'hui plongée dans la barbarie [v] Fourier, 'Préface historique,' reprinted in Said, *Orientalism*, 85.

²³³ Il ne s'est formé, dans l'Occident ou dans l'Asie, aucune puissance considérable qui n'ait porté ses vues sur l'Égypte, et ne l'ait regardée, en quelque sorte, comme son apanage naturel. [ii] Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier, 'Préface historique,' *Description de l'Égypte*, 1:1.

Lacking political or military control of the state, France nevertheless claimed intellectual control of Egypt via textual and visual description. While the text of the *Description de l'Égypte* would be an interesting study in itself, my analysis will focus on its engravings and the ways in which Egypt was delineated visually. The images in the *Description de l'Égypte* included topography, flora and fauna, clothing, physiognomy, antiquities, and geography. Architectural and landscape engravings were organised into two separate categories, *Antiquités* and *État Moderne*. As James Stevens Curl notes, these two plate sets were based on, 'scientifically exact measurements of remaining buildings of Egyptian Antiquity, and on the detailed notes made by the surveyors regarding condition, detail, and so on.'²³⁴

Ancient Egyptian architecture was a central theme of the *Description de l'Égypte*, as in *Egypt and Nubia*.²³⁵ Both publications contain numerous references to ancient sites, such as the ruins of Kom Ombo, a temple built by the Ptolemies as part of the capital of an Egyptian province before Rome conquered Egypt in 30 BCE.²³⁶ Both scenes depict the temple in ruins, slowly melding with the barren desert sands. Brockedon's letterpress for Roberts' lithograph noted that the sand drifts imbued the scene with 'dreary desolation, in keeping with the decay of this once magnificent structure.'²³⁷

²³⁴ Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 226.

²³⁵ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 68.

²³⁶ Bourbon, *Egypt Yesterday and Today*, 121.

²³⁷ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:6.

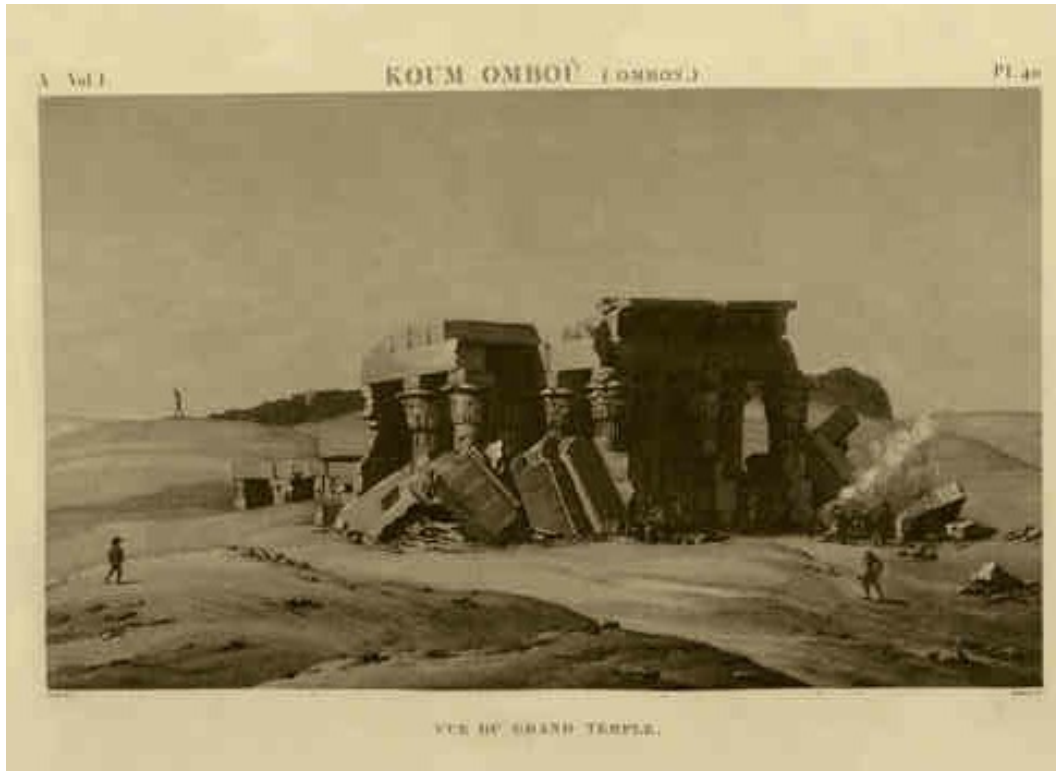


Fig. 19: *Koum Ombo*, 1809, engraving, *Antiquités Vol. I Description de l'Égypte*



Fig 20: David Roberts, *Ruins of the Temple of Kom-Ombo, Upper Egypt*, 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II

Both Roberts' and the *Description de l'Égypte*'s representations of Kom Ombo make use of picturesque conventions in order to accurately represent the site in relation to their particular contexts. The combination of decay, ruggedness, and textural variety all conform to the picturesque template. Interestingly, both images are also intended to be "accurate" depictions of the scene. As discussed in the previous chapter, nineteenth-century revisionist picturesque imagery was often utilised as a vehicle for accurate description, evidenced by Col. Jackson's remarks in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*.²³⁸

However, despite the revisionist picturesque qualities of engravings such as *Kom Ombo* in *Description de l'Égypte*, the overwhelming visual mode in the plates was inspired more by the scientific accuracy of topographical and architectural drawing than aesthetic templates. This can be seen in a tripartite engraving of Elephantine Island, from Volume I of the *Description de l'Égypte* [Fig. 21]. Only the central image contains picturesque subject matter. The top engraving is topographical while the bottom image is a mineralogical depiction of a view of a mined granite rock near the island.²³⁹ Other images, such as the temple plan at Elephantine Island [Fig. 22], suggest antiquarian rather than aesthetic description. The use of imagined structural plans, both in the *Description de l'Égypte* and Denon's publication, furthers the rational precision implied in the imagery.²⁴⁰ As a result of these contrasts, I suggest that the *Description de l'Égypte* and Denon's images operated in a different mode to Roberts', although they are related. Roberts' use of the revisionist picturesque will be discussed in more depth in chapter five.

²³⁸ Jackson, 'On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel,' 382-384.

²³⁹ 'Antiquités,' *Description de l'Égypte*, 1:72.

²⁴⁰ Anne Godlewska, 'Map, Text and Image,' 10.

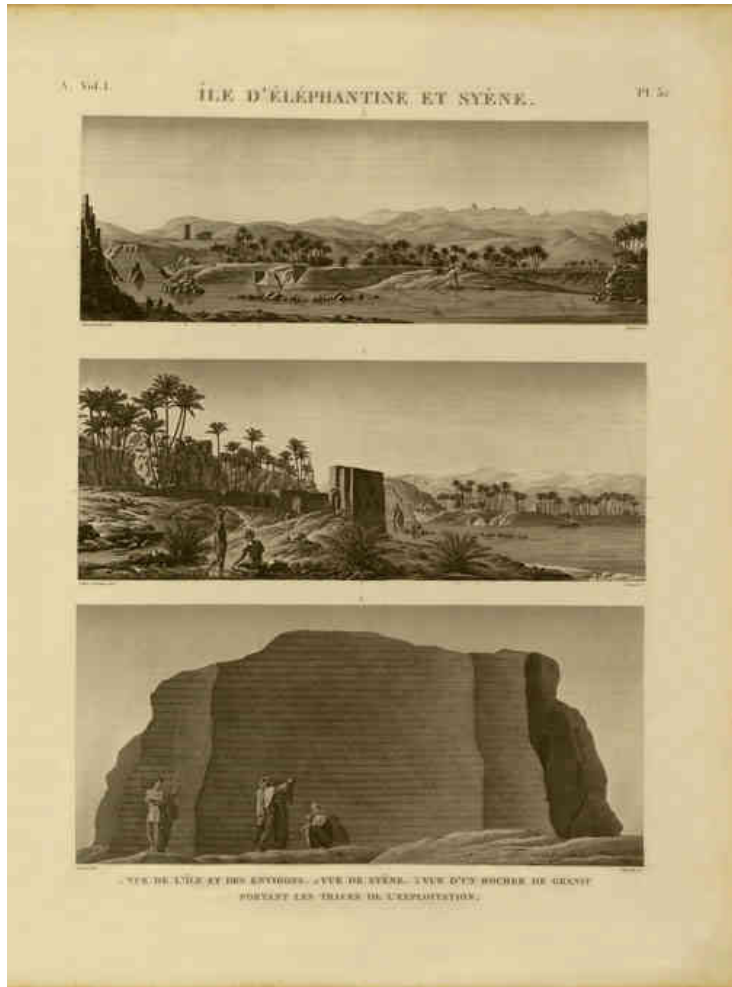


Fig 21: *Île D'Elephantine et Syène*, 1809, engraving, Antiquités Vol. I, *Description de l'Égypte*

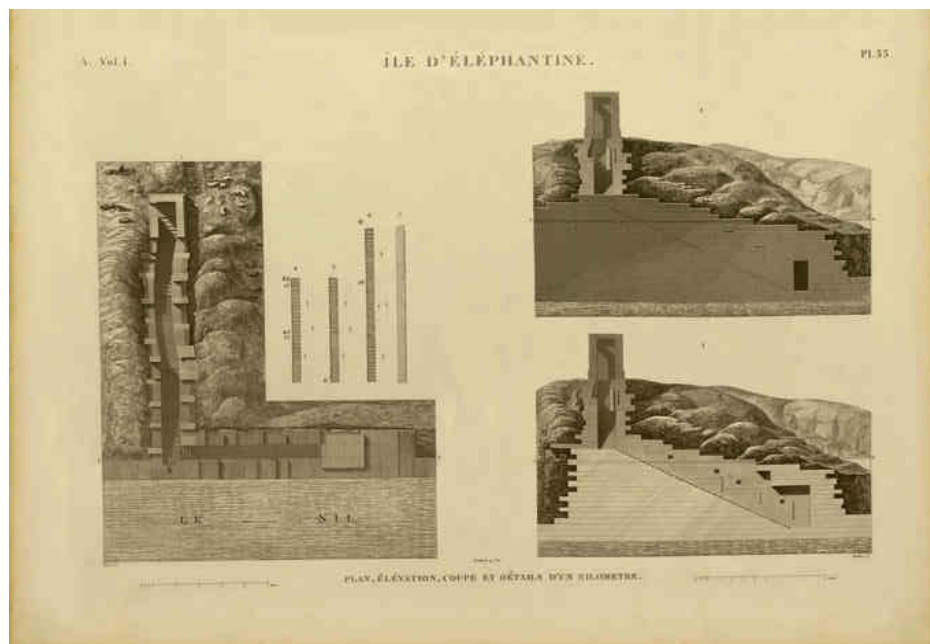


Fig 22: *Île D'Elephantine*, 1809, engraving, Antiquités Vol. I *Description de l'Égypte*

In relation to the previous discussion, it would appear that the French publications and *Egypt and Nubia* share certain visual affinities, but served fundamentally different purposes. Recall that Denon's publication was the initial salvo in a large-scale battle for intellectual ownership of Egypt and as Said asserted, the authors of the *Description de l'Égypte* aimed at nothing less than complete control over all Western knowledge relating to Egypt's history and present condition.²⁴¹ This information was arranged into a bifurcated history consisting of a glorious ancient past that had been undermined by centuries of mismanagement and barbarism. While Roberts agreed with this judgmental historiography, he did not use it for the same ends. As stated above, Roberts had no remit from the British government, nor did he have any overt ideological or propagandistic intent for his lithographs. Unlike the French publications, *Egypt and Nubia* was first and foremost an aesthetic publication, although it arguably did mirror dominant British opinion of Egypt's condition. This difference was tacitly acknowledged in a review of Roberts' drawings appearing in *The Times* on 10 June 1840. The reviewer noted the artistic merits of the drawings, arguing that their quality relative to the *Description de l'Égypte* was based in part on the military nature of the French work:

...the original [French] drawings were taken whilst the artists were on the wing, and not amidst the leisure and facilities of peace. Now, these views of Mr. Roberts have been taken under circumstances more propitious to excellence, and, though his labours have not been unattended with difficulty, and in some respects with danger, he has comparatively enjoyed opportunities with which his predecessors were not favoured.²⁴²

Despite their differences, however, it is likely that Denon's publication, along with the larger-scale *Description de l'Égypte* partially motivated Roberts to travel to the Levant

²⁴¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 84-85.

²⁴² 'Mr. David Roberts's Views In Palestine, Egypt, Arabia, &c.,' *Times* (London) 10 June, 1840.

in 1838. These French publications were the most comprehensive accounts of Egyptian life that he would have had access to. As Helen Whitehouse noted in her 2003 essay, ‘Archaeology Wedded to Art: Egyptian Architecture in 19th Century Painting’, ‘The records published by Denon, and subsequently in much greater detail by his colleagues in the *Description* provided the first informative stimulus for artists to incorporate extensive images of ancient Egyptian architecture into their work.’²⁴³ These publications introduced their British readership to Egyptian architecture, design, and antiquities, helping to develop the fashionable use of Egyptian motifs in early nineteenth-century Britain.²⁴⁴ This trend presented itself in such diverse forms as Thomas Hope’s *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* [1807] and William Bullock’s Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, London. Built in 1812, the Egyptian Hall was designed as a generalised pastiche of Egyptianized forms, despite the promotional material claiming that it was inspired by the Great Temple at Dendera [Fig. 23].²⁴⁵ It was described in Thomas Shepherd and James Elmes’ *Metropolitan Improvements; or London in the Nineteenth Century* [1827] as ‘correctly taken from Denon’s celebrated work, and principally from the great temple at Tentyra [sp]. The two colossal figures that support the entablature of the centre window are novel in idea and application, picturesque in effect, and add variety to the composition.’²⁴⁶ Roberts’ involvement with this “Egyptomania” was established in the previous chapter – his first large scale history painting for Lord Northwick, *Departure of the Israelites from Egypt*, was partially

²⁴³ Helen Whitehouse, ‘Archaeology Wedded to Art: Egyptian Architecture in 19th Century Painting,’ in *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture*, ed. Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price (London: UCL Press, 2003), 43.

²⁴⁴ Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 205.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁴⁶ Thomas Shepherd and James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements; or London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Jones & co., 1827), 157.

inspired by the fashion for Egyptian motifs, and contained similarly nonspecific Egyptian architectural elements.²⁴⁷



Fig 23. Thomas Shepherd, *Bullock's Museum (The Egyptian Hall)*, 1827, engraving, *Metropolitan Improvements; of London in the Nineteenth Century*

These architectural and design examples serve as evidence for the popularity of Egyptian motifs at the time. Additionally, genuine Egyptian artifacts became more popular in the early nineteenth century through their display in the British Museum and Bullock's Egyptian Hall, which displayed one of the first large-scale exhibitions of Egyptian antiquities in 1821.²⁴⁸ It is likely that Roberts visited the Egyptian Sculpture Room at the British Museum, only a short walk from his Bloomsbury home; he referred to the Museum in his *Eastern Journal*, noting that the sculptures at Wady Saboua 'were similar to those in the British Museum.'²⁴⁹ These pieces came to London as a result of

²⁴⁷ While the term "Egyptomania" has been used by authors such as James Stevens Curl, Elliott Colla and Jean-Marcel Humbert in the exhibition catalogue *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930*, the term is contentious. As Harrison Moore notes in 'Voyage' the term 'Egyptomania' 'suggests a compulsion, rather than a deliberate action within a political hegemony.' See Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 179; Harrison Moore 'Voyage,' 531; Jean-Marcel Humbert *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 1; Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 1.

²⁴⁸ Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 261.

²⁴⁹ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 5 November, 1838.

Anglo-French competition for archaeological artifacts in the 1810s. While the minutiae of the Anglo-French scramble for Egyptian antiquities is beyond the scope of this project, a brief explanation of the situation will help to explain the artifacts' significance in London.

Following the British Navy's seizure of the Rosetta Stone in 1801, a century of Anglo-French Egyptological rivalry ensued.²⁵⁰ The initial battles of this struggle for supremacy were fought between the British Consul in Egypt, named Henry Salt, and the French Consul, Bernardino Drovetti. Drovetti was sent to Egypt by Napoleon in 1802.

Dismissed by the restored Bourbon monarchy in 1814, he remained in the Levant as a free agent, collecting and selling artifacts to the highest bidder, usually the Louvre.²⁵¹

Drovetti had enjoyed unparalleled access to the antiquities since the turn of the century; Salt arrived in Egypt in 1815 with an official remit to upset French supremacy in the region. The British Foreign Office explicitly instructed Salt to collect artifacts in a memorandum from 1815, stating that the removal of Egyptian artifacts, 'would be most cheerfully supported by an enlightened nation, eager to anticipate its Rivals in the prosecution of the best interests of science and literature.'²⁵² Salt oversaw British interests there for over a decade, until his death in 1827, and managed to procure a collection of several thousand objects within two years, including the so-called Memnon Head, for the British Museum.²⁵³ This meant that the Museum was now able to compete with the more established collection of Egyptian artefacts at the Louvre.

²⁵⁰ This competition included the translation of the Rosetta Stone itself, ultimately done by the French linguist Jean-François Champollion in 1824. Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (London: University of California Press, 2002), 37.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵² As quoted in Stanley Mays, *The Great Belzoni: The Circus Strongman Who Discovered Egypt's Ancient Wonders* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1959), 114.

²⁵³ The sculpture has also been known by the name Ozymandias. It was only when Champollion translated Egyptian hieroglyphics that the figure was correctly identified as the pharaoh Ramesses II. It is

Both consuls competed for the attention of the Pacha Mehemet 'Ali, who understood the value of having a powerful European ally. As Deborah Manley and Peta Ree write in their biography of Salt:

[Mehemet 'Ali] placed no historic value on the spoils of a country with which he had no ancestral ties – but he judged shrewdly the political value of “permissions to dig” as a lever in his machinations to keep England and France in a co-operative rather than a coercive attitude towards his rule.²⁵⁴

'Ali was an Albanian-born Ottoman soldier who rose to power in Egypt following the expulsion of French troops in 1801. In 1805, he became the Ottoman governor of Egypt and began to actively modernise the state by building up manufactories and infrastructure. Both Britain and France were eager to aid in these developments, thus ensuring a privileged position within the region. France was more successful in this – Drovetti had a superior knowledge of Egypt and enjoyed a close friendship with Mehemet 'Ali – and in the early nineteenth century, France provided military experts to train the state's conscript army and engineers to oversee Mehemet 'Ali's modernisations. By the late 1830s, Egypt's developmental state was frequently criticised in the British press; often the blame for Egypt's perceived decrepitude was placed on French entrepreneurs and the malpractice of French consuls. This can be seen in art of the period, and as Christiane Ziegler states in the catalogue of the National Gallery of Canada's 1994 exhibition *Egyptomania*:

Early nineteenth-century art was profoundly influenced by the “Egyptian fashion”; while at the political level, infatuation of Egypt linked with the Napoleonic legend would persist throughout the century. In fact, the new surge of Egyptomania following the Egyptian Expedition was propelled in large part by political considerations.²⁵⁵

likely that the statue was the inspiration for Percy Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias'. See Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 53, 67.

²⁵⁴ Deborah Manley, Peta Ree, *Henry Salt* (London: Libri Publications, 2001), xiv.

²⁵⁵ Christiane Ziegler, 'The Return from Egypt,' in *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930*, ed. Jean-Marcel Humbert (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 253.

The theme of Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt was not lost on Roberts. He depicted several contested artifacts in *Egypt and Nubia*. Two of them, *Cleopatra's Needle* [Fig. 24] and *Obelisk at Luxor* [Fig. 25], were included in the series as potential 'expression[s] of nationalistic concern.'²⁵⁶ In *Obelisk at Luxor* Roberts depicted the site of the 3300 year-old obelisk featuring a gaping hole where the monument once stood before its removal to the Place de la Concorde in Paris in 1833. It had marked the entrance to the Luxor temple complex. The British obelisk, Cleopatra's Needle, had not yet been removed, and would not arrive in London until 1878. The obelisk was constructed in 1460 BCE for the pharaoh Thotmes III and was given to Britain by Mehemet 'Ali in 1819. Kenneth Bendiner has suggested that the subject matter of these two lithographs reflected England's failure to commemorate Nelson's victory over Napoleon in the Battle of the Nile by claiming the obelisk.²⁵⁷ According to Brockedon, it was offered as a 'trophy of the glorious termination of the war of 1801 in Egypt [against Napoleonic France],' although, to Brockedon's dismay, 'the project appears to have been abandoned.'²⁵⁸

The French obelisk, conversely, had been removed. Brockedon lamented:

The traveller who now looks upon the ruins of the Temple feels a deep regret that the completeness of its glorious façade should have been destroyed to gratify such a frivolous national vanity. The French obtained leave from Mohammed Ali to remove it; and erected it, at enormous cost, in their national capital. *Cui bono?* – not to preserve it from destruction, not to commemorate a victory, or to mark an era in the history of France; but it was removed from its place of honour, where it had stood for thirty-three centuries, only to decorate, with the help of bronze and gilding, a spot in Paris which has been stained with a thousand crimes.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East: Social and Religious Themes,' 73.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁵⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:1.

²⁵⁹ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:22.



Fig 24: David Roberts, *Cleopatra's Needle*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. I

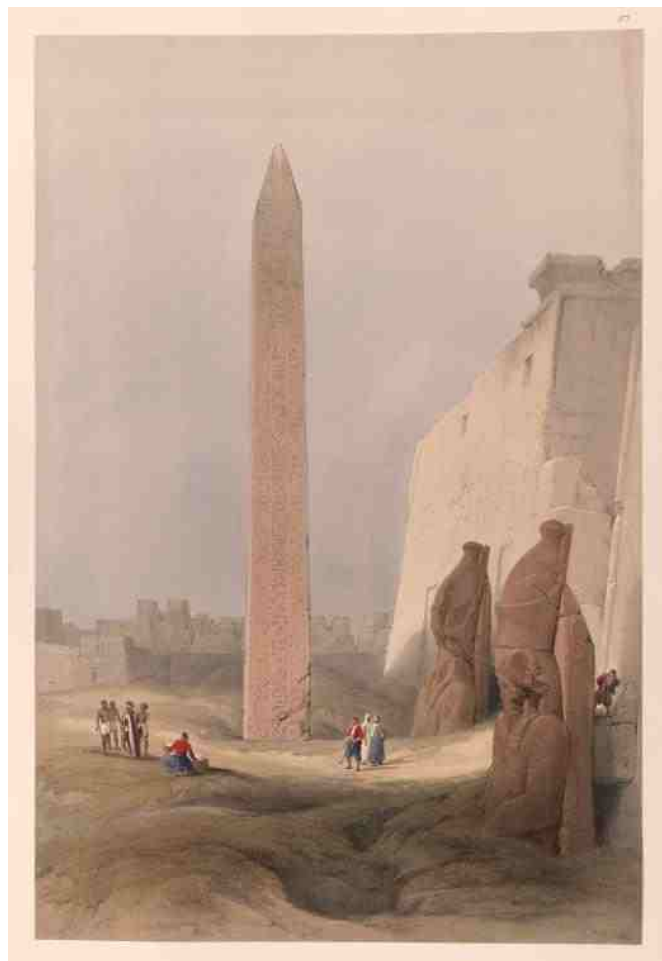


Fig 25: David Roberts, *Obelisk at Luxor*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia* Vol. I

It is clear that Brockedon – and presumably Roberts – distinguished between French involvement in Egypt, believed to be negative, and Britain’s, which was considered to be positive.²⁶⁰ According to Brockedon, Britain’s claim on the obelisk was based on the preservation of the monument from destruction and to commemorate a national victory. Effectively, he suggested that Britain had a right to remove “Cleopatra’s Needle”, whereas the French did not have any reasonable claim to the obelisk at Luxor. These images suggest that as a result of French influence, Egypt was squandering its cultural and archaeological legacy. Evidence of this sentiment can be seen in British reportage on Egypt in the early nineteenth century, such as in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* and its reportage on the gift of the obelisk to France. The journal suggested that the gift was inappropriate and that France should have no claim to it.²⁶¹

While French interference into Egyptian antiquities and development was a concern in the decade prior to Roberts’ publication, the Egyptian government’s own mismanagement was an increasing concern as well. British criticism of the Egyptian state centred around the Pacha. ‘Ali was a frequent topic of discussion in the British press of the mid-to-late 1830s, often being criticised for his despotic rule and reliance on French expertise for infrastructural development. In 1834 the *Athenaeum* stated that while the Pacha’s reforms were significant, his treatment of his subjects, particularly the lower classes, was deplorable,²⁶² and that, ‘his plans of reform require money, and to collect money, by right or by wrong, is the leading, almost the only principle of his

²⁶⁰ It is important to remember that Brockedon based his letterpress on Roberts’ *Eastern Journal* and interviews. Roberts himself suggested that Brockedon merely copied his recollections. See Proctor, ‘David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,’ 48.

²⁶¹ ‘The World We Live In. No. III,’ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 254, no. 1 (January 1837): 33.

²⁶² ‘Review of *Egypt and Mohammed Ali, or Travels in the Valley of the Nile*, by James Augustus St. John,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 339 (26 April 1834): 307-308.

administration.²⁶³ The author further noted that Egypt's legislature was 'little more than a court for the registration of [his] edicts.'²⁶⁴ This position was seconded in *The Times* and other leading journals of the day.²⁶⁵

Additionally, books and pamphlets such as James St. John's *Egypt and Mohammed Ali* [1834], Edward Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* [1836], C. Rochfort Scott's *Egypt and Candia* [1837], and Lord Lindsay's *Letters on Egypt* [1838] highlighted the debased state of much of the population, in spite of the reforms that the Pacha undertook in the early 1830s. George Robinson wrote in his book, *Travels in Palestine and Syria* [1837], that: 'As we pushed off from the shore [of the Nile], many a poor Arab fellah gazed upon our bark with a longing eye, as if desirous to escape from the tyrannic chains of the present ruler of Egypt.'²⁶⁶ Other writers reiterated this position. St. John described Egypt as a dichotomy:

Yet, in the midst of this magnificent plain [the Nile delta]... the poorest villages, perhaps, in Egypt are found. The Nile overflows, and the sun ripens in vain. Misgovernment more than counterbalances the bounty of nature, and leaves the wretched peasant pining with want in the midst of luxuriant harvests and over-filled granaries.²⁶⁷

This passage highlights the perceived disparity between the present state of the underclasses and infrastructural reforms undertaken by the Egyptian government, which St. John discussed in his letter to the *Athenaeum* in 1833. This position was also

²⁶³ 'Review of *Egypt and Palestine*, by M. Michaud et M. Poujoulat,' *Athenaeum*, no. 377 (17 January, 1835): 50-52.

²⁶⁴ 'Review of *Egypt and Mohammed Ali*, by James Augustus St. John,' *Athenaeum*, no. 339 (26 April, 1834): 307-308.

²⁶⁵ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 10 May, 1834; 'Turkey and Her Relations,' *Times* (London) 11 September, 1835; Veritas, letter to the editor, *Times* (London) 7 November, 1835; 'News,' *Times* (London) 23 July, 1836; 'Varieties,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1007 (1 May 1836): 284; 'Our Weekly Gossip on Literature and Art,' *Athenaeum*, no. 445 (7 May 1836): 329; 'The World We Live In. No. III,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 254, no. 1 (January 1837): 33; 'Private Correspondence,' *Times* (London) 4 August, 1837.

²⁶⁶ George Robinson, *Travels in Palestine and Syria* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), 1:11.

²⁶⁷ St. John, *Mohammed Ali*, 97-98.

maintained in other literature, such as Edward Lane's influential *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*.²⁶⁸ This is significant, as *Egypt and Nubia* also presented the state as developmentally unsound, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

While much of this writing formed the context of Roberts' journey to Egypt, one book, Lord Lindsay's *Letters on Egypt, Edom, and the Holy Land* relates specifically to Roberts, who carried a copy of this book on his trip.²⁶⁹ Lord Lindsay's book was an indictment of the state in the mid-1830s. He stated unequivocally, 'we have heard much at home of the reforming enlightened spirit of Mohammed Ali, but what is it founded on? It looks more like a great and sudden blaze before the whole is extinguished and falls into total darkness,'²⁷⁰ and that '[Mehemet 'Ali's] trees only are likely to survive him.'²⁷¹ The British concerns were shared by Roberts, who mused on his misgivings about the Pacha in the *Eastern Journal* and a letter to his daughter written from Cairo.²⁷²

Ambivalence manifested itself in Roberts' voyage and subsequent imagery. While the artist was doubtful of the competence of Egypt's ruler, Roberts received cordial assistance from the government and Mehemet 'Ali personally.²⁷³ He was impressed by the Pacha's order that local officials give his party all the assistance they needed, one of the Pacha's customs with visiting Europeans.²⁷⁴ Roberts also received the rare privilege

²⁶⁸ Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Library of Entertaining Knowledge, 1836), 1.

²⁶⁹ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 21 January, 1839.

²⁷⁰ Lindsay, *Letters on Egypt*, 25.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷² David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 22 December, 1838, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 105; Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 19 January, 1839.

²⁷³ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 51.

²⁷⁴ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 106.

of access to the interiors of Cairo's mosques, provided that he dress in Ottoman-style clothes and refrain from using hog's hair brushes while sketching, as the brushes would be offensive in a Muslim place of worship.²⁷⁵ Generally, Roberts was well treated by the Egyptian government. This positive impression was heightened when the Pacha granted Roberts an audience with him in the spring of 1839. As Proctor noted in his essay on *Egypt and Nubia*, the resultant lithograph from this meeting, *Interview with Mehemet Ali in His Palace at Alexandria* [Fig. 26] depicted the ruler as 'cordial, sagacious, and even benevolent.'²⁷⁶



Fig 26: David Roberts, *Interview with Mehemet Ali in His Palace at Alexandria*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

This lithograph was a recollection of a meeting between the Pacha, British consul Patrick Campbell, Thomas Waghorn, and various Egyptian and British dignitaries, which Roberts attended.²⁷⁷ The discussion centred on a proposed trade route across the

²⁷⁵ Sim, *David Roberts*, 152.

²⁷⁶ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 52.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Isthmus of Suez. Waghorn was an entrepreneur as well as a dedicated supporter of Mehemet 'Ali who proposed to Parliament in his pamphlet *Egypt As It Is in 1837* that Britain should align itself with Egypt and throw its full support behind steam navigation to India via the Overland route.²⁷⁸ Colonel Campbell was also supportive, albeit with the caution that came from being a diplomatic official.²⁷⁹ Roberts noted this meeting in his *Eastern Journal*, writing, 'Sadly, [Campbell] and Waghorn are at loggerheads. Waghorn is, I rather think, too hurried and the Col. too slow for these railway times.'²⁸⁰

Interview with Mehemet Ali in His Palace at Alexandria is an interesting lithograph within the series, as it is the only image depicting known individuals. The image lacks the picturesque ruined monuments and crowded streets that can be seen in the rest of *Egypt and Nubia*. The only picturesque feature in the scene, as noted by Roberts, was the Egyptian clothing worn by the Pacha and his retinue.²⁸¹ In the image Egyptian clothing is contrasted with the three British figures' outfits, both military and civilian – Roberts is the figure on the right not wearing military dress. The composition of this lithograph, especially Mehemet 'Ali's position relative to Campbell, Waghorn, and Roberts is telling. The Pacha poses languidly, with crossed legs and his hookah while the British figures sit upright and hold plans for a trade route. Possibly, Roberts was alluding to the long-held stereotype that 'Orientals' were sensuous and inactive.²⁸² This is, however, only one possible interpretation, and Roberts' use of Egyptian stereotypes such as these will be discussed in chapter five. However, it can be inferred from this

²⁷⁸ Thomas Waghorn, *Egypt As It Is in 1837* (London: J. Unwin, 1837), 1.

²⁷⁹ F.S. Rodkey, 'Colonel Campbell's Report on Egypt 1840, with Lord Palmerston's Comments,' *Cambridge Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1929): 103.

²⁸⁰ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 14 January, 1839.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9 October, 1838.

²⁸² Said, *Orientalism*, 72.

image that, as with the obelisk images, Roberts was interested in depicting journalistically relevant subject matter.

The relevance of the Pacha's portrait lay in both the celebrated Egyptian ruler himself and the subject of the meeting depicted. British interest in Egypt revolved around its utility as a route for its lucrative Indian trade.²⁸³ As Sarah Searight discusses in her work, *Steaming East* [1991] Indian trade was the dominant concern in Anglo-Egyptian relations, helping to forge British opinion in the early Victorian world.²⁸⁴ Beginning in the 1830s, journals such as *The Times* frequently discussed Egypt as an overland trade route to India.²⁸⁵ On 3 February 1830, the newspaper reported that not only was this development imminent, but that it had the full support of the Egyptian government.²⁸⁶ On 15 April 1830, the newspaper reprinted a letter stating that, 'we hope to see Egypt shortly become (as it ought to be) the high road to the British colonies in the East, and India brought, as it were, to our door.'²⁸⁷

Like many contemporary commentators, Roberts was enthusiastic about Egypt's role as a British trade route, and believed that it would help remedy the state's perceived dilapidation. Roberts himself wondered, 'Will this desert ever again become the busy haunt of men? Nothing is more probable, as Egypt is the medium of our direct intercourse with India.'²⁸⁸ This was also noted in the letterpress for *Egypt and Nubia*. In the text accompanying *Approach to Alexandria*, Brockedon explicitly stated that British

²⁸³ G.D. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli* (London: University of London Press, 1971), 11.

²⁸⁴ Sarah Searight, *Steaming East* (London: Bodley Head, 1991), 42-44, 58, 62.

²⁸⁵ See 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 3 February, 1830; 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 15 April, 1830; 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 3 June, 1830.

²⁸⁶ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 3 February, 1830.

²⁸⁷ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 15 April, 1830.

²⁸⁸ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 91-92.

trade would ensure ‘the future prosperity of Egypt.’²⁸⁹ This sentiment was again expressed in the letterpress to ‘Entrance to the Citadel of Cairo,’ in which he wrote that increased interaction with Europe would improve Egypt and undo the mismanagement of its past governments.²⁹⁰ However, images and sentiments such as these were the result of conflict as well as cooperation.

Politics and the revisionist picturesque in the 1830s

The majority of images in *Egypt and Nubia* do not explicitly relate to Anglo-Egyptian relations in the 1830s. Instead, most of the lithographs feature picturesque landscape scenes and archaeological remains. However, it is possible that Roberts’ mobilization of the revisionist picturesque contains an implicit political dimension, related to the view that Egypt was a decayed place that required assistance. The artist would have had a wide variety of literature available to him espousing this position. This early-Victorian perception of Egypt can be seen in a variety of literary genres, but none more so than British travel writing. The language used to describe Egypt, particularly with regards to landscape, populace, and architecture, in the literature appears to be strikingly similar to the visual language used in British and revisionist picturesque description discussed in the previous chapter. In the 1830s, travel literature about Egypt shifted from seemingly objective description to a more expressive prose style that made use of concepts like ruin, decay, and ‘wretchedness.’²⁹¹ This literature may have influenced Roberts’ work in *Egypt and Nubia*. While it is unclear whether or not he read travelogues, the artist’s work emphasised the same qualities that the travel literature did.²⁹² It seems probable

²⁸⁹ David Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:4.

²⁹⁰ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:16.

²⁹¹ Nadia El Kholy, ‘Romances and Realities of Travellers,’ in *Unfolding the Orient* ed. Paul Starkey and Janet Starkey (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2001), 262.

²⁹² See Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:6, 15, 18, 21; Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:38, 43; Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:1, 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17, 20.

that the popularity of *Egypt and Nubia* in the 1840s and 1850s was partially based on the perception of the state propagated by picturesque description in travel literature.

The perception of Egypt as a misgoverned or ‘backward’ state went hand-in-hand with a shift in style on travel writing, away from authoritative and faithful description of objects, as in John Gardner Wilkinson’s *The Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt* [1835], and towards impressions made upon the authors’ imaginations.²⁹³

Egyptian literary critic Dr. Rashad Rushdi firmly divided travel writing on Egypt into an antiquarian/realist period, dated between 1805 and 1835, and a romantic period dating from 1835 to 1850, when the picturesque became the dominant descriptive mode and in which ‘certain aspects of [Egypt] were as common knowledge then as some parts of Switzerland or France.’²⁹⁴ Rushdi’s use of Switzerland and France is informative, as both states were delineated in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* in the 1830s and considered to be picturesque locales. The familiarity described by Dr. Rushdi was based in part on the mode of description and the type of material highlighted – that unmodern subject matter in Egypt could be described as picturesque.

Many travel writers in the 1830s emphasised aspects of Egypt that were readily identifiable as picturesque, such as ruins and wretched figures. While the majority of literature published in the 1830s discussed the state’s political situation, Egypt’s picturesque aspect became much more pronounced in the middle of the decade.

Occasionally the two concepts were linked. As Thomas Skinner pointed out in his *Adventures During a Journey Overland to India* [1836], ‘Colleges, manufactories, and disciplined armies, do not make the peasantry of the miserable villages throughout the

²⁹³ El Kholy, ‘Romances and Realities of Travellers,’ 262.

²⁹⁴ Rashad Rushdie, *English Travellers in Egypt During the Reign of Mohamed Ali* (Cairo: Fouad I University Press, 1952), 1, 35.

valley or the delta of the Nile one bit happier or more free: they are wretched in appearance, and wretched in fact.²⁹⁵ The linkage of a wretched existence and a wretched appearance bound the negative reportage to revisionist picturesque vocabulary.

This connection is significant for an understanding of *Egypt and Nubia*, which also potentially conflates negativity and the revisionist picturesque. According to the *Eastern Journal*, Roberts had ample opportunity to witness the wretchedness of modern Egyptian life, and was frequently struck by governmental corruption and its adverse effect on local populations.²⁹⁶ While travelling he was told that the nilometer, which was used to calculate the level of the Nile inundation, and the level of tax levied on farmers, was usually more calibrated to the state of Egypt's treasury than to the Nile's depth.²⁹⁷ In the letterpress accompanying *A Group at the Entrance of the Temple of Amun at Goorna, Thebes* [Fig. 27] Brockedon remarked that the figures in the scene were entreating an officer of the Pacha to intervene in a disagreement. The officer is shown accepting a bribe, 'without regard to the injustice which it is almost certain will attend his administration.'²⁹⁸ The positioning of the figures around the crumbling ruins of the Temple of Amun invites the viewer to conclude that it is the fault of the Egyptian government in its indifference to its citizens that the temple was literally falling down around them as the result of governmental corruption.

²⁹⁵ Skinner, *Adventures During a Journey Overland to India*, 52.

²⁹⁶ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 19 January, 1839.

²⁹⁷ Sim, *David Roberts*, 157.

²⁹⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:10.



Fig 27: David Roberts, *A Group at the Entrance to the Temple at Amun at Goorna, Thebes*, 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II

This lithograph, and others like it, appears to intertwine the aesthetic appeal of the revisionist picturesque with the British perception that Egypt was misgoverned. However, neither this image, nor any other in *Egypt and Nubia*, depicts physical mistreatment or suffering. This is despite the fact that in the decade prior to publication newspapers, journals, and travelogues were awash with stories of Egyptians being mistreated by their government. The disconnection between Egyptian reality and Roberts' representation of it is indicative the restrictive visual filter that the artist used in his lithographs. Specifically, Roberts disallowed any subject matter that would upset the picturesque framework through which he presented the state. While the artist knew that images of backward and decayed Egypt could resonate with the dominant British perception of the state, grotesque or violent images would not necessarily be saleable.

Despite the fact that he personally witnessed young girls carrying stones and mortar to one of Mehemet 'Ali's building sites, with 'task-masters who use their whips

unsparingly,²⁹⁹ they do not appear in any lithograph. In the letterpress to ‘Approach to Alexandria’ the government’s regeneration of the port of Alexandria was described as being a violent event, and completed ‘at the cost of many thousands of the lives of the poor creatures, who are forced by him to labour in the public works.’³⁰⁰ Images of these figures did not appear in *Egypt and Nubia*, however.

This tendency can also be seen in images of slavery in the series. As Gabriel Baer stated in his 1967 essay ‘Slavery in Nineteenth-century Egypt,’ between 1839 and 1840 there were between 22,000-30,000 slaves in Egypt, of African and Eastern European descent,³⁰¹ and Roberts depicted this trade in his lithographs. The artist personally attended slave markets, and wrote that he found them disgusting, claiming to be ‘proud to live in a country that had abolished slavery.’³⁰² These remarks are among the most topical of the subjects that he discussed in his journal – he was almost certainly referring to the British emancipation of slaves in 1833 and the immediate aftermath, when Britain turned its attention towards the international slave trade. Particular interest was paid to the Near Eastern slave market,³⁰³ of which Egypt’s was one, and Roberts would doubtless have been aware of that. Indeed, Egypt was one of the only Muslim countries that still used slaves for agricultural labour by the time of Roberts’ visit, and the practice was widespread amongst all but the poorest strata of society.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 110.

³⁰⁰ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:4.

³⁰¹ Gabriel Baer, ‘Slavery in Nineteenth-century Egypt,’ *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 423.

³⁰² David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 24 September, 1838, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 81-82.

³⁰³ Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century*, 82.

³⁰⁴ Baer, ‘Slavery in Nineteenth-century Egypt,’ 421-422.

Two lithographs in *Egypt and Nubia* explicitly depict slavery: *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti* [Fig. 28] and *A Group in the Slave Market in Cairo* [Fig. 29]. Each image referred to a different point on the Egyptian slave route. The first image, *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti* depicts Abyssinian slaves most likely on the route from Sennar to Berber and then down the Nile to Cairo where they would be sold – the most popular Abyssinian slave route until the 1860s.³⁰⁵



Fig 28: David Roberts, *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. I

This image depicts a rest stop in Korti, near the Temple of Debod, at which the slaves are grinding corn to make cornmeal. The figures are arranged in three groups, with the Nubian slave trader on the right. Although the letterpress noted that the scene took place near the Temple of Debod, the figures are positioned in an indistinct space and serve as the subject of the lithograph. Brockedon quoted Roberts in the letterpress, stating that the artist considered the scene to be ‘a very melancholy one,’ although both the slaves

³⁰⁵ Baer, ‘Slavery in Nineteenth-century Egypt,’ 424-425.

and the slave merchant were ‘rather good looking.’³⁰⁶ Brockedon also noted that the Abyssinian slaves, once purchased, would be well treated by their masters and would serve as the ‘general maternity of citizens of Lower Egypt.’³⁰⁷ The following image *A Group in the Slave Market in Cairo* depicts a similar group of slaves at the final stage of the route in Cairo.



Fig 29: David Roberts, *A Group in the Slave Market in Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

The slave images provide perhaps the most compelling evidence for Roberts’ restrictive visual filter. *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti* does not show the slaves being mistreated. Indeed, the composition of this image bears a strong resemblance to eighteenth-century picturesque mountain imagery. If the figures are viewed only in outline and not as figures, they resemble the spine of the mountain in Gilpin’s *Picturesque Mountain Landscape* [Fig. 2] discussed in chapter two. The outlines of the figures, with their draped clothing and irregular grouping, possess the rough and rugged shape that was

³⁰⁶ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:27.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

central to Gilpin's theories of the picturesque. *A Group in the Slave Market in Cairo* depicts slaves as completely depersonalised objects displaying picturesque qualities without moralising on their condition. Neither of the images depicts the slave masters as violent. Both images feature slaves sleeping or interacting with each other, and all but four figures in the two lithographs are sitting – none of the slaves appear to be in distress. In the letterpress to *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti*, Brockedon noted, citing both the *Eastern Journal* and Eliot Warburton's *Crescent and the Cross* as sources, that these slaves were treated well after they were purchased.³⁰⁸ How is it possible to reconcile Roberts' private outrage and his pictorial indifference to the violence inherent in slavery?

The fact that Roberts' did not vilify slavery in his lithographs is evidence for the mode in which he viewed his Egyptian subjects. The artist did not intend for his images to be overtly political or socio-critical, but to be picturesque. Roberts was preoccupied with the aesthetic qualities of the Egyptian slaves,³⁰⁹ and this preoccupation disallowed explicit images of violence or suffering. While he frequently depicted Egyptian figures as wretched, none in *Egypt and Nubia* are shown in distress. In this regard the suffering of Egyptian slaves that he noted in his journal was like the unproductive factories that were noted by some travel writers but absent from Roberts' lithographs. While the depiction of derelict factories or slaves being mistreated would have highlighted the artist's personal opinions, their presence would diminish the images' picturesqueness.

It is interesting to note that Brockedon also avoided proselytizing on the evils of slavery in the letterpress for these images. In the letterpress to obelisk imagery discussed earlier

³⁰⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:27.

³⁰⁹ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the ideology of imperialism,' 57.

Brockedon explicitly stated that the removal of the Luxor monument was an outrage while in the slave imagery both the text and image fail to prompt a similar level of denunciation. This does not imply that either Roberts or Brockedon was in favour of slavery. The subtext of the images and text do suggest, however, that Egyptians were uncivilised because they still owned slaves after Britain abolished the trade. It is possible that explicit images of the slave master's brutality would not have been necessary to impart this point. However, representations of brutality would certainly have diminished the picturesque quality of the scene.

This restrictive visual filter can also be seen in the lack of modern subject matter in Roberts' lithographs. Despite the fact that Mehemet 'Ali had spent the previous two decades building factories and purchasing machinery from both the British and the French, they do not appear in any image in *Egypt and Nubia*. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that the artist did not equate prosperity with the picturesque. As with his Spanish imagery, Roberts chose to restrict any features that interfered with the scene's aesthetic. Although he saw unpicturesque scenery in Egypt, he was disinclined to delineate it. Despite the fact that Roberts was interested in producing journalistically relevant subject matter, he appears to have been unwilling to sacrifice revisionist picturesque marketability in order to do so. The deletion of modern infrastructure in *Egypt and Nubia* again conforms to Leask's theory, discussed in the previous chapter, that modernity was anathema to the picturesque.³¹⁰

In his informative study of Mehemet 'Ali's army, *All the Pacha's Men*, Khaled Fahmy writes that Egypt's infrastructure and military were highly visible in the 1830s.

³¹⁰ Leaske, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 168.

The army occupied central stage among the Pasha's numerous institutions and was the *raison d'être* of various other impressive institutions. For example, the many factories that were founded were intended mainly to produce commodities for the use of the army, which was their most important market. Similarly, most of the schools that were opened were aiming at graduating officers for the army. Likewise, the earliest modern hospitals to be built in Egypt were essentially military hospitals that were constructed near camps with high troop concentration.³¹¹

As discussed above, Egypt in the 1830s was a tumultuous state, undergoing modernisation and grappling with European powers for lucrative trade. This situation was most highly visible in the development of Egypt's military. Despite this visibility, however, there are no images of Egypt's large conscript army in the series. This is interesting, as Roberts was in Egypt during the second Ottoman-Egyptian conflict, as will be discussed in the next chapter. He saw the conscripts himself, and reflected on them in his *Eastern Journal*, stating that in some villages every man had cut off his right thumb to avoid conscription and that the soldiers were treated 'more as convicts than as conscripts'.³¹² Their situation greatly distressed the artist and he concluded that conscription was the basis for Mehemet 'Ali's unpopularity with the Egyptian people.³¹³ Despite this, no soldiers appear in the series.

Proctor has suggested that visual evidence for this sentiment could be seen in the figurative lithograph *The Letter Writer, Cairo* [Fig. 30] and in its letterpress.³¹⁴ While there is nothing in the image to suggest conscription, Brockedon noted in the accompanying text that the woman in the scene might have been dictating a message intended for someone 'torn perhaps from her by the hated and cruel conscription.'³¹⁵

³¹¹ Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pacha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

³¹² Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 12 October, 1838, 11 January, 1839.

³¹³ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the ideology of imperialism,' 52.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

³¹⁵ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:31.

However, the lithograph does not acknowledge the existence of a large and growing military force.



Fig 30: David Roberts, *The Letter Writer, Cairo 1849*, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

The similarities between Roberts' presentation of Egypt as unmodern and popular British perception are also noticeable in the reception of Sir John Bowring's *Report on Egypt and Candia* published in 1840. Bowring had petitioned Parliament to support Egypt since 1838,³¹⁶ believing that an independent Egypt would be a commercial ally of Britain.³¹⁷ He travelled to Egypt to survey the industrial, military, and social situation in Egypt in the late 1830s and noted that, 'The strong hand of Mahomet Ali removed the

³¹⁶ F.G. Bartle, 'Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,' *The English Historical Review* 79, no. 313 (October 1964): 766.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 766.

hundred oppressors who in various parts of Egypt levied their tribute from the people.³¹⁸ He presented the state as progressive and as a viable trading partner.

However, his findings were not well received in the media. The months after his return to Britain in August 1838 witnessed the signing of the Balta Liman free-trade agreement between Britain and the Ottoman Empire and Britain's public defense of the Ottoman Empire. In essence, Bowring's cry fell on deaf ears; even Palmerston himself, who sent Bowring to Egypt, described the reported industrial advances as 'inauthentic'.³¹⁹ Palmerston rejected Bowring's report and described it as 'nonsense from beginning to end',³²⁰ a position seconded by *The Times*. In the 11 January 1841 edition their Egyptian correspondent reported on the reception of Dr. Bowring's report in Alexandria, describing the report as inherently flawed.³²¹ The correspondent stated that Bowring was tricked by Mehemet 'Ali into believing that industry and the military were developing into something akin to an European nation's, describing Bowring's impression of Egypt as a 'mirage'.³²²

The Times' correspondent went on to correct various passages of the *Report on Egypt and Candia* from his own personal experience, touching on industry, taxation, and slavery. *The Times'* correspondent noted that none of the cotton factories described by Bowring were in existence in 1840, owing to the fact that the largely conscripted workers were under-trained and starving, and therefore could not work.³²³ All this misery, according to the reporter, came to nothing, as the cotton was of such poor

³¹⁸ Bartle, 'Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis,' 766.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 767.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 767.

³²¹ 'Private Correspondence,' *Times* (London) 11 January, 1841.

³²² *Ibid.*, 5.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

quality that it was unsaleable at any price and eventually ‘the Pacha’s 44 manufactories died a natural death.’³²⁴ Bowring’s report on the Navy was reported as ‘amusing’ and the navy itself as filthy, ignorant, fanatic, and semi-savage.³²⁵

The denial of infrastructural developments such as these might correlate to Roberts’ presentation of the state as decayed and crumbling. It is interesting that imagery from *Egypt and Nubia* corresponds to several politicised textual descriptions, despite the fact that Roberts had no political intentions for his work. It is possible that, while the artist wished to create a series of novel imagery based around a recognisable template, he knew that picturesque description would resonate with the British perception of Egyptian backwardness. If so, then his images tacitly endorse the misinformed view that Egypt was developmentally unsound. Based in part on the tumultuous Anglo-Egyptian relationship in the early nineteenth century, much of the readership of *Egypt and Nubia* believed that they had an accurate understanding of Egypt, and knew what did and did not exist there. This was despite the fact that almost every representation of the state, including Roberts’, was doctored. Much of Egypt’s political and developmental landscape was edited or deleted from British descriptions of the state around the time of Roberts’ journey. How, then, was the state described?

A number of travel writers and journalists described Egypt using picturesque vocabulary. Authors such as Skinner described Arab thieves as picturesque,³²⁶ and Lord Lindsay found that veiled women, harems, black eunuchs, ‘richly-dressed Bedouin Sheikhs,’ and other figures in a Cairo bazaar were ‘familiar to [his] imagination’ as

³²⁴ ‘Private Correspondence,’ *Times* (London) 11 January, 1841.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³²⁶ Skinner, *Adventures During a Journey Overland to India*, 191.

picturesque.³²⁷ Lindsay also stated that a passing boat of Bedouins on the Nile was ‘savagely picturesque.’³²⁸ Writing in 1834, James Augustus St. John considered all of Egypt to be picturesque.³²⁹ In *Egypt and Mohammed Ali*, he described ‘the rocky eminence’ of Cheops as ‘various in form and height, which cause it to exhibit a ruggedness of aspect...’³³⁰ The words ‘various’ and ‘rugged’ are particularly useful, as they constitute two of the picturesque’s component parts as described by Gilpin. As discussed in the previous chapter, variety and ruggedness, for Gilpin, differentiated the picturesque from other representational modes. In describing Cheops as having a ‘rocky eminence’ St. John sets positions Cheops as picturesque, as he does with Egypt’s topography, describing the mountains around the Nile as having ‘the appearance of a lofty Gothic castle.’³³¹

Additionally, St. John commented that, ‘The mixture of ancient and modern architecture and ruins in Cairo was worthy of Samuel Prout.’³³² This is a significant statement. When St. John’s book was published in 1834, Prout was enjoying success as picturesque landscape artist and contributor to the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*. A reviewer in the *Athenaeum* wrote of Prout’s work, ‘by looking at these illustrations... a man who is inclined to stay at home may form a very correct notion of the cities, and the castles, and mountains of France.’³³³ When St. John made his statement, Prout was considered by the *Athenaeum* to be an artist who at once ‘picturesque’ and ‘accurate’.³³⁴

³²⁷ Lindsay, *Letters on Egypt*, 29.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

³²⁹ St. John, *Mohammed Ali*, 104, 147, 303.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

³³² *Ibid.*, 104.

³³³ ‘Review of *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1834*,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 312 (19 October 1833): 699.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 699.

This would suggest that St. John believed that Egypt could be accurately described using the picturesque.

In comparing one of Prout's engravings from the *Jennings Landscape Annual* and a lithograph from *Egypt and Nubia* the revisionist picturesque tendency towards exterior scenes presented in a familiar way is born out. *Mosque El-Mooristan, Cairo* [Fig. 31] is an image of the religious complex built in 1285 by Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun featuring a school, the Sultan's mausoleum and a hospital.³³⁵ When compared with Samuel Prout's *Swiss Cottage, Lavey* from the 1830 *Jennings Landscape Annual* [Fig. 8], the compositional template of picturesque city scenes is evident.³³⁶ Both Roberts' and Prout's compositions feature buildings projecting onto uneven streets populated by colourful locals in novel costumes, although the compositions diverge in the background of the images. Prout used an Alpine foothill as the rugged background to his image; Roberts, however, inserted the minaret of a mosque. Roberts frequently used the mosque and minaret in the same way that earlier picturesque imagery made use of natural landscape features. This echoes the way that he substituted desert sands in place of the vegetation in picturesque ruins in other lithographs.

³³⁵ Fabio Bourbon, *Egypt Yesterday and Today*, 207.

³³⁶ *Swiss Cottage Lavey* was also discussed in the previous chapter – the template of narrow city streets featuring rugged architecture and exotically dressed people was a popular one for both Prout and Roberts.



Fig 31: David Roberts, *Mosque El-Mooristan, Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

What was it about the architecture and population of Egypt that made them legible as picturesque elements in an image? One component required for the perception of Egypt as a picturesque place was novelty. As discussed in the previous chapter, nineteenth-century picturesque subject matter was drawn from Continental Europe and North Africa to satisfy the audience's craving for novel picturesque subject matter. This was evidenced by Prout's French landscapes in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*. The *Jennings Landscape Annuals* were reviewed favourably in part because of their novelty,³³⁷ and particularly for the use of Islamic architecture in Roberts' Spanish landscapes.³³⁸

³³⁷ Roscoe, *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1838*, iv.

³³⁸ Christine Peltre, *Orientalism In Art* (London: Abbeville Press, 1998), 101.

Roberts' Spanish work was celebrated for having a novel quality owing in part to Islamic architecture at precisely the time the picturesque became a dominant descriptive mode in relation to Egypt. In 1839 the *Athenaeum* concluded that Roberts' Egyptian sketches were a natural extension of his Spanish landscapes and that Egypt was 'the fountain head' of picturesque Islamic scenery.³³⁹ This connection again suggests that an investigation of Egypt and the picturesque in the 1830s is useful.

Interestingly, the other component necessary for the picturesque was familiarity. Within the expanded field of 1830s imagery, novel subject matter was presented in a manner that recalled earlier picturesque images. The subject was novel, but the template was not. When St. John referred to Egyptian scenery as being like a Prout landscape, he not only referenced a *Jennings Landscape Annual* alumnus but also the framework in which Prout worked, favouring decay, wretchedness, and variety. These were features of picturesque imagery and literature since the late eighteenth century. In his recent work on Persian Orientalism of the nineteenth century, Frederick Bohrer suggests that exotic imagery was most often mediated through familiar templates, noting that, 'Often, those images that offered only a token resistance to an accepted norm were accepted most quickly.'³⁴⁰ The same can be said for Egyptian picturesque.

With regards to its familiarity by the mid-1830s, the abundance of literature about Egypt has been established. The *Athenaeum* stated in 1835 that Lower Egypt was as well known as 'the green hills of Wales' through travel writing and recent journalism.³⁴¹

³³⁹ 'Our Weekly Gossip,' *Athenaeum*, no. 623 (5 October 1839): 765.

³⁴⁰ Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

³⁴¹ 'Review of Maddox's *Excursions in the Holy Land, etc.*,' *Athenaeum*, no. 326 (23 January 1835): 60.

It was these same green hills of Wales that provided picturesque subject matter for the likes of Gilpin and Price. Rushdi noted that it was precisely the familiarity that allowed travel writers to eschew seemingly objective description for more emotional impressions of Egypt.³⁴² Also, writers such as C. Rochfort Scott openly acknowledged in their books that the state was firmly in the minds of the public. Scott noted in the introduction to *Egypt and Candia* [1837] that:

Egypt has for many years past... given employment to the pens of so many authors... Such, however, since the re-appearance of that ancient kingdom in the political world, is the interest attached to every thing relating to it, that, even though the harvest of the antiquary should be considered as satisfactorily got in and *shelved*, yet a gleanings of matters deemed unworthy of falling under the sickles of my numerous precursors may not prove unacceptable to the public at large.³⁴³

The 'political world' that Scott referred to was informed by popular British perceptions of Egypt,³⁴⁴ as well as literature such as the *Description de l'Égypte* and *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. However, these perceptions were not necessarily accurate, but were instead coloured by recent political events such as Anglo-French competition in the region and Ottoman political instability. Scott's book provides evidence for the constellation of politics and picturesque that was present in mid-1830s travel writing. The view that Scott's book was part of a larger body of picturesque work that provided an accurate view of Egypt was endorsed in a long and favourable review in the *Athenaeum*.³⁴⁵ Scott's remarks in the introduction to *Egypt and Candia* also provide evidence that there was an emergent framework for Egyptian picturesque description.

³⁴² Rushdi, *English Travellers in Egypt During the Reign of Mohamed Ali*, 35.

³⁴³ C. Rochfort Scott, *Egypt and Candia* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), iii-iv.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, iii.

³⁴⁵ 'Review of *Rambles in Egypt and Candia* by Captain C.R. Scott,' *Athenaeum*, no. 482 (21 January 1837): 47-48.

Without familiar compositional elements and framework, imagery and writing on Egypt could not be considered picturesque. However, without novelty, the writing and imagery of the travel genre would not necessarily be considered picturesque. It would seem that in the 1830s, both elements were required. As seen in the comparison of Prout's and Roberts' images above, much of Roberts' work in *Egypt and Nubia* presented novel scenery within a readily legible framework. Writers such as St. John and Scott laid the foundation for this rubric, establishing that 'wretched' figures, variety, and 'considerably dilapidated' antique structures had a 'striking Oriental air,'³⁴⁶ and could be accurately described as picturesque. In so describing, the authors made a connection between Egypt and decay, similar to the connection made by *The Times* in 1834. This connection had the implicit support of journals such as the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, on account of their favourable reviews of the travel literature.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that there existed a great interest in textual and visual descriptions of Egypt in early nineteenth-century Britain and that Roberts tapped into an existent rubric. This interest was partially initiated by Napoleon's attempted invasion of Egypt and the subsequent French publications, such as Denon's and the *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de Sa Majesté l'empereur Napoléon le Grand*. Within these publications, as well as the British responses to them, Roberts' framework of Egypt possessing a glorious past but a decayed present was established, with the emphasis placed on ancient architecture,

³⁴⁶ St. John, *Mohammed Ali*, 104.

desolate landscape scenery and colourful urban scenes. This framework overlapped with the vogue for scenery described using the vocabulary of the revisionist picturesque – the depiction of novel scenery within a familiar landscape framework.

Contemporaneous to the British fashion for revisionist picturesque imagery was an increase in reportage of Egypt as developmentally backward, as well as Anglo-French competition in the region. The complex interrelationship between archaeology, international relations and aesthetics manifested themselves in Roberts' lithographs, suggesting that the artist's work was explicitly related to its cultural context and reified existent British perceptions of Egypt. Roberts' decision to travel to Egypt was based in part on contemporary interest in the state; he believed that there was a market for Egyptian landscape imagery that emphasised ruination at the expense of modernity, and designed his lithographs to suit that desire. However, despite the generalised British interest in Egypt in the early nineteenth century, it is possible that events immediately surrounding Robert's voyage impacted the creation and reception of *Egypt and Nubia*. The next chapter explores this possibility.

Chapter Four

The Ottoman-Egyptian crises of the 1830s and their impact on *Egypt and Nubia*

Introduction

As was seen in the last chapter, Britain maintained a great interest in Egypt throughout the early nineteenth century in a variety of ways. However, by 1838, the primary aspect of Egyptian culture of interest to the British public was arguably war. It is possible that the creation and publication of *Egypt and Nubia* was spurred on by the Ottoman-Egyptian military crises of 1831-33 and 1838-41, and that reportage of these events added to the lithographs' novelty value. With this aim in mind, the chapter explores the ways in which Egyptian territorial expansion were presented to the newspaper and journal reading public in the years 1830 to 1842, the decade before the publication of *Egypt and Nubia*. In doing so, it charts the largely unexplored history of British journalistic representations of Egypt in the 1830s. Although this chapter will not address David Roberts directly, or explore any individual lithograph from *Egypt and Nubia*, it aims to establish that the artist was tapping into the intensified public interest in Egypt stimulated by reportage relating to the Ottoman-Egyptian crises of the 1830s.

This decade saw Mehemet 'Ali declare independence from the Ottoman Empire and expand Egyptian control into the Hijaz, the Sudan, and Syria. Mehemet 'Ali's development of the state was closely followed by commentators in such influential publications as *The Times*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and in travel literature. The publications themselves represent a wide spectrum of political positions, from liberal to conservative. It is interesting to note that while

views of Mehmet 'Ali as a beneficent “moderniser” were relatively widespread in the very early 1830s, by the date of Roberts’ publication in 1842, all the literature employed similarly negative language and potentially drew the same conclusions about the state of Egypt, suggesting that there was a broad contemporary consensus about Egypt’s poor developmental state. The apparent existence of such a consensus, transcending partisan positions, was arguably bound to have a strong influence on the audiences for these publications with regard to what was perceived to be “true” about the condition of Egypt. Although there is little definitive information about who was reading these books and journals, in terms of class, status or income, the fact that Roberts’ work was reviewed and reported on in several of them suggests that the readership was likely to include potential purchasers of *Egypt and Nubia*. In relation to this, it will be argued that the journalistic consensus on Egypt as decayed and degenerate helped to prime the British public for the picturesque decrepitude displayed in Roberts’ *Egypt and Nubia* lithographic series.

In this chapter, British journalism in the 1830s will be interpreted through recent analysis of Egyptian historiography. There are several recent approaches to the historiography of the Ottoman-Egyptian conflicts of the 1830s. Broadly, these approaches can be called Egyptian nationalist and non-nationalist, and differ primarily in the analysis of European intervention into Egypt’s territorial expansion. Both schools acknowledge that Britain became enmeshed in Egyptian affairs, but differ in interpretation of British intent. Chief amongst the nationalist historians is Afaf Lufti al-Sayyid Marsot, author of *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* [1984].³⁴⁷ al-Sayyid Marsot claims that Egyptian development was retarded by British interference, and that

³⁴⁷ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 1.

Britain aimed to undermine Egypt's emergent position as a trade rival. Conversely, non-nationalist historians, such as A.L. Macfie and Khaled Fahmy, suggest that British involvement in the Ottoman-Egyptian crises was based on the perceived need to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, including constituent parts such as Egypt. While the historiography seems to be thus polarized, both al-Sayyid and Macfie acknowledge that Britain's position during the period was inconsistent. The research into Egypt-focused journalism presented in this chapter appears to corroborate this. Additionally, the research shows a variety of journalistic positions during the period. While trade issues were dominant concerns throughout the period, issues related to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire largely occurred in the context of the 1838-1841 crisis, initially in *The Times* and eventually in a wider cross-section of British journals.

1830-1831

On 14 January 1830, *The Times* referred to 'the improvements, not only of a material and mechanical, but of a moral and political character, going on in Egypt.'³⁴⁸ By 1830 the Egyptian government had established education reforms, modernised the military, and increased trade significantly;³⁴⁹ this was widely reported in Britain. On 14 January 1830 the editorial in *The Times* spoke positively about a legislative body recently created in Egypt by Mehemet 'Ali.³⁵⁰ This anonymous article is a good indication of the generally positive views of the state taken by the newspaper around that time. While the article was not wholly sympathetic to the legislative body, it did suggest that infrastructural progress was being made in Egypt.³⁵¹ *The Times* further stated that the state was attempting development in education, and concluded that as a result of this

³⁴⁸ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 14 January, 1830.

³⁴⁹ Fahmy, *All the Pacha's Men*, 13.

³⁵⁰ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 14 January, 1830.

³⁵¹ 'The members of this Assembly, selected, no doubt by the officers of the Pacha, and liable to be enshrined at his pleasure...' 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 14 January, 1830.

development, Egypt could enjoy continued prosperity.³⁵² In suggesting that educational and infrastructural development were the keys to lasting change and that Egypt was engaged in that development, *The Times* highlighted its positive perception of the state in 1830:

If the Pacha, during his reign, can succeed in diffusing education among the people, and in establishing institutions to superintend their interest (objects which he is now attempting) the advantages of his present administrative arrangements may be perpetuated beyond his life and a new era commence for Egypt.³⁵³

In addition to commenting on the creation of a legislative body, *The Times* also highlighted the publication of a new Egyptian newspaper, *The Egyptian Moniteur*, as evidence of the state's modernisation.³⁵⁴ This was noted in a letter printed in *The Times* on 14 January 1830 written by an officer in the Egyptian army, General Jomard.³⁵⁵ The newspaper, run by Mehemet 'Ali's agents, was published in Turkish and Arabic twice a week. This suggests that the journal was aimed not only at the Ottoman-Egyptian administration, which spoke Turkish, but also at an educated native-Egyptian population, who spoke Arabic. Jomard noted that the newspaper was evidence that Egypt was developing at a rate unprecedented by 'Oriental nations.'³⁵⁶

This view of Egypt as a progressive nation in 1830 was also maintained in the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*. In 1830 the *Athenaeum* published two long articles about recent developments there, specifically noting that the *Egyptian Moniteur* was evidence of modernisation.³⁵⁷ The *Athenaeum* noted the format

³⁵² 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 14 January, 1830.

³⁵³ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 21 January, 1830.

³⁵⁴ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 14 January, 1830.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵⁷ 'Egypt,' *Athenaeum*, no. 131 (1 May 1830): 268; 'The Gazette of Cairo,' *Athenaeum*, no. 145 (7 August 1830): 488-489.

in their review of the newspaper,³⁵⁸ and described the newspaper as ‘one of the most remarkable literary curiosities of the present day.’³⁵⁹ The *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* also noted the establishment of the *Egyptian Moniteur*, describing it as, ‘the March of Intellect in Egypt.’³⁶⁰

This interpretation of Egyptian development was helpful in its identification as an attractive trade route between Britain and India, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was of paramount importance for Britain’s revenue at the time. In 1830 *The Times* made mention of Egypt as an overland trade route to India,³⁶¹ and reported that not only was this development imminent, but that it had the full support of the Egyptian government.³⁶² Two months later, the newspaper reprinted a letter stating that ‘we hope to see Egypt shortly become (as it ought to be) the high road to the British colonies in the East, and India brought, as it were, to our door.’³⁶³ The sentiment expressed here, that Egypt and the Ottoman Empire would facilitate the route from Britain to India, was to shape British public opinion and policy towards the state for the rest of the decade. Indeed, the Mediterranean-Red Sea and Euphrates-Persian Gulf routes to India became overwhelming British concerns during the decade.³⁶⁴ An anonymous writer for the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* also stated that trade between Europe and Asia via Egypt was a necessity.³⁶⁵ Interestingly, the political journals made almost no comment on Egypt at this time. While there is no one reason for this, the bulk of the journals focused on domestic and European issues. The political journals would not

³⁵⁸ ‘The Gazette of Cairo,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 145 (7 August 1830): 488.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

³⁶⁰ ‘Varieties,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 678 (16 January 1830): 45.

³⁶¹ See ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 3 February, 1830; ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 15 April, 1830; ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 3 June, 1830.

³⁶² ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 3 February, 1830.

³⁶³ ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 15 April, 1830.

³⁶⁴ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 11.

³⁶⁵ ‘Varieties,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 702 (24 July 1830): 433-434.

become involved until Egyptian issues threatened British economic stability later in the decade.

The travel literature of 1830 often endorsed the views of the press. Two examples of this endorsement are John Carne's *Letters from the East*, and James Webster's *Travels Through The Crimea, Turkey, and Egypt; Performed During the Years 1825-1828*.³⁶⁶ Carne, a noted expert,³⁶⁷ wrote that Egypt had risen to preeminence in the Ottoman Empire,³⁶⁸ while Webster declared that a monument to Mehemet 'Ali should be erected.³⁶⁹ The literature of 1830 suggests that Egypt was seen as secure, modern, and a viable trading partner. Articles in *The Times*, *Athenaeum*, and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* of 1830 made no mention of Egypt as an aggressive or upsetting force in international relations. The positive impression published in the literature contradicts Roberts' overwhelmingly negative images of the state. His views were not consonant with the general consensus in 1830. Events after 1831 would ultimately force a change of opinion in the journals and travel literature, beginning with the 1831-1833 conflict between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire.

The 1831-33 crisis

In October 1831, Mehemet 'Ali's role in international relations changed significantly. That year, the Egyptian army, under the command of the Pacha's son Ibrahim, invaded Syria. The invasion created a complicated international incident, as both Egypt and Syria were pachalics, or territories, of the Ottoman Empire, and all parties involved were subjects of the Ottoman Sultan. Therefore, the invasion constituted an act of civil

³⁶⁶ 'Advertisement,' *Times* (London) 19 April, 1830.

³⁶⁷ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 1 January, 1831.

³⁶⁸ John Carne, *Letters from the East* 3rd ed. (London: Henry Colburn, 1830), 79.

³⁶⁹ James Webster, *Travels Through the Crimea, Turkey, and Egypt; Performed During the Years 1825-1828* (London: Henry Colburn, 1830), 2:38.

war. Mehemet 'Ali's ultimate aim was the independence of Egypt from the Ottoman Empire, and the expansion of Egyptian power into Syria.³⁷⁰ After a series of stunning military victories, including the seizure of the strategic town of Acre, the invading Egyptian forces were free to march on Constantinople in 1833. Mehemet 'Ali ordered his army to halt just 150 miles from the Ottoman capital. In May 1833 a peace treaty, the Convention of Kutahia, was concluded between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. The treaty confirmed that Syria was now under Mehemet 'Ali's control; Egypt was to remain nominally within the Ottoman Empire, and was obliged to pay an annual tribute to the Ottoman Sultan in exchange for control of Syria.³⁷¹ This effectively ended the crisis of 1831-33.

How were these events reported? *The Times* first made mention of the conflict on 14 January 1832 and gave intermittent updates until its conclusion. On 30 April 1833 *The Times* reported that the conflict was largely over.

With the command of a powerful army – with the possession of a considerable fleet – with the assurance of great national resources – and with the conviction that, by asserting [Egypt's] independence, [Egypt] ought to displease no European Power, the Pacha chose his time well for demanding the possession of Syria, and a conditional independence for Egypt.³⁷²

The Times article indicated that Egypt's conquests were legitimate, provided that the conditions of the ceasefire were maintained. The article offers an interesting insight into the perception of legitimacy in an international conflict of this nature, specifically that a more powerful force [Egypt] was entitled to conquer a lesser state [Syria], provided that 'he ought to displease no European Power.'³⁷³ This would suggest that, in *The Times*' view, the Syrian invasion was in itself not upsetting to European stability, but support of

³⁷⁰ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 20.

³⁷¹ Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 54.

³⁷² 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 30 April, 1833.

³⁷³ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 30 April, 1833.

Egypt was conditional on its maintenance of European interests. The state had begun to be perceived as a politically dangerous nation, provided that they not uphold their end of the bargain.

In the same editorial *The Times* bemoaned the lack of British involvement in the affair, and stated, ‘The state of affairs in Turkey, which we are glad to think is likely for the present to be settled, has not attracted the attention in this country which their importance deserves, from the position of the Mussulman combatants or the rival pretensions of their European umpires.’³⁷⁴ Historians of Anglo-Egyptian relations agree upon this position. Both al-Sayyid Marsot and G.D. Clayton, author of the non-nationalistic *Britain and the Eastern Question* [1971] argue that Britain did not take on an interventional role in the conflict. Clayton suggests that, ‘The Parliamentary Reform crisis had dominated government thinking during the first half of 1832,’ and that military involvement in Portugal and Belgium precluded British intervention in Egypt.³⁷⁵ This point is shared by al-Sayyid Marsot, who claims that, ‘the threat of civil strife over the Reform Bill’ kept Britain out of Egypt.³⁷⁶ Macfie also agrees on this point.³⁷⁷ This inactivity diminished British influence in the region, while bringing France to the forefront. As discussed in the previous chapter, both states had vied for superiority in Egypt since the time of Napoleon’s invasion. The 1831-33 crisis helped to cement French dominance, as Macfie states in *The Eastern Question*. ‘Having established close relations with Mehmet Ali... [the French] showed little inclination to impose limits on his plans for expansion.’³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 30 April, 1833.

³⁷⁵ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 65.

³⁷⁶ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 228.

³⁷⁷ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 21.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

In addition to Anglo-French competition, recent scholarship has also focused on Russia's influence in the conflict. As Macfie notes, in 1833, Russia 'brought pressure to bear on Mehmet Ali to agree to a suspension of hostilities.'³⁷⁹ Lacking British or French support, the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II petitioned Russia for 30,000 troops and eight ships in February 1833 in an attempt to upset Ibrahim's advances, and Tsar Nicholas acquiesced.³⁸⁰ al-Sayyid Marsot notes that the presence of the Russian army halted Egypt's advances, and that Constantinople was spared only by this alliance.³⁸¹ Russia used the diplomatic leverage gained from the conflict to interfere with Ottoman politics. Tsar Nicholas believed that a weakened Ottoman position would benefit Russia and that, ultimately, Constantinople would eventually become a Russian protectorate.³⁸² The Ottoman Empire, in a weakened position after the conflict, was forced to sign a mutual defence pact with Russia, known as the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. This treaty was offensive to the British Government in that it included the ability for the Ottoman Empire to close the Straits to all foreign vessels, which diminished British naval power in the Mediterranean.³⁸³ If the Royal Navy was unable to send ships through the Straits then they could have no military presence near Russian waters.

Contemporary scholars acknowledge the significance of Unkiar Skelessi. Historians such as Frank E. Bailey in his article, 'The Economics of British Foreign Policy, 1825-1850' claim that, 'The attitude of the British foreign office with respect to Near Eastern affairs underwent a profound change in 1833,' based on the treaty.³⁸⁴ Clayton suggests that Russia aimed to 'reduce Anglo-French influence at the Porte, and to give Russia

³⁷⁹ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 20.

³⁸⁰ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 66.

³⁸¹ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 229.

³⁸² Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 61.

³⁸³ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 21.

³⁸⁴ Frank E. Bailey, 'The Economics of British Foreign Policy, 1825-1850,' *The Journal of Modern History* 12, no. 4 (December 1940): 450.

exclusive control over Turkey's future.³⁸⁵ Macfie agrees, noting that, 'for the Russians, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi promised significant advantages.'³⁸⁶ By annexing Syria, Mehemet 'Ali controlled viable overland trade routes to India, through both Egypt and Syria. French support for Egypt diminished Britain's commercial position in the Levant. Russian support of the Ottoman Empire after 1833 increased their position in the region at a time when the Ottoman Empire was already unstable, further undermining British diplomatic efforts. In short, Egyptian, Russian, and French involvement in the Ottoman Empire was viewed as a potential threat to Britain.³⁸⁷ Egypt was only valuable as a non-aggressive nation that would facilitate trade, and the Ottoman Empire was only useful as long as it remained intact.

Despite this threat, few British publications acknowledged the threat posed by this development. The *Quarterly Review*, the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* all refrained from comment on the treaty; instead, journals such as the *Athenaeum* and *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* continued to paint the country as a positive, modern state, noting other infrastructural developments such as repairing the port of Alexandria,³⁸⁸ and aiding in the development of trade routes between Britain and India.³⁸⁹ Only *Blackwood's Edinburgh Review* defended the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and criticised the treaty:

The victory of Koniah prostrated the Asiatic power of Turkey; the standards of Mehemet Ali are rapidly approaching the Seraglio; and the discomfited Sultan is driven to take refuge under the suspicious shelter of the Russian legions. Already the advanced guard of Nicholas has passed the Bosphorus; the Muscovite standards are floating at Scutari; and, to the astonishment alike of

³⁸⁵ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 67.

³⁸⁶ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 21.

³⁸⁷ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 242.

³⁸⁸ 'Varieties,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 851 (11 May 1833): 301.

³⁸⁹ 'Varieties,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 862 (27 July 1833): 477.

Europe and Asia, the keys of the Dardanelles, the throne of Constantine, are laid at the feet of the Czar.³⁹⁰

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine maintained the position that Russia would shortly invade Turkey and scupper any chance of Britain using Egypt as a trade route.

According to this view, the decline of the Ottoman Empire would bring about a massive power struggle in Europe, with Russia gaining the upper hand – a situation that had to be avoided at all costs. Despite the overall lack of critical reportage on French and Russian involvement in the 1831-33 conflict – *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* excepted – recent scholarship has shown that a lack of British involvement increased both Russia's and France's positions in the region, a situation which may have precipitated the expression of less favourable views on the Egyptian state. While British opinion on Egypt was divided immediately following the 1831-33 crisis, a negative stance became more pronounced in the years leading up to the second conflict.

Between the crises – 1834 to 1838

Journals and travel literature after the 1831-33 crisis provided a wealth of information and conflicting opinions about the present state of Egypt and its relation to Europe.

While a negative opinion of the state was evident in *The Times* by 1833, and in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review* by 1835, the *Athenaeum* and the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* took longer to come to a similar view. Before the 1838-1841 crisis, travel writing was also ambivalent. But, as a negative perception of Egypt became more commonplace in the journals, a concordant rise in negativity can be observed in the travel literature.

³⁹⁰ 'The Fall of Turkey,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 209, no. 32 (June 1833): 931.

I will first examine *The Times*' opinion. After 1833, the journal began to refer to the state in almost exclusively negative terms. Evidence for this can be seen in a *Times* editorial published on 10 May 1834. The editorial concerned the *Egyptian Moniteur*, the newspaper which four years earlier had been hailed by *The Times* as an indication of Egypt's modernisation. *The Times* described an article in the *Egyptian Moniteur* about diplomatic relations between the Pacha and the Ottoman Sultan as, 'hollow and insincere; [the article] may be a trick – an act of fraud or perfidy,' and dismissed the journal itself by stating, 'to speak of the freedom of the press, or of freedom of discussion, in such a region, would be an ironical abuse of terms.'³⁹¹ In the space of four years, the journal that *The Times* used to signify the rebirth of Egypt was now cited as a symbol of its inherent duplicity, a trend that would be repeated when reporting Egyptian government and development. The article in the *Egyptian Moniteur* described how both Mehemet 'Ali and the Ottoman Sultan were pleased with the state of relations between them. This was dismissed as untrue in *The Times*.³⁹²

Articles such as this were regular features in the newspaper after the 1831-1833 crisis, and reflected a change in the editorial policy of *The Times*. Prior to 1835 the newspaper was known as a reformist journal – it supported the Reform Act of 1832 and agitated for the dissolution of rotten boroughs.³⁹³ In 1835 the newspaper struck a deal with Robert Peel and the Conservative party,³⁹⁴ and for the rest of the decade *The Times* was associated with the Conservatives. While the minutiae of this editorial shift is beyond the scope of this project, broadly, the deal was struck as a result of *The Times*' editor Thomas Barnes' distrust of the Whig party, the radical reformers and their positions on

³⁹¹ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 10 May, 1834.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ *History of The Times, the Thunderer in the Making 1785-1841* (London: The Office of *The Times*, 1935), 247.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 357.

Irish emancipation.³⁹⁵ *The Times*' editorial position in the second half of the 1830s was that the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland must be defended. This was also the Conservatives' position. There was symmetry between the newspaper's position on Ireland and its position on Egypt after 1835, as the issue at stake after the 1831-1833 crisis was itself one of Ottoman unity. The Conservative party believed that the continued existence of the Ottoman Empire was crucial for the maintenance of peace in Europe.³⁹⁶ Egypt's independence, coupled with the recent cession of Greece was seen by some, such as *The Times*, as the death of the Ottoman Empire.³⁹⁷

After 1835 *The Times* began publishing regular and frequent correspondence and commentary on Egyptian politics by British politicians and correspondents in the Levant. One such correspondence, written by an anonymous writer calling himself "Veritas", stated unequivocally that Egypt was a despotic state holding its possessions in a stranglehold,³⁹⁸ that Britain had an obligation to liberate Syria from Egypt, and that the success of British-Indian trade depended on that liberation.³⁹⁹ After 1835, the newspaper championed British intervention in Egypt and agitated for a halt to its expansionist policies, a stance that would continue throughout the decade. Interestingly, "Veritas'" interpretation of Anglo-Egyptian relations broadly corresponds to al-Sayyid Marsot's interpretation of Palmerston's attitude towards Egypt after the 1831-33 conflict. She claims that Palmerston was mistrustful of Mehemet 'Ali's policies and that Palmerston actively sought to undermine Egyptian independence because it was a potential threat to British trade routes.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 358.

³⁹⁶ Bailey, 'The Economics of British Foreign Policy,' 450.

³⁹⁷ 'Private Correspondence,' *Times* (London) 4 August, 1837.

³⁹⁸ Veritas, 'Turkey and Her Relations,' *Times* (London) 11 September, 1835.

³⁹⁹ Veritas, letter to the editor, *Times* (London) 7 November, 1835.

⁴⁰⁰ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 236-237.

Despite its urgent tone, *The Times*' position was not shared by other journals, which were generally more equivocal in their treatment of Egypt. In 1834 the *Athenaeum* stated that while the Pacha's reforms were significant, his treatment of his subjects, particularly the lower classes, was deplorable.⁴⁰¹ It accepted the Pacha's reforms and noted that he was an important figure with regards to British trade, but added that Egyptian government was not as reformed, and therefore as useful to British commerce, as previously thought. They specifically mentioned the legislature highlighted by *The Times* in 1830, stating that, 'Though the [legislature], as yet, is little more than a court for the registration of [Mehemet 'Ali's] edicts, it is probable that it may, at no distant period, discharge more important functions.'⁴⁰²

According to the *Athenaeum*, Egypt simply needed more time for the effects of the reforms to manifest themselves. The journal also noted, however, that the reforms were not necessarily beneficial to all. 'The condition of the Fellahs [Egyptian peasants] has been rendered worse than ever under the government of Mohammed Ali: his plans of reform require money, and to collect money, by right or by wrong, is the leading, almost the only principle of his administration.'⁴⁰³ In the same year, the journal made several mentions of Egypt as a trade route, and noted that the Egyptian government was giving its full support to developments such as rail links between Cairo and Suez.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ 'Review of *Egypt and Mohammed Ali, or Travels in the Valley of the Nile*, by James Augustus St. John,' *Athenaeum*, no. 339 (26 April 1834): 307-308.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 307-308.

⁴⁰³ 'Review of *Egypt and Palestine*, by M. Michaud et M. Poujoulat,' *Athenaeum*, no. 377 (17 January 1835): 50-52.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Steam Navigation to India,' *Athenaeum*, no. 360 (20 September 1834): 700.

Egypt appeared often in mid-1830s literature in the context of trade routes, a central feature of Anglo-Egyptian relations at the time. As F.G. Bartle notes, Palmerston's concerns in Egypt were principally related to trade and the trade routes between Britain and India⁴⁰⁵ Two separate trade routes were proposed and debated between 1834 and 1838: one via the Red Sea and one via the Euphrates. The Red Sea route consisted of a journey through the Mediterranean to Alexandria, cutting across the Mahmoudiyeh Canal to the Nile, down the Nile to Cairo, a two-day desert crossing from Cairo to Suez, then Suez to Bombay, via the Red Sea.⁴⁰⁶ The other route again went through the Mediterranean, then overland through Syria to join up with the Euphrates. Once on the Euphrates the second route followed the river to the Persian Gulf and India. Both routes were hotly debated in Britain between 1834 and 1838.

In 1834 the House of Commons set up a select committee to investigate steam communications between Britain and India.⁴⁰⁷ It was the committee's job to decide which route, or combination of routes, would enjoy the support of the Government. The select committee heard evidence in favour of both routes. The Red Sea route travelled through more settled territory – Egypt – whereas the Euphrates route travelled through some territory controlled by local Bedouin chieftains. The Red Sea route also had the full support of Egypt's government, whereas the Euphrates route was actively discouraged by the Pacha.⁴⁰⁸ This was a serious issue, as the majority of territory on the Euphrates route was conquered by Egypt the previous year. Conversely, the Euphrates route was shorter and the Persian Gulf was more easily navigated than the Red Sea. The committee ultimately voted £20,000 towards an exploratory expedition to study the

⁴⁰⁵ F.G. Bartle, 'Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,' *The English Historical Review* 79, no. 313 (October 1964): 763.

⁴⁰⁶ Sarah Searight, *Steaming East* (London: Bodley Head, 1991), 42-44.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁰⁸ Searight, *Steaming East*, 62.

Euphrates route.⁴⁰⁹ This was largely decided because the Euphrates was less likely to remain permanently under Egyptian control, unlike the Red Sea route. At the same time, however, post was being directed through the Red Sea route.

Trade routes were also the only part of Anglo-Egyptian relations that the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* was willing to discuss.⁴¹⁰ Nearly the only mention of Egypt in the journal between 1834 and 1837 concerned the Red Sea and Euphrates trade routes. From August 1834 to 1837 the journal published regular updates on progress made in the developments of the two routes and British expeditions exploring the Euphrates River. The trade route issue also was noticed in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*. A reviewer in the *Edinburgh Review* stated that either route would benefit from the resolution of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire's issues and that they favoured both routes, provided that 'Egypt is quiet.'⁴¹¹ This cautious optimism was not shared by the *Quarterly Review*, which roundly dismissed the possibility of Egypt being a partner in the development of the Overland Route.⁴¹² A reviewer in that journal noted that there were over forty miles of iron rails lying in Alexandria and intended for a trans-Suez railway.⁴¹³ This, the author stated, would not amount to anything. Both journals did acknowledge that the development of trade routes were significant not only to British trade with India, but tourism to and through Egypt as well. This was

⁴⁰⁹ Searight, *Steaming East*, 60.

⁴¹⁰ The journal stated that it was divorced from politics and would therefore not comment on international relations. As if to emphasise this point, the journal discontinued the Politics column in which it had discussed the 1831-1833 crisis.

⁴¹¹ 'Review of *Eastern and Egyptian Scenery, Ruins, etc., accompanied with descriptive Notes, Maps, and Plans, illustrative of a Journey from India to Europe, followed by an Outline of an Overland Route, Statistical Remarks, etc., intended to show the advantage and practicability of Steam Navigation from England to India*. By Captain C.F. Head, Queen's Royal Regiment,' *Edinburgh Review*, 107, no. 117 (April 1833): 316.

⁴¹² 'Review of *An Account of the Modern Egyptians, written in Egypt during the years 1833, 1834, and 1835, partly from Notes made during a former Visit to that Country, in the years 1825, 1826, 1827, and 1828*, by Edward Wm. Lane,' *Quarterly Review*, 107, no. 117 (April 1833): 193.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 193.

specifically highlighted in the *Edinburgh Review* article of 1833.⁴¹⁴ It appeared that tourism in the state was perhaps as significant a concern as trade in the mid 1830s.

The 1838-1841 crisis

In 1838, Anglo-Egyptian relations underwent a major shift. In that year, Britain signed a free-trade agreement with the Ottoman Empire, which ended an Egyptian monopoly on many goods in the Levant. The treaty gave Britain 'most favoured nation status' as a trading partner,⁴¹⁵ and was considered to increase Britain's position with the Sultan, at the expense of Egypt's governor. Both al-Sayyid Marsot and Clayton concur that the agreement decisively placed Britain firmly on the side of the Ottomans.⁴¹⁶ However, the rationale underpinning the agreement divides historians. The nationalist position holds that the free-trade agreement 'encouraged an influx of cheap British goods into the area, which killed local industries. In Egypt the infant industries could not compete without protective barriers...'⁴¹⁷ al-Sayyid Marsot further argues that Palmerston intended to bolster Britain's position in the Ottoman Empire, and to undermine Mehemet 'Ali. Other historians, such as Clayton, Macfie, and Marlowe, however argue that the treaty was the natural outcome of Palmerston's increasing interest in the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire, commercially if possible, but militarily if necessary.⁴¹⁸ Clayton notes that 'Joint naval exercises were held in 1838 by British and Turkish fleets in the Mediterranean... their presence is important evidence of the new line in British policy. The British

⁴¹⁴ 'Review of Eastern and Egyptian Scenery, Ruins, etc., accompanied with descriptive Notes, Maps, and Plans, illustrative of a Journey from India to Europe, followed by an Outline of an Overland Route, Statistical Remarks, etc., intended to show the advantage and practicability of Steam Navigation from England to India. By Captain C.F. Head, Queen's Royal Regiment,' *Edinburgh Review*, 107, no. 117 (April 1833): 316.

⁴¹⁵ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 76.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76; al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 238-239.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴¹⁸ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 76-77; Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 44; Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 1.

commitment to the defence of the Turkish empire was much greater in 1839 than it had been in 1832.⁴¹⁹

It is likely that al-Sayyid Marsot's interpretation of these events is more problematic than the non-nationalist historians. While al-Sayyid Marsot is correct that the free-trade agreement would increase the amount of British goods in Egypt, it is not necessarily true that this was done to undermine Egyptian commerce. However, contemporary journalism suggests that Britain was more concerned with the maintenance of trade routes and gaining a foothold in Ottoman trade, which had been undermined by Russian and French interference, than undermining Egypt specifically.⁴²⁰ Egyptian independence would threaten Britain, as there was no guarantee that the independent state would encourage British commerce. However, following the free-trade agreement of 1838, it was clear that the Ottoman Empire was willing to make those guarantees. Britain's resolve in this issue was soon to be tested by Mehemet 'Ali, who decided to make a conclusive break with the Ottoman Empire shortly thereafter.

On 25 May 1838, Mehemet 'Ali declared independence from the Ottoman Empire. Non-nationalist historian John Dunn argues that the principal reason for this was the increasingly hard-line Ottoman stance towards Egypt, including the curtailment of

⁴¹⁹ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 77.

⁴²⁰ See 'Review of An Account of the Modern Egyptians, written in Egypt during the years 1833, 1834, and 1835, partly from Notes made during a former Visit to the Country, in the years 1825, 1826, 1827, and 1828, by Edward Wm. Lane,' *Quarterly Review* 109, no. 117 (April 1833): 193; 'Review of Rambles in Egypt and Candia by Captain C.R. Scott,' *Athenaeum*, no. 482 (21 January 1837): 47-48; 'Review of Rambles in Egypt and Candia by Captain C.R. Scott (second notice),' *Athenaeum*, no. 484 (4 February 1837): 78-79; 'Review of Lord Lindsay's Letters on Egypt, Edom, and the Holy Land,' *Athenaeum*, no. 564 (18 August 1838): 586; 'Egypt,' *Times* (London) 17 May, 1838; 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 2 July, 1838; 'Private Correspondence,' *Times* (London) 9 July, 1838; 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 13 September, 1838.

Egyptian trade.⁴²¹ Nationalists such as al-Sayyid Marsot counter that Egypt was forced to declare independence, based on the Anglo-Turkish commercial treaty ‘sapping the financial roots of [Egypt’s] strength. They believed that if the *wali* was divested of his monopolies, he would have fewer funds with which to finance an army and consequently would have his teeth drawn.’⁴²² In the nationalist view, the declaration of independence was a necessary preemptive step after Britain refused to trade directly with Egypt, as Mehemet 'Ali wanted.⁴²³ The perceived necessity of this declaration is not, however, reinforced with contemporary reportage. The governor’s declaration of independence was only reported in *The Times*, in which a reporter stated that ‘Mehemet 'Ali’s declaration of independence was of no consequence’,⁴²⁴ the ‘general condition of Egypt was deplorable’,⁴²⁵ and Britain supporting Egypt over the Ottoman Empire ‘would be an act of treason against an ally.’⁴²⁶

The Times’ position on Egyptian independence adds nuance to the historians’ arguments. Interestingly, in addition to acknowledging that the Ottoman Empire was a British ally and that Egyptian independence was illegitimate, the newspaper also suggested that Egypt’s backwardness was the natural concomitant of Mehemet 'Ali’s governance. The notion of Egypt as decayed, and therefore possibly picturesque, within the context of Egyptian independence was first explored by *The Times*, although it was also addressed by *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* the following year. There is a possible link between the political reportage on the 1838-1841 crisis and the perception of Egypt as a picturesque location. It is clear that by the time of the second crisis the

⁴²¹ John Dunn, ‘Egypt’s Nineteenth-Century Armaments Industry,’ *The Journal of Military History* 61, no. 2 (April 1997): 238.

⁴²² al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 238.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁴²⁴ ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 2 July, 1838.

⁴²⁵ ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 28 June, 1838.

⁴²⁶ ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 20 September, 1838.

majority of British journalism and literature related to Egypt suggested that it was considered to be a decayed state. An increase in picturesque description, highlighting the unmodern quality of Egypt, was also seen in the mid-1830s. While this picturesqueness made Egypt a novel and interesting locale, it also served as evidence for its non-viability as a commercial partner. It was both the journals' and Palmerston's position that Egypt's viability as a trading ally depended on it remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire. Britain's siding with the Ottoman Empire and attempting to negotiate peace was based on the desire for Egypt to be a part of a modern, functioning Ottoman Empire. It is possible that the rise in picturesque description of Egypt at this time was a condition of the dominant British perception of Egypt within the context of the conflict.

In the previous chapter, the possible connection between politics and the picturesque in Egypt was explored. Works such as *Skinner's Adventures During a Journey Overland to India* illustrate the viability of the picturesque as a descriptive political mode; as Nadia El Kholy states, descriptions of Egypt in the 1830s were based on 'impressions made on the author's imagination.'⁴²⁷ El Kholy's statement echoes sentiments expressed in the late 1830s, as the connection between the political and the picturesque was also acknowledged in a long article on the second crisis in the conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1839. The author of the article began this, one of the only instances of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* weighing in on Egyptian affairs in the 1830s, by stating that Egypt 'renders us fabulists rather than historians, and novelists rather than biographers.'⁴²⁸ The author continued by suggesting that the picturesque abounded in Egypt and that it was a viable mode for describing the state.⁴²⁹ This

⁴²⁷ El Kholy, 'Romances and Realities of Travellers,' 262.

⁴²⁸ 'Turkey, Egypt, and the Affairs of the East,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 285, no. 46 (July 1839): 100.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

introduction to a lengthy analysis of Ottoman affairs is telling, in that it acknowledges that picturesque description could be mobilised when describing Egypt's political and material condition in the late 1830s. After this introduction, the author continued to state that Egyptian independence, the possession of Syria, and the influence of Russia were large concerns for Britain.⁴³⁰ The article concluded by stating that war was inevitable and that conflict between Turkey and Egypt, involving all the major European powers, would bring about the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.⁴³¹

Non-partisan journals such as the *Athenaeum* occasionally addressed the issue as well. The journal endorsed the view that British trade interests must be protected in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. It was stated in the 5 January 1839 edition, that both the 'Ottoman Sultan and the Egyptian Pacha' depended on 'the building-yards and engine works of Britain.'⁴³² It was also reported in the journal that fostering peace between the two states would ensure profitable British trade.⁴³³ The moderate tone employed by the journal was perhaps indicative of their position on the crisis, as the *Athenaeum*, as well as the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* largely avoided regular reportage on the crisis, instead focusing on literary reviews and recent events in Britain.

In the spring of 1839, Sultan Mahmud II ordered the Ottoman forces to re-invade Syria and pacify Mehemet 'Ali.⁴³⁴ During the attempted invasion in 1839 the Turkish fleet defected and joined the Egyptian navy. Following this, the Turkish army was defeated at Nezib on 24 June 1839. Charles R. Middleton described the Ottoman Empire in 1839

⁴³⁰ 'Turkey, Egypt and the Affairs of the East,' 100.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴³² 'Review of *Report on Steam Navigation to India, via the Red Sea. Presented to the Committee.* By W.D. Holmes, Civil Engineer. Weale,' *Athenaeum*, no. 548 (5 January 1839): 5.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³⁴ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 23.

as being 'at Egypt's mercy'.⁴³⁵ Shortly after this defeat, on 1 July 1839, Sultan Mahmud II died. Middleton states that, by July 1839, the Ottoman army was completely exhausted,⁴³⁶ having suffered a number of defeats at the hands of the Egyptian army. G.F. Bartle, in his article 'Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,' [1964] concurred, suggesting that the partition of the Ottoman Empire between Egypt and Russia seemed to be imminent.⁴³⁷ Effectively, as al-Sayyid Marsot claims, this was unacceptable to Palmerston, as:

With Egyptian forces in control of the Red Sea and of the region of the Euphrates river and Aleppo, as well as a large expanse of Mediterranean coastline, the whole project [of the overland route] would fall under the control of Muhammad Ali, who would dominate both routes to India. The trade of the Levant would be at the mercy of the Egyptian monarch and his armies.

This concern was shared by British journals in 1839, such as *The Times*, which summed up the Ottoman position on the 8 August 1839 as 'disastrous.'⁴³⁸

It was at this time [September 1838-May 1839] that Roberts travelled in Egypt and Syria. While he refrained from commenting on the political dimension of the conflict, he did note that his route through Syria had to be rearranged on more than one occasion because of battles between the Egyptians and the Ottomans. Roberts wrote that he had 'given up the idea of visiting Damascus, owing to the unsettled state of the country,' and that on the road to the town, 'there were numerous strings of mules laden with food for the army, the troops of the Sultan and the Pasha being within fifteen hours of each other.'⁴³⁹ His journey in Egypt was in no way affected by the conflict.

⁴³⁵ Charles R. Middleton, 'Cabinet Decision Making at the Accession of Queen Victoria: The Crisis of the East 1839-1840,' *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 2 (June 1979): 1087.

⁴³⁶ Avigdor Levy, 'The Officer Corps in Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army, 1826-39,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1971): 26.

⁴³⁷ Bartle, 'Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,' 771.

⁴³⁸ 'Leader,' *Times (London)* 8 August, 1839.

⁴³⁹ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 139.

Mahmud II's son Abdul Mejid succeeded him as the head of the Ottoman Empire. Clayton suggests that this event was advantageous for Britain, as the inexperienced young Sultan was more willing to be influenced by European ambassadors.⁴⁴⁰ al-Sayyid Marsot claims that Abdul Mejid's succession emboldened Palmerston, whose 'tone of patronizing indifference to Muhammad Ali changed to one of virulence and moral outrage at the rebellious vassal,' in 1839.⁴⁴¹ In that year, Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia took action to ensure that European interests did not suffer in the face of the young Sultan's inexperience. On 27 July 1839, the nations, known as the Great Powers, presented a collective note to the new Sultan Abdul Mejid, stating that they were interested in mediating this second Ottoman-Egyptian crisis. As M.E. Chamberlain notes in *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* [1980], it was Palmerston who took an active role in Britain's involvement in the Collective Note, based on his desire to maintain the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁴² Both Egypt and the Ottoman Empire agreed to the terms of the note.⁴⁴³ Effectively, this meant that Egypt now had to negotiate not with the young Sultan, but with the Great Powers.

This was a significant event with regard to the increasingly negative perception of Egypt in the British press. After the 1831-1833 crisis an editorial in *The Times* had stated that the state's expansionist policies were legitimate, provided that 'it displease no European power.'⁴⁴⁴ The Collective Note stated explicitly that the Great Powers of Europe were indeed displeased, and felt obligated to get involved in the situation. The Melbourne Government believed that British overseas trade would be severely damaged

⁴⁴⁰ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 80.

⁴⁴¹ al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 243.

⁴⁴² M.E. Chamberlain, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 40.

⁴⁴³ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 24; 'Affairs of the East,' *Times* (London) 4 September, 1839.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 30 April, 1833.

in the event of complete Egyptian independence from the Ottoman Empire, as both al-Sayyid Marsot and Bartle note.⁴⁴⁵ This position was also maintained by *The Times*, which fatalistically declared on 6 September 1839 that without British intervention, the 1838-1841 crisis would ‘only ultimately end in... the total annihilation of the Turkish Empire...’⁴⁴⁶

The Ottoman-Egyptian crisis carried on into 1840, with the Ottoman Empire unable to check Mehemet 'Ali's advances. In July of 1840 Palmerston enacted the Convention for the Pacification of the Levant, including most major European nations, excepting France, who had by then openly sided with Egypt.⁴⁴⁷ The Convention issued Mehemet 'Ali with an ultimatum to cease hostilities and return the Ottoman fleet, which he still possessed. In exchange, Mehemet 'Ali was permitted to rule Syria until his death, after which Syria reverted back to direct Ottoman control. Egypt was to be ruled in the name of Ottoman Empire by his family indefinitely.⁴⁴⁸ The combined European powers gave Mehemet 'Ali ten days to agree to this offer. If he failed to accept the offer in ten days, he would be permitted to keep only Egypt.⁴⁴⁹ After a further ten days, the combined forces of the remaining Four Powers and the Ottoman Empire would openly attack Egypt.⁴⁵⁰ When Mehemet 'Ali did not comply with this ultimatum, British and Austrian troops were deployed to Beirut in September of that year to force a withdrawal.⁴⁵¹

The refusal of the Great Powers' offer effectively served as the end of Mehemet 'Ali's imperial ambitions. In November 1840, Acre was recaptured from Ibrahim Pacha, and

⁴⁴⁵ Bartle, ‘Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1841,’ 763.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Private Correspondence,’ *Times* (London) 6 September, 1839.

⁴⁴⁷ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 24-25.

⁴⁴⁸ Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, 82.

⁴⁴⁹ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 25.

⁴⁵⁰ Macfie, *The Eastern Question*, 25.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

he was forced to return to Egypt. On New Year's Day, 1841, *The Times* printed an intercepted letter from Ibrahim Pacha to Mehemet 'Ali begging for funds and suggesting that all hope was lost in Egypt maintaining control of Syria.⁴⁵² The following week *The Times* reported that Mehemet 'Ali had become despondent since the fall of Acre to the Allied forces and that:

He is no longer the active, energetic spirit that looked into, willed, and moved everything in Egypt. Now, when new works or active projects are suggested, he turns a deaf ear, and says, 'Let things take their course!' He evidently feels that he is no longer the unconquered, and fortunate Mehemet Ali.'⁴⁵³

By December 1840 the Pacha had lost in his bid for independence and control of Syria and had no choice but to accept the Convention's demands.⁴⁵⁴ Rumours of this development circulated in *The Times* throughout January 1841, and on 2 February, the newspaper announced that peace had definitively been reached between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, with the terms of surrender being Mehemet 'Ali gaining hereditary control of Egypt under the Ottoman Empire, the return of the Ottoman fleet, and the evacuation of all occupied territory.⁴⁵⁵ On 4 February *The Times'* editorial stated that:

The Russian army has not reached Constantinople, nor the Russian fleet passed the Straits of Gibraltar; the Pasha has not been crushed or deposed; no partition of the Turkish Empire has taken place... For England we ask no higher recompense than that moral weight, which the unanimous consent of nations never refuses to the power of a state moderately, reasonably, and disinterestedly exerted in the right cause.⁴⁵⁶

Sentiments such as these, that Britain should be recognised only as a moral defender of a sovereign nation's integrity, were common after the 1838-1841 crisis. The consensus appeared to be that Britain simply desired a return to the *status quo* of the Ottoman Empire, with Mehemet 'Ali as a regional governor in the service of the Ottoman Sultan.

⁴⁵² 'Egypt,' *Times* (London) 1 January, 1841.

⁴⁵³ 'Private Correspondence,' *Times* (London) 9 January, 1841.

⁴⁵⁴ Fahmy, *All the Pacha's Men*, 291.

⁴⁵⁵ 'The Hereditary Investiture of Egypt Granted to Mehemet 'Ali,' *Times* (London) 2 February, 1841.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 4 February, 1841.

Despite this, attempts to re-present Egypt as a modern, productive state, such as in Bowring's report, met with little success. It appears that the perception of Egypt as a picturesque location was firmly entrenched.

At no point in the literature reviewed did any author suggest that Britain now had the right to interfere in Egyptian or Ottoman governance at this time. This will prove to be significant for Roberts' legacy in the twentieth century, as Saidian critics such as Linda Nochlin have recently seen him as an agent of British imperial expansion.⁴⁵⁷ As seen in the previous two chapters, a Saidian interpretation of Roberts – that he essentialised Levantine subject matter, making use of age-old stereotypes – is generally productive. However, in light of the research undertaken for this chapter, a number of shortcomings emerge. While Roberts may have been interested in depicting a region that had recently come into conflict with the nascent second British Empire, his images do not necessarily relate to a British desire to control Egypt in 1841. Indeed, the rejection of any British administration in Egypt was echoed in the conservative *Quarterly Review*, which weighed in on the aftermath of the second crisis in a long article published in 1841. It was stated in the article that 'England has no more desire [to govern] *Egypt* than she has for *Switzerland* or *Piedmont*: she wishes for good roads through them all, with a sufficient local police.'⁴⁵⁸ This statement is suggestive of several ways in which Egypt was viewed politically and visually in Britain, principally towards infrastructural development in relation to Egypt's value as a trade route. The lack of desire for direct control problematises a Saidian reading based on direct imperialism.

⁴⁵⁷ Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' 37.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Foreign Policy,' *Quarterly Review* 106, no. 133 (July 1841): 292.

As discussed in the introduction, a frequent criticism of Said's theories is that his work is ahistorical and monolithic in its attempts to define and deconstruct a set of orientalist assumptions. One of Said's most vocal critics, Robert Irwin, stated unequivocally in *For Lust of Knowing* [2006] that Said allowed his argument to 'swoop backwards and forwards through the centuries,'⁴⁵⁹ tarring writers, academics, and explorers with the same brush. While it is not possible to fully explore the nature of Irwin's complaints in this section, it can be argued that a Saidian reading of *Egypt and Nubia* could ignore the historical specificity of its production and reception.

Indeed, it has been one of the aims of this chapter to contextualise the lithographs within a framework of early-Victorian visual culture and without the intellectual baggage of a strict Saidian reading. An exclusively Saidian interpretation of Roberts might be misleading to viewers familiar with the theorist but unfamiliar with the specificities of the early-Victorian world. Britain's arbitration of the Ottoman-Egyptian peace settlement virtually guaranteed a lucrative trading position within the reunited Ottoman Empire, and secured overland trade routes between Britain and India. This situation helped to increase the novel value of Egypt in Britain, but was not necessarily an overture towards direct imperial control of the region.

Was David Roberts an imperialist? In order to answer this question a number of qualifications are required. In one sense of the term, Roberts was never an imperialist, in that he was never directly involved with the governance of the British Empire. Roberts famously wrote that 'But with politics they say we artists have nothing to do.

⁴⁵⁹ Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Penguin, 2006), 282.

With all my heart be it so.⁴⁶⁰ Perhaps a more useful question would be: How did Roberts and his work fit into early-Victorian notions of imperialism?

In order to discuss whether Roberts' attitude towards the state was imperialistic the nature of the state's relationship with early-Victorian Britain must be addressed. This brings us to an interesting question. Was the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt, under British imperial control at the time?

While the Ottoman Empire was never a formal part of the British Empire, it can be seen to fall into a British sphere of influence. Within this sphere, British policy, and significantly, trading interests had an inordinate influence on Ottoman policy. Mehemet 'Ali was himself compelled to capitulate to the Ottoman Sultan only by the threat of the British military landing at Alexandria.⁴⁶¹ It can be said that by the time of Roberts' publication Egyptian policy was in some ways influenced, but not dictated, by Britain. Therefore, it can be argued that there was an informal imperial presence in Egypt after 1841.

How was imperialism understood by Roberts' generation? What they understood by concepts such as "imperial" and the "British Empire" appear to be surprisingly distant from the Saidian perception that all Victorians were expansionist. According to Bernard Porter, author of *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* [2004], the early Victorians had an uneasy relationship with formal imperialism, which they associated with Napoleon Bonaparte's military campaigns and annexation of European territory.⁴⁶² As a result,

⁴⁶⁰ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 20 January, 1839.

⁴⁶¹ Michael Brett, 'Continuity and Change: North Africa in the nineteenth-century,' *Journal of African History*, no. 27 (1986): 152.

⁴⁶² Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 8.

early Victorians often avoided using the word to identify their own network of settlement colonies and overseas possessions.

Instead, as Ronald Hyam suggested in *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914* [1976], early-Victorian Britain saw its place in the world largely in terms of opening markets and facilitating trade.⁴⁶³ The doctrine of free trade emphasised the importance of the individual in a trading relationship instead of protectionist trade based on colonial policy.⁴⁶⁴ Liberal Victorian economists believed that the spread of globalised trade without tariffs or boundaries would erase any need for empires and would bring neglected parts of the world into economic and cultural harmony.⁴⁶⁵ One of the most radical early-Victorian free-traders, Richard Cobden, noted that:

restrictions and prohibitions are imposed upon our trade in all quarters of the world, for the acquisition or maintenance of colonial possessions; and all for what? ... No candid investigator of our colonial policy will draw the conclusion, that we have derived, or shall derive, from it advantages that can compensate for these formidable sacrifices.⁴⁶⁶

Imperial expansion, in the Napoleonic sense of the term, was anathema to free trade in that government intervention into trade put a brake on the generation and the spread of wealth. This can be seen in an apt metaphor written by Palmerston:

We do not want Egypt or wish it for ourselves, any more than any rational man with an estate in the north of England and residence in the south [India] would have wished to possess the inns on the north road. All he could want would have been that the inns should be well kept, always accessible, and furnishing him when he came with mutton chops and post-horses.⁴⁶⁷

Early Victorians were, however, well aware of British economic and military presence overseas. Britain's premier status in the second Industrial Revolution allowed the

⁴⁶³ Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century*, 108.

⁴⁶⁴ Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal ideal and the Demons of Empire* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 22; Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism*, 158.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁶⁶ Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America* (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1835), 24.

⁴⁶⁷ Evelyn Baring, *Modern Egypt*, 1:92, reprinted in Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century*, 180.

country to develop unparalleled export of capital and manufactures, impacting on almost all regions of the world. Ideally, these regions would not require British interference of any sort to maintain the free flow of goods and materials. In the words of economic historians John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in their seminal essay ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’: ‘It is only when the politics of these new regions fail to provide satisfactory conditions for commercial or strategic integration and when their relative weakness allows, that power is used imperialistically to adjust those conditions.’⁴⁶⁸ The early Victorians were not opposed to military or political intervention as a means to opening or securing markets, but they did not see this practice as inherently imperialistic, or that intervention was in the service of direct political control over overseas territory.⁴⁶⁹ They saw the world largely as a series of markets with which to trade, and the state’s role was to maintain access to trade.⁴⁷⁰ This system was distinct from the late-Victorian imperialist system of direct rule that Said referred to in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* and further problematises a Saidian understanding of the early-Victorian loose imperialism that Roberts seemed to endorse.⁴⁷¹

Conclusion

This chapter has established that Egypt was a topic of great interest for the British public in the years leading up to the publication of *Egypt and Nubia*, and that popular perceptions of Egypt in Britain underwent great changes between 1830 and 1842. In

⁴⁶⁸ Gallagher and Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade,’ 6.

⁴⁶⁹ It is worth noting that this is the main distinction between radical Cobdenites and the majority of the early Victorian world. Cobden was a pacifist and made it clear that Britain should remove itself from any military conflict based on trade, and, spectacularly, that Russia should invade Turkey as Russia maintained a larger trade with Britain than the Ottoman Empire did. See Cobden, *England, Ireland and America*, 8.

⁴⁷⁰ Gallagher and Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade,’ 5.

⁴⁷¹ See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 129-130; Said, *Orientalism*, 38-49.

1830 newspapers, journals, and other literature presented the state as a progressive part of the Ottoman Empire and a valuable British ally. This perception began to change after the 1831-1833 crisis between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Egypt's attempt at independence from the Ottoman Empire forced journals to question whether the state was an ally or an upsetting force in the region.

After the 1831-1833 crisis, a negative perception of Egypt began to emerge in British journalism. This was a problematic situation, given that Egypt was increasingly seen as a crucial link in Anglo-Indian trade. The perceived wretchedness of the Egyptian population and governmental incompetence were also discussed in travel literature of the time. The negative conception in British literature and journalism was cemented during the 1838-1841 crisis in which Britain actively sided with the Ottoman Empire in order to maintain Ottoman territorial integrity. By 1842 it was commonly reported by all the journals reviewed in this chapter that Egypt was in need of rehabilitation, as seen by the reception of Bowring's *Report on Egypt and Candia*.

British reportage on Egypt indicates that the state was seen in new ways in the 1830s. Drawing on the decades of interest in Egypt explored in the previous chapter, it can be seen that dominant British journals presented Egypt in novel ways. Its changing role in British commerce and international relations gave the state a new-found novelty value, which possibly heightened interest in Egyptian landscape scenery. The same literature that denounced the state as backward employed similar language to describe the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. Without the shift from the perception of the state as positive and modern to negative and backward, the notion of Egypt as picturesque

would not have been as popular as it was. Egypt as it was understood in Britain in 1830 would not necessarily have been accepted as picturesque.

The connection of picturesqueness and “truth” is central to the argument in this chapter. What was considered to be “true” about Egypt in 1830 was opposed to what was reported as “true” in 1842. Understanding the commonly accepted view that the state was both developmentally backward and picturesque in 1842 is essential for comprehending Roberts’ trip and the imagery in *Egypt and Nubia*. This is because his journal and lithographs endorse the negative view.

While Roberts’ journey was not largely affected by the 1838-1841 crisis, the mode in which he saw and presented the state in his art was absolutely affected by the events in, and British perceptions of, Egypt in the 1830s. In 1842, Roberts began publishing his picturesque Levantine landscapes. These landscapes were exceedingly popular with the British “middle-classes”, most of whom read the journals under review.⁴⁷² The state's topicality in the British press arguably helped to popularise Roberts’ lithographs. The next chapter will explore Roberts’ journey and the ways in which he presented Egypt within this context.

⁴⁷² G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society From Caxton to Northcliffe* (London: Longman Group, 1978), 159.

Chapter Five

Roberts' Egyptian journey and revisionist picturesque imagery

Introduction

The previous chapters explored what information was available to Roberts and his potential audience about Egypt in the years prior to his publication. By 1838, the year he travelled to the Near East, Egypt appeared to be firmly in the minds of his audience, comprised of literate Britons interested in exotic novelty. As Proctor has noted, Roberts was aware of this and, 'expected to bring back sketches that would be the basis for enough paintings, water colors, and lithographs to keep him busy for years and to make his fortune.'⁴⁷³ This chapter will explore the Egyptian leg of his journey between 1838 and 1839 and the lithographs in *Egypt and Nubia*.

On this trip, Roberts continued to explore the link between Islamic culture and the picturesque that he began in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*. To this end, he utilised a variety of picturesque modalities. In his illustrations of ancient and modern Egypt, for example, his images appeared to filter the dominant British opinion of the state through aesthetic conventions inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century picturesque conventions. In lithographs of both the ancient and modern Egyptian scenery, the artist incorporated figures in exotic dress, engaging in stereotypical Egyptian and Muslim activities. As the artist noted, he found, 'exactly what he expected' in Egypt.⁴⁷⁴

In order to understand *Egypt and Nubia* several indices must be examined. Roberts' Egyptian imagery serves as the primary index. I will explore those elements of the

⁴⁷³ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 64.

⁴⁷⁴ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 30 September, 1838.

landscape to which the artist drew attention, those he excluded, and how he incorporated ancient and modern subject matter. Additionally, two bodies of textual material will be examined. Roberts wrote extensively in his *Eastern Journal* and in letters about his experiences in Egypt. Accompanying the lithographs in *Egypt and Nubia* was a letterpress contextualising each image by describing scenes, their situation, and each location's historical significance, written by the antiquarian William Brockedon. Brockedon drew heavily on Roberts' *Eastern Journal* so much so that the artist complained that Brockedon had added almost nothing to Roberts' words.⁴⁷⁵ These textual sources will augment the primary visual material.

Both the images and text of *Egypt and Nubia* will also be explored in the light of recent scholarship on Orientalism and the British Empire. As Kenneth Bendiner states in his 1983 article 'David Roberts in the Near East: Social and Religious Themes', Roberts' lithographs illuminated 'early Victorians' willful objectivity, ethnic biases, social conscience, opulent taste, anti-Classicism, international rivalry, self-confidence, sense of history, and perpetual religious questions.⁴⁷⁶ The ways in which these social themes are addressed in the lithographs will be examined.

As in his earlier trip to Spain, the artist was in search of new scenery to draw, and he believed that a series of Egyptian images would be financially rewarding.⁴⁷⁷ This point was endorsed by William Thackeray, who described, 'the fortune to be made for painters in Cairo...the variety of architecture, of life, of picturesqueness, of brilliant

⁴⁷⁵ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 48.

⁴⁷⁶ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 78.

⁴⁷⁷ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 29 January, 1839.

colour, of light and shade.’⁴⁷⁸ As J. Harris Proctor has recently noted, Roberts believed this to be the case on account of British interest in Egypt’s ancient history, strategic importance, and rising British tourism to the region.⁴⁷⁹ The state was also in the public mind as a result of the quantity of travel literature and also the newsworthy exploits of Mehemet 'Ali in the 1830s, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Roberts’ use of the picturesque

Roberts’ journal and the letterpress suggest that the artist viewed Egypt in a picturesque manner and made use of picturesque templates in his compositions.⁴⁸⁰ One remarkable passage describing Philæ in Upper Egypt within *Egypt and Nubia* explicitly described ‘the material for the picturesque’ in the Egypt’s ruined ancient temples:

Granite rocks and ruined temples, broken and beautiful forms of natural and artificial embankments, and the refreshing verdure of the palms and sycamores, contrasted with the arid and burning sands, which descend on the banks of the Nile even to the water’s edge.⁴⁸¹

The composition of *Island of Philæ, at Sunset* [Fig. 32] suggests that Roberts was, at least in part, motivated by eighteenth-century British picturesque compositions. In comparing this image with William Gilpin’s *North-east View of Tintern Abbey* seen in chapter two [Fig. 4], it can be argued that Roberts’ positioning of ruins and placement of peripheral objects such as vegetation owed a debt to Gilpin’s approach. Specifically, the use of the Nile reeds and Gilpin’s placement of two trees in the far left of both images and the interspersal of vegetation in the ruins themselves, suggests compositional affinity. Additionally, the placement of the ruins in the middle ground, along with a low vantage point, underscores this affinity. Finally, both artists

⁴⁷⁸ W.M. Thackeray, *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Cairo* 2nd ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1846), 205.

⁴⁷⁹ Proctor, ‘David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,’ 64.

⁴⁸⁰ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 92-93.

⁴⁸¹ David Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:43.

emphasised the verticality of the architecture, drawing attention to their ruinous state and adding scale to the compositions.



Fig 32: David Roberts, *Island of Philæ, at Sunset*, 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II



Fig. 4: William Gilpin, *North-east View of Tintern Abbey*, 1782, aquatint, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of 1770*

Roberts appears to have modified Gilpin's template slightly, however. In *North-east View of Tintern Abbey* Gilpin utilised vegetation to frame the scene and establish boundaries within a picturesque composition. Here, the composition directs the viewer's eye towards the scene's focal point. While Roberts made use of the sparse vegetation around Philæ in this image, generally, he did not have this luxury in the largely infertile Egyptian landscape. Instead, he largely replaced Gilpin's vegetation with barren, rocky backgrounds in the first two volumes of *Egypt and Nubia*. This generalised approach, accompanied by the geographically precise title of the lithograph, recalls Roberts' Moroccan work, discussed in chapter two, in which the artist's perceived accuracy was based in part on a combination of generality and precision. In his images for the *Jennings Landscape Annual*, Roberts appealed at once to the specificity of a given locale and the landscape templates of the revisionist picturesque. This approach was discussed in the context of Col. Jackson's remarks on picturesque accuracy; in Jackson's view, the vocabulary of the picturesque could impart a correct impression of a given locale. This approach can be seen in both rural and urban Egyptian landscapes.

In Egypt's modern architecture, Ballantine noted that Roberts found a wellspring of picturesque subject matter,⁴⁸² including Cairo's long and narrow streets crowded with projecting shops.⁴⁸³ Lithographs such as *Minarets and Grand Entrance of the Metwaleys at Cairo* [Fig. 33] indicate the way in which Roberts represented Cairo, specifically as a series of buildings projecting onto uneven streets populated by colourful locals in novel costumes. The tonal and textural variety evident in this image recalls earlier urban picturesque, such as Prout's *Swiss Cottage, Lavey*.

⁴⁸² Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 106.

⁴⁸³ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 13 September, 1838.



Fig. 33: David Roberts, *Minarets and Grand Entrance of the Metwaleys at Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia* vol. III

Compositional elements such as the positioning of natural features, ruins, and mosques, alongside adaptations of pre-existing templates, combined to help make the landscapes legible as picturesque. The scene's sharply linear perspective suggests a long street, full of colourful locales interacting within a strange, yet familiar, space. It has already been established that picturesqueness may be defined as a juxtaposition of a series of compositional elements – notably architecture, ruins and figures – within the conventionalised framework of leading subject matter and side views. How were these elements used in Roberts' lithographs?

Picturesque architecture in *Egypt and Nubia*

Of particular interest to Gilpin's, Price's, and Roberts' picturesque frameworks was the ruin. The ruin, as seen in images of the crumbling Gothic church or monastery, was a central feature of Gilpin's and Price's visual repertoire on the picturesque. For Gilpin, the Gothic ruin exhibited varieties of texture and colour, as well as ruggedness, which highlighted the wild quality of a scene. As discussed in the second chapter, Uvedale Price refined Gilpin's theory on ruins, suggesting that decay and ruin were processes. He implored his readers to 'Observe the process by which time (the great author of such changes) converts a beautiful object into a picturesque one,' and wrote that weather stains and incrustations removed a building's uniformity of surface and colour and loosened its foundation, forming irregular masses.⁴⁸⁴ In Price's theorisation the properly picturesque ruin was one where the individual features of the building had become indistinct. The building had begun to be reclaimed by nature but was still recognisably man-made.⁴⁸⁵ Price, like Gilpin, believed that non-ruined buildings were considered to be smooth and uniform, aspects he associated with the beautiful.⁴⁸⁶ Conversely, roughness and irregularity, both qualities of the ruin accrued over time, were associated with the picturesque. In the majority of his ancient Egyptian scenery, Roberts appears to have adhered to the notion that architecture was most picturesque when it was in a state of ruination.

As Bendiner has observed, one of the central themes of *Egypt and Nubia* was the ruin.⁴⁸⁷ The picturesque concept of a properly ruined building was explored in

⁴⁸⁴ Price, *Picturesque*, 1:62.

⁴⁸⁵ Price, *Picturesque*, 2:96.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁸⁷ Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 68.

numerous lithographs, including the *Temple of Isis on the Roof of the Great Temple of Dendera* [Fig. 34], from the second volume of *Egypt and Nubia*.



Fig 34: David Roberts, *Temple of Isis on the Roof of the Great Temple of Dendera*, 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II

Brockedon's letterpress underscored the picturesque qualities of the scene. He wrote that the temple was 'set like a gem on the roof of the great structure,' but time and the destructive desert climate had all but destroyed the site.⁴⁸⁸ He noted, 'The sand around presents an arid appearance, covering the ancient and populous city, which once flourished amidst scenes of fertility; and desolation now rests on the ruins...'⁴⁸⁹ At Dendera, nature had converted the once smooth and beautiful architecture of the sites into picturesque ruins through a process of decay. Eventually the scenes would be consumed by nature and cease to exist; Roberts caught the sites at their most picturesque moments. His images were even more picturesque, in a Pricean sense, as the process of decay was one that was readily observable, and also observably advancing.

⁴⁸⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:23.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Roberts appeared to agree with Price's concept of decay in more than the visual sense. Recall that Price's concept of the picturesque ruin contained a moral element. He described English Catholic ruins as 'the abodes of superstition and tyranny';⁴⁹⁰ their ruined state, in this view, was a direct result of their being institutions of oppression. It was not only natural, but moral decay that led to the picturesque ruins' decrepit state. He considered it inevitable that Catholic structures in England were ruined, as they were unjust.⁴⁹¹ Therefore, the picturesque ruin was not only properly decayed, but it was proper that it was decayed. This sentiment was iterated by the *Athenaeum* on 1 December 1832 with particular reference to ancient Egyptian ruins. A writer for 'Our Weekly Gossip on Literature and Art' noted that:

The Pyramids of Egypt are monuments certainly of the ignorance, and most probably of the superstition of their builders: the cathedrals are monuments of a corrupt religion, and the same baronial castles, the want of which we never deplored till now, are monuments of a state of society in which everything was barbarous...⁴⁹²

Roberts seems to have adopted this theory on morality and ruins, albeit with one modification. Price's picturesque ruin was ruined because the institutions that built the buildings were unjust. Roberts, unlike the writer for the *Athenaeum*, harboured no such ill will towards the institutions of ancient Egypt. In fact, he was constantly amazed at the expertise displayed by the construction of ancient temples,⁴⁹³ and believed that their decrepit state was the result of Islamic mismanagement.⁴⁹⁴ In a letter to his daughter on 22 December 1838 Roberts wrote that the once great cities of Egypt were now, 'deserted and lonely, or reduced by misgovernment and the barbarism of the Moslem

⁴⁹⁰ Price, *Picturesque*, 2:301.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁹² 'Our Weekly Gossip on Literature and Art,' *Athenaeum*, no. 266 (1 December 1832): 779.

⁴⁹³ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 23 October, 1838.

⁴⁹⁴ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:18.

creed, to a state as savage as the wild animals by which they are surrounded. Often have I gazed on them till my heart has actually sickened within me.⁴⁹⁵ The artist made no secret of his distaste for Islam and specifically equated the religion with barbarism, laziness, and a fundamentally unchanging nature.⁴⁹⁶ Roberts' position has also been noted by the curators of the 1988 exhibition *The East: Imagined, Experience,*

Remembered:

The social and religious undercurrents of the illustrations... have been seen to include a sense of the destructive effect of Islamic domination and Christianity's lost inheritance, as well as the contrast between ancient grandeur and modern decadence, in a way breaking the Egyptian's link with his past...⁴⁹⁷

How did his views on Islam affect his representations of Egyptian architecture?

There were several elements of the lithographs that arguably reflect the artist's negative impression of Islam. Roberts, along with many early Victorians, appeared to believe that Muslims were unable to be materially productive.⁴⁹⁸ In the production of public works such as the port of Alexandria, Mehemet 'Ali was known to have dismantled ancient monuments and temples for building material.⁴⁹⁹ Roberts lamented this, noting in his journal that this practice was used at Antinoë. 'Here and there are polished granite pillars standing, or rather leaning, many half-buried in the rubbish surrounding them, contrasting rudely with the modern mud huts. I presume that the stones of the triumphal arches [have been] taken down to make lime.'⁵⁰⁰ Roberts seemed to suggest that modern, Islamic Egyptians had to revert to sourcing their material from surrounding monuments and temples because they were incapable of producing building material for

⁴⁹⁵ David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 22 December, 1838, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 105.

⁴⁹⁶ Malcolm Warner, 'The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity and Islam,' in *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse* ed. Maryanne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984), 36.

⁴⁹⁷ 'David Roberts,' 134.

⁴⁹⁸ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 342.

⁴⁹⁹ Scott, *Rambles in Egypt and Candia*, 19.

⁵⁰⁰ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 85-86.

use. The notion of modern Egyptians destroying ancient architecture was a constant theme of the lithographs, particularly in volumes I and II of *Egypt and Nubia*.⁵⁰¹

In lithographs such as *Grand Entrance to the Temple of Luxor* [Fig. 35] and *Ruins of Luxor From the South-West* [Fig. 36] Roberts juxtaposed ancient temples and modern hovels, emphasising his disgust with the modern Egyptian practice of reclaiming building materials from ruins. By composing scenes in this way, he was able to highlight his respect for ancient Egyptian construction and at the same time register his displeasure with the modern state. On his trip to Luxor, Roberts noted in his journal that sites such as this proved ‘the mighty work of ages long gone by,’ but that the ‘wretched dwellings’ that clung around Luxor ‘compromised’ the ruins.⁵⁰² The compromising process to which Roberts referred both compromised the picturesque quality of the scene, and also the structural integrity of the ancient temple being undermined by the modern buildings.

Luxor images such as *Grand Entrance to the Temple of Luxor* [Fig. 35] illustrate Roberts’ point. The vantage point for this image was the summit of a mound that overlooked the modern village of Luxor.⁵⁰³ Here, the modern dwellings were described as being like swallows’ nests, ‘disfiguring the beautiful objects to which they are attached.’⁵⁰⁴ The modern houses have a vaguely pyramidal form, which Roberts suggested was an older building style than the pyramids themselves.⁵⁰⁵ Behind the

⁵⁰¹ In addition to the lithographs discussed in this chapter, see *Karnak: Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Amun*; *Edfu: The Pylon Viewed from the Back*; *Edfu: View into the Pronaos*; *Entrance to the Tomb of a Prince* from vol. I, and *Thebes: Bigeh*; *Temple of Ptolemy III*; *The Colossi of Memnon at Sunrise*; *Thebes: Armant: Temple of Month*; *Ramesseum with Statues of Ramesses II* from vol. II.

⁵⁰² Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 23 October, 1838.

⁵⁰³ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:38.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

modern dwellings are the ruins of Luxor, which featured hieroglyphs of the military conquests of Rameses II. In the first courtyard a dome is present. Behind the left-hand tower the summit of the minaret of the Mosque of Abu el-Haggag can be seen.⁵⁰⁶ In presenting the ruins of Luxor and the story of one of Egypt's greatest pharaohs surrounded with primitive huts, Roberts invited the viewer to conclude that Egypt had somehow regressed from its previous civilisation to a barbarous state.



Fig 35: David Roberts, *Grand Entrance to the Temple of Luxor* 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II

Interesting differences between Roberts' approach and eighteenth-century attitudes towards picturesque poverty emerge when comparing this description with Gilpin's depiction of the wretched figure at Tintern Abbey. He encountered a beggar who gave him an impromptu tour of the Abbey, in which she lived.⁵⁰⁷ Gilpin recognised the beggar as a picturesque addition to the scene.⁵⁰⁸ Roberts, however, decried the contemporary squalor surrounding Egyptian ruins. The disparity between these two responses elucidates the difference between Gilpin's and Roberts' applications of the

⁵⁰⁶ Bourbon, *Egypt Yesterday and Today*, 155.

⁵⁰⁷ Gilpin, *Wye*, 36.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

picturesque. The former did not use his art to moralise on the conditions of modern life; the latter, however, often did so.

One important element of Roberts' interpretation of racial and cultural difference was the idea that a nation or culture could devolve from a high position within the hierarchy of peoples to a lower position. As Porter notes, it was a common early-Victorian assumption that with a lack of good governance, or the influence of religions other than Christianity, it was possible for communities to become increasingly uncivilised.⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, this was frequently remarked upon with regards to Turkey, such as in an article in the *Athenaeum* published in December 1832, in which it was stated that:

The power and glory of the Turks are passed and gone... Their strength has failed less from the courage of their enemies than from internal decay; their religion prevented improvement, and their ignorant pride hindered all beneficial changes: they fell, in everything save in personal bravery, the leeward; and the result has been, that the barbarians of the north, as they contemptuously termed the Russians, have trampled them down and threatened their empire with destruction.⁵¹⁰

This theory was also used as a way of explaining the early nineteenth-century state of Egypt, which was described as 'full of ancient learning when Britain was inhabited by savages,' in the words of one Victorian schoolbook, but was perceived to have since fallen into a state of decrepitude.⁵¹¹ James Augustus St. John seconded this point in the *Oriental Album* [1851], stating that descriptions of Egypt tended to rely on picturesque and negative descriptions because they:

greatly enhance the pleasure of the reader to contrast his state with that of men in other parts of the world, and fancy it to be greatly superior; and, as far as mere

⁵⁰⁹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 78.

⁵¹⁰ 'Review of the *Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece, &c. and of a Cruise in the Black Sea, with the Capitan Pasha, in the Years 1829, 1830, and 1831* by Adolphus Slade,' *Athenaeum*, no. 268 (15 December 1832): 801.

⁵¹¹ Arabella Buckley, *History of England for Beginners* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1887), 354, reprinted in Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 78.

material wealth goes, there are few in any European community who may not look down with pity on the Egyptian...⁵¹²

St. John's remark accurately summed up part of the allure of picturesque Egyptian visual imagery. As such imagery was a mixture of novel subject matter and a familiar template, the viewer was free to negatively view the state and its residents from a familiar vantage point.

Another lithograph, *Ruins of Luxor From the South-West* [Fig. 36] – a view of the main satellite of the large religious complex at Karnac – provides further evidence for this interpretation. In this image, unlike *Ruins of the Temple of Kom-Ombo, Upper Egypt* and *Temple of the Roof of the Great Temple of Dendera*, the process of ruination was *un-natural* in that it was man-made.



Fig 36: David Roberts, *Ruins of Luxor from the South-West*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. I

⁵¹² E. Prisse and James Augustus St. John, *The Oriental Album* (London: James Madden, 1851), 29-30.

In this lithograph Roberts chose a spot across the Nile from the ruins of the temple complex at Luxor as his vantage point and in so doing was able to incorporate three modern elements into the scene, all of which are presented negatively: the ‘mud huts’ that form the ‘Arab village of Luxor,’ the mosque of Abd Alhajaj, and the *shadoof*, a device for extracting water from the Nile.⁵¹³ The mud huts, which can be seen directly in front of the ruins, were described in the letterpress as ‘vile’ and an ‘outrageous contrast’ to the ruined temple, which Roberts depicted as being separated by both centuries of mismanagement and the Nile.⁵¹⁴ Adding to the visual and cultural distance between ancient and modern Egyptian architecture, Brockedon stated that the mosque looked out of place amidst ‘structures that have braved more than thirty centuries.’⁵¹⁵ Finally, the *shadoof* was presented as an archaic and wasteful method of raising water and described by Brockedon as ‘a source of excessive labour and waste of energy to the Fellahs, who are employed to work them.’⁵¹⁶ As if to emphasise this point, Roberts inserted a reclining fellah languidly gazing out at the Nile. The figure appears to be as idle and unproductive as the *shadoof* itself.

It is clear that Roberts drew unfavourable conclusions when comparing ancient Egypt to its modern counterpart. Nowhere in *Egypt and Nubia* is this more evident than in the lithograph *Approach of the Simoon, Desert of Gizeh* [Fig. 37]. The image consists of a desert landscape featuring the Sphinx in profile. In the foreground a group of Egyptians are attempting in vain to flee the approach of the simoon, a strong and dust-laden cyclonic wind that blows through the Sahara desert at a temperature of over 50 degrees Celsius. In this image, the Sphinx is presented as an enduring monument having faced

⁵¹³ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:15.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

down innumerable visitations by the storm. It thus served as a symbol of Egypt's venerable past, while the modern Egyptians are seen to be unable even to pitch a tent in the face of the storm. The conclusion seems to be that the state had regressed from its once-noble past. *Approach of the Simoon, Desert of Gizeh* can be read as a barometer of just how far it was perceived to have decayed.



Fig 37: David Roberts, *Approach of the Simoon, Desert of Giza*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

After comparing modern rural Egyptian architecture unfavourably to ancient Egyptian architecture in the first two volumes of *Egypt and Nubia*, Roberts devoted the third volume to modern Cairo. Roberts wrote in his journal that the city was ‘unequaled in the world for the picturesque,’⁵¹⁷ and used this subject matter to create lithographs of cityscapes, bazaar scenes and mosques. While the ancient architecture in the first two volumes of *Egypt and Nubia* seems to be inspired by Gilpin’s and Price’s theories of the

⁵¹⁷ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 106.

picturesque, Volume III arguably incorporated more of the expanded field of the picturesque seen in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*.

The revisionist picturesque extended the compositional nature of Gilpin's and Price's theorisations. Many nineteenth-century picturesque representations utilised the tropes of decay, colourful figures, and a formulaic overall composition, as eighteenth-century picturesque images had, but were differentiated by the depiction of urban and exotic subject matter. In the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*, for example, Roberts depicted Spain, particularly Moorish Spanish ruins, within this framework. As discussed in previous chapters, the application of new subject matter in a familiar framework kept the picturesque in the public imagination and increased Roberts' budding celebrity in the 1830s. He appears to have maintained this approach whilst in Cairo in 1838 and 1839.

Evidence of what Roberts considered to be picturesque can be seen in the title vignette to Volume III [Fig. 38]. By placing a picturesque view on the cover, Roberts clearly indicated the way in which he would depict Cairo in the final installment of *Egypt and Nubia*. In the text accompanying this image Brockedon stated that the scene was:

... one of the most generally characteristic of the streets and buildings of Cairo that the artist could select. The narrow way, overhanging houses, trellised windows, sheds and shops, the throngs of people and the crowning minaret of the mosque, rich in all that constitutes such an Arab structure, make up a scene of singular and picturesque beauty.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:1.



Fig 38: David Roberts, *Title Vignette*, 1849, lithograph *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

One of the characteristic qualities of picturesque Cairo was the mosque. In his many scenes of Cairo's mosques Roberts utilised them as symbols of decay in a similar fashion to earlier eighteenth-century picturesque artists' use of ruined Gothic abbeys. Roberts replaced the monastery with the mosque and thereby incorporated it into a nineteenth-century picturesque framework. They were largely only accessible to non-Muslims by special permission of the Pacha.⁵¹⁹ Roberts received this special permission,⁵²⁰ and, therefore many of the scenes that he depicted extremely novel. The importance of novelty in the early-Victorian print market can be seen in a letter from the publisher and bookseller Robert Cadell to Roberts, in which Cadell suggested that

⁵¹⁹ Nicholas Tromans, 'The Holy City,' in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publications, 2008), 164.

⁵²⁰ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 24 December, 1838.

within this ‘scrambling, pushing, competing, bustling,’ milieu only work that contained ‘a dash of originality’ would be financially successful.⁵²¹

Roberts’ connection of Gothic religious ruins to the mosque was not as unusual as it may seem. It was an early-Victorian belief about Islam that the religion was a decrepit inversion of Christianity,⁵²² and as discussed above Price considered Catholicism to be superstitious and tyrannical.⁵²³ Indeed, superstition and tyranny were two of the fundamental Victorian stereotypes of Islam.⁵²⁴ In Roberts’ imagery, Islam served a similar function to Catholicism in Price’s theory: that of the debased and decayed cultural and religious system signified by ruined architecture. In fact, one Victorian theory suggested that both Gothic and Islamic architecture shared a common Byzantine architectural ancestor,⁵²⁵ and therefore would have a similar picturesque effect.

Brockedon noted this in the letterpress for Vol. III.⁵²⁶

What distinguished picturesque mosques from the ‘abodes of superstition and tyranny’ described by Price was that, while Britain’s Catholic ruins symbolised the nation’s perceived triumph over Catholicism, the mosque was a symbol of the contemporary state. The mosque’s juxtaposition with the ruined ancient architecture possibly suggests that Egypt’s situation was an inversion of Britain’s. While the latter moved forward from perceived ignorance and tyranny into greatness, the former receded from ancient greatness into ignorance and tyranny. It is possible that, unlike Britain’s picturesque

⁵²¹ Robert Cadell to David Roberts, London, n.d., in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 164.

⁵²² Philip Almond, *Heretic and Hero: Muhammad and the Victorians* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), 4.

⁵²³ Price, *Picturesque*, 2:301.

⁵²⁴ Sari Nasir, *The Arabs and the English* 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1979), 65.

⁵²⁵ P. Frankl, *The Gothic; Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 363-365, reprinted in Bendiner, ‘David Roberts in the Near East,’ 68.

⁵²⁶ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:20.

sites that were enclosed and historicised by enlightened civilisation, Egypt was presented in the lithographs as a completely picturesque place.

In *Egypt and Nubia* Brockedon described mosques as being:

so strikingly characteristic of the East [and] so highly picturesque that the artist can scarcely help adding to his collection of drawings every fresh mosque that he visits... but so rapidly are they now decaying, that the chief record of their having ever existed may, in another age, be found only in such a work as these illustrations.⁵²⁷

Had the mosques been in pristine condition, they would not have fitted the criteria for picturesque architecture. Roberts' presentation of the mosques as ruined helped make them legible to his audience in the same way that ruined Gothic architecture was indicative of picturesqueness in the eighteenth century. Additionally, the encroaching ruination recalls Price's assertion that decay was at its best when it was a readily observable phenomenon that resulted in a 'correctly picturesque' ruin.⁵²⁸

While Roberts' images of mosques were varied and diverse visually, nearly all of them appear to link Islam with laziness and violence, two distinct causes of decay. The lithograph *Ruined Mosques in the Desert West of the Citadel* [Fig. 39] serves as evidence of this. The letterpress stated that the mosques outside of Cairo 'are nearly all falling to decay, and some are in ruins... There is little doubt that the mosques have been destroyed by violence, but history has not preserved when or why.'⁵²⁹ This is an interesting image in that it does not depict any ancient subject matter. Despite the fact that the scene's position is in the wilderness outside Cairo, it was included in Vol. III of *Egypt and Nubia*, which primarily focuses on urban imagery. Roberts used a different visual language for this image from the others discussed above in that there is no

⁵²⁷ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:17.

⁵²⁸ Price, *Picturesque*, 1:79.

⁵²⁹ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:7.

reference to Egypt's glorious past. Instead, the desolation of a ruined Islamic building, its verticality encouraging the viewer to notice every element of decay, is foregrounded as the only subject matter. The leading subject matter in the image – mosques – suggested that parts of the Egyptian countryside were overrun with Islamic ruins and little else.



Fig 39: David Roberts, *Ruined Mosques in the Desert West of the Citadel*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

Roberts considered violence to be a fundamental aspect of Islam.⁵³⁰ He established this link in part through crumbling Islamic architecture. In depicting the vast majority of Islamic architecture in *Egypt and Nubia* as decrepit, he suggested that this was the normal state of modern Egypt. This decay was attributed, as in the case of *Ruined Mosques in the Desert West of the Citadel*, to the violence that Roberts considered to be endemic in Islamic societies.⁵³¹ The linkage of mosques and violence was evident in

⁵³⁰ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 57.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

the commentary accompanying *Interior of the Mosque of the Sultan Hassan*, of which Brockedon noted:

This magnificent temple is neglected, and falling to decay, and it is evident from the state of the walls that, at a period not very remote, it has been used as a place of defence, and bears, as a whole, as much the appearance of a fortress as of a temple.⁵³²

Roberts made this link in the *Eastern Journal* as well, particularly with regard to his exceptional visits to the interiors of Cairo's mosques. On his trip he mistakenly entered the mosque in which the covering for the Prophet's tomb was being woven and was warned to flee the mosque to avoid being murdered. He noted, 'Had it been known that the sacred drapery had been polluted by the touch of an unbeliever – a dog of a Christian – and had I been caught it is horrid to reflect on what might have been my punishment.'⁵³³

Again, this type of violence was perceived as distinct from the violence described by Price in unseating Catholicism in Britain. For Price, that series of violent historical events was sanctified in British history as just. Additionally, Catholic ruins featured the natural decay that added aesthetic weight to the moral weight – mossy encrustations confirmed that the ruin was naturally part of the British landscape. Roberts' images, however, suggest that the violence surrounding the mosques was not in the service of a greater good. There is no historical or visual evidence provided by the images or Brockedon's text to suggest that sort of validation. Instead, the mosque images gave credence to the view that violence was the natural state of modern Egypt. Indeed, there exists a disjunction between the aesthetic and moral message of Roberts' mosque images: they are visually pleasing, but also confirm the moral decrepitude of the present

⁵³² Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:8.

⁵³³ Sim, *David Roberts*, 154.

state. This approach is distinct from Price's use of the ruin as a litmus test for social and political development. Roberts mobilised ruins in order to show the very opposite – that Egypt had regressed from past grandeur to its current state.

Roberts' preconceived notion of Islam was concordant with early-Victorian stereotypes of the religion. Other writers maintained similar views, such as a writer in the *Art-Union*, who wrote in 1841 that, 'the ravages of ruthless and ignorant [Muslim] barbarians' were to blame for the ruin of Egypt's monuments.⁵³⁴ Recall that one indictment of Egypt's government in the mid 1830s was the aborted plan to destroy the Pyramids. These negative views of Islam at the time were evident in a variety of media, including arts criticism, popular travel writing, and nascent anthropology.⁵³⁵ Even so respected a scholar as Edward Lane noted in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* that Muslim Egyptians were lazy and unproductive.⁵³⁶

Another early-Victorian belief about Islam was that it was the root cause of all social problems in the East.⁵³⁷ W.C. Taylor wrote in 1834 that Islam was a religion where 'disease... became permanent in its system, every wound changed into a festering sore...'⁵³⁸ Roberts appears to have agreed with this and depicted Egypt's mosques and ancient temples as slowly rotting away from the inside, being reclaimed by the surrounding landscape. This process of decay, though picturesque, was, for Roberts an effect of the state's corrupt government and debased religion. Modern Egypt as both picturesque and decayed served as the basis for the third volume of the lithographs.

⁵³⁴ *Art-Union*, July 1841, 123, reprinted in Bendiner, 'David Roberts in the Near East,' 69.

⁵³⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 62-65.

⁵³⁶ Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 1.

⁵³⁷ Almond, *Muhammad and the Victorians*, 85.

⁵³⁸ W.C. Taylor, *The History of Mohammedanism* (London: J.W. Parker, 1834), 5.

Politics and picturesque figures in *Egypt and Nubia*

Roberts' use of the human figure in his lithographs reflects his usage of the picturesque as well as his feelings on the contemporary state of Egypt. While he tended to generalise figures in his lithographs, he did incorporate them into the majority of the images in *Egypt and Nubia*.⁵³⁹ He often used them as compositional devices that provided scale, introduced tonal variety and broke up the unvaried desert landscape. In this respect, the artist largely conformed to eighteenth-century versions of the picturesque.

In keeping with Gilpin's theory, Roberts' figures in *Egypt and Nubia* generally served a minor functional role in the compositions. Gilpin stipulated that figures not be the focus of the picturesque scene, but instead serve to characterise and animate a scene, as well as to break up harsh, unvaried, and linear compositions.⁵⁴⁰ For Gilpin, the figure was a generalised, impersonal addition to a scene. Roberts' figures also perform these functions in *Egypt and Nubia*. With the exception of *Interview with Mehemet Ali in His Palace at Alexandria* [Fig. 26] there are no individually recognisable figures in any of the images.⁵⁴¹ These figures, like the architecture discussed earlier, can be seen as a component part of the overall scene that reminded the viewer of the desolation or lack of productivity required in the picturesque scene, as discussed in chapter two. In the case of Gilpin's vagrant at Tintern Abbey, the idle picturesque figure served as personification the scene's picturesqueness. Roberts' Egyptian figures served a similar function.

⁵³⁹ Figures appear in all but eight of the 247 lithographs in *The Holy Land, Egypt and Nubia*. Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 48.

⁵⁴⁰ Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 144.

⁵⁴¹ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 50.

In presenting Egyptians as idle and unproductive, Roberts appears to have further adhered to Gilpin's rule concerning individuals in a landscape scene. Gilpin wrote:

In a moral view, the industrious mechanic is a more pleasing object, than the loitering peasant. But in a picturesque light, it is otherwise. The arts of industry are rejected; and even idleness, if I may so speak, adds dignity to a character. Thus the lazy cowherd resting on his pole; or the peasant lolling on a rock, may be allowed in the grandest scenes; while the laborious mechanic, with his implements of labour, would be repulsed.⁵⁴²

Roberts' aesthetic adherence to this rule has been seen in images such as *Ruins of Luxor from the South-West*, [Fig. 35]. The principal distinction between Gilpin's theory and Roberts' practice lies in the moral judgment that Roberts passed on his idle picturesque figures.

In *Adventures During a Journey Overland to India* in 1836, Thomas Skinner pointed out that in spite of 'colleges, manufactories and disciplined armies,' Egyptians 'are wretched in appearance, and wretched in fact.'⁵⁴³ This passage, discussed in the previous chapter, referred to the late 1830s British perception that the Egyptian population was backward and lacked industriousness. In much the same fashion, Roberts largely presented Egyptians in *Egypt and Nubia* as wretched in appearance, idle and picturesque. There are no figures in the lithographs engaged in taxing labour or industry, excepting possibly the *Interview with Mehemet Ali in His Palace at Alexandria*. The majority of the figures are presented as idling in bazaars, coffee shops, and the Egyptian landscape. The idleness and wretchedness of Roberts' figures highlights both the negative and picturesque way Roberts saw Egyptians.

⁵⁴² Gilpin, *Cumberland, and Westmoreland*, 1:44.

⁵⁴³ Skinner, *Adventures During a Journey Overland to India*, 52.

While his opinion of Egyptians in the majority of his images can be readily observed, it is when the artist used figures as the central subject of the scene that the full weight of Roberts' approbation is visible.⁵⁴⁴ These lithographs include *The Coffee-Shop of Cairo* [Fig. 40] and *The Silk Mercers' Bazaar of El Gooreyeh, Cairo* [Fig. 41]. In a sense these images are an inversion of traditional picturesque representation, which dictated that figures were minor compositional elements. However, instead of nullifying the picturesque quality of the scene via this transgression, Roberts highlighted their tonal variety, roughness, and ruination – defining them as decrepit. These figures do not perform the same function compositionally in that they are not inserted to add variety to the landscape. In these images the landscape and other compositional elements are secondary to the figures themselves. Often, Roberts used these figures to further highlight his perception of Egyptians' backwardness.

In the same journal entry that he described Cairo as the most picturesque city in the world, the artist also mentioned that 'Cairo contains more idle people than any place of its size in this world.'⁵⁴⁵ In *The Coffee-Shop of Cairo*, groups of colourfully dressed men sit, smoking and drinking coffee and are seen as slothful and sensuous. When presenting the figures within a decrepit architectural space Roberts invited the viewers to surmise that this behaviour was natural in Egypt. The viewer is encouraged to see these colourful figures not as individuals, but as vehicles for the picturesque and as examples of the 'troops of idlers' that the artist encountered during his stay in Cairo.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ This can be seen in *Abyssinian Slaves at Korti* and *A Group in the Slave Market in Cairo*, discussed in chapter three,

⁵⁴⁵ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 19 January, 1839.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 January, 1839.



Fig 40: David Roberts, *The Coffee-Shop of Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

Despite examples such as *The Coffee-Shop of Cairo* that somewhat undermine traditional picturesque composition, the majority of images in *Egypt and Nubia* featured a more standardised approach to the human figure as a minor compositional element within a larger scene. When inserted into a Cairo bazaar, or in front of a mosque, the effect would have been an exciting interplay of novelty, colour, and architecture, in a compositional framework that was immediately legible for the viewer. Roberts noted the visual value of Egyptian figures in a letter to his daughter Christine:

I wish I could transport you for an hour into one of the bazaars. Such a scene! All the Eastern nations gathered together. Turks and Greeks in their picturesque costumes. The wild Arab, who never slept within walls; every tribe different in dress and all armed... Then the extraordinary variety of articles for sale, the gravity of the shopkeeper and his customer, each smoking a pipe in front of the shop.⁵⁴⁷

The scene of the artist's breathless description was *The Silk Mercers' Bazaar of El Gooreyeh, Cairo*. The bazaar, held under a makeshift roof sandwiched between two

⁵⁴⁷ David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 31 January, 1839, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 111-113.

buildings in the religious complex of Sultan al-Ghuri, fascinated the artist.⁵⁴⁸ The text accompanying this image stated that there were ‘few situations in Cairo in which [Roberts] was so much struck with the picturesque appearance of the population as in the bazaars, and this remained long after the mere novelty of their costume had passed away.’⁵⁴⁹



Fig 41: David Roberts, *The Silk Mercers' Bazaar of El Gooreyeh, Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. III

What is interesting about this passage is the final statement ‘long after the mere novelty of their costumes had passed away.’ It was not only the clothing that the artist found picturesque, but the mannerisms that he witnessed as well. It is clear from this image, Roberts’ letter, and Brockedon’s letterpress that the artist considered the people he saw

⁵⁴⁸ Bourbon, *Egypt Yesterday and Today*, 218.

⁵⁴⁹ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:10.

in the Cairo bazaar to be picturesque. This is a result of the figures displaying the idleness and lack of productivity that Roberts equated to the picturesque while at the same time providing the requisite compositional and tonal variety. This can be seen in the various groupings of figures wearing elaborate and exotic dress, often hiding from the sun's glare. He also noted that the merchants would not solicit any business but would sit or stand by their shops, smoking a pipe,⁵⁵⁰ which can be seen in *The Silk Mercers' Bazaar of El Gooreyeh, Cairo*.

The idleness seen in lithographs such as *The Coffee Shop of Cairo* and *The Silk Mercers Bazaar of El Gooreyeh, Cairo*, echoed one of the ways in which early-Victorian Britain understood hierarchical racial and cultural distinctions. By judging which states were preferred trading partners and which required development, racial attitudes often featured in the judgment. Early Victorians largely viewed racial differences hierarchically, with Britain at the top, followed by northern Europeans, then southern Europeans, with Asians and Africans at the bottom of the racial table. As imperial historian Bernard Porter suggests in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, the perceived deficiencies of “lesser” races was accounted for not by innate racial inferiority, as it would be later in the century, but through a lack of environmental factors such as personal liberty, education, openness, peace and the absence of tyrannical government.⁵⁵¹ Once these factors were in place, it was only a matter of time before “lesser races”, of which the Egyptian was considered one, would be able to begin trading with Britain and self-governing without European intervention.

⁵⁵⁰ David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 31 January, 1839, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 111-113.

⁵⁵¹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 104.

This is a point of view that Roberts certainly agreed with. Recall that he lamented in his *Eastern Journal*, ‘Will this desert ever again become the busy haunt of men? Nothing is more probable, as Egypt is the medium of our direct intercourse with India.’⁵⁵² Here, Roberts shows himself to be an adherent of the idea that liberalised trade, once instigated by Britain, would be a benefit to all trading partners. This was also acknowledged by Brockedon, who explicitly stated that British trade would ensure ‘the future prosperity of Egypt,’⁵⁵³ and that increased interaction with Britain via trade would help to improve the lot of the Egyptian people.⁵⁵⁴ While sentiments such as these would not have been considered in themselves imperialistic at the time, they appear to have been in line with a view towards increasing Britain’s international trade presence, and therefore serve as further evidence for Roberts’ acceptance of loose imperialism.

This situation further problematises a Saidian interpretation of Roberts. While the artist appears to have believed that a British trade presence in the Levant would benefit both Britain and Egypt, at no point did Roberts explicitly state in his writing, or implicitly suggest in his imagery, that Britain should directly or indirectly rule Egypt. It is clear that the lack of desire to directly govern was related to the concern with free trade discussed above. Without the chance for improvement, the majority of Britain’s trading partners, including China, India, and the Ottoman Empire, would never be capable of trading unless Britain maintained a costly ruling presence. This was precisely the reason why Egypt was highlighted in pre-1832 reportage as being a model Eastern state. Before 1832, Mehemet 'Ali, was thought to have established the environmental factors necessary to facilitate free trade between Britain and Egypt. Britain intervened in Egyptian affairs only when it was realised that Egypt’s modernisation was at the

⁵⁵² Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 91-92.

⁵⁵³ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3:4.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

expense of the Ottoman Empire and was therefore unhelpful to British trade. While Roberts never directly commented on the 1838-1841 crisis, it is likely that he saw it as a minor interruption of the commerce that would wake Egypt up from centuries of inactivity, as discussed in chapter four.

This interpretation is at odds with some Saidian interpretations of Roberts' art. In Said's view, Western representations of the Levant are predicated on the desire for political control, manifested in the denunciation of Islamic society as backward, decayed, and unmodern. While elements of this type of interpretation resonate with Roberts' imagery, it would be historically inaccurate to assume that the lithographs in *Egypt and Nubia* exclusively functioned in this way. The relative utility of Saidian interpretation, previously mentioned in chapter four, can be seen the critique of orientalist art laid out by Linda Nochlin in her essay 'The Imaginary Orient'.

Nochlin largely agrees with Said's interpretation of Orientalism and imperialism. Her agreement with *Orientalism* came with only one caveat, that although Said's insights into imperialist representations were significant, 'Said's book does not deal with the visual arts at all.'⁵⁵⁵ As such, 'The Imaginary Orient' is an attempt to address Said's silence on visual art by applying his theory to a variety of nineteenth-century orientalist painters, including the French painters Eugene Delacroix and Jean-Leon Gérôme, as well as Roberts. These artists, according to Nochlin, actively propagated orientalist stereotypes of Muslims as sensuous, lethargic, and 'backward,' and the artists' use of these tropes furthered the cause of European dominance over the Levant.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ See Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' 57, endnote 3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

There exist a number of parallels between Nochlin's argument and my own. Chiefly, Nochlin states that Orientalist art 'cannot be confronted without a critical analysis of the particular power structure in which these works came into being,' which is a central concern of this project.⁵⁵⁷ More specifically, Nochlin's interprets works such as Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Clothes Merchants of Cairo* [1866], and *The Snake Charmer* [1870], as well as Eugène Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* [1827], *Street in Mekenes* [1832], and *Sultan of Morocco* [1845] as presenting the Levant as a timeless, decayed place, and its inhabitants as being sensuous, lethargic, and backward.⁵⁵⁸ She notes that, 'Neglected, ill-repaired architecture functions, in nineteenth-century Orientalist art, as a standard topos for commenting on the corruption of contemporary Islamic society.'⁵⁵⁹ My findings regarding Roberts' Egyptian imagery broadly correspond to these conclusions.

However, Nochlin's conclusions are compromised by a lack of historical specificity. She implies that a variety of French artists, particularly Gérôme and Delacroix, exist within an imperialistic singularity. Nochlin fails to address the shifting nature of French imperialism in the nineteenth century. Various attitudes towards overseas possessions in France during the nineteenth century would have impacted the imperialist implications of the works discussed by Nochlin. She casually references French imperial practices in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire – this is problematic in that France did not maintain a singular policy toward the Ottomans and the Algerians.⁵⁶⁰ She suggests that picturesque orientalist artists attempted to create an unthreatening image of Islam that would legitimise French control of Muslim territories such as Algeria.⁵⁶¹ Nochlin's examples include paintings of Egyptian scenery, ancient Assyrian despots and Romantic

⁵⁵⁷ Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' 35.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-37.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁶⁰ MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 50-51.

⁵⁶¹ Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' 50.

Algerian imagery. While it would be possible to claim that Gérôme's work could be used as a justification for French intervention into Levantine practices such as slavery, it would be almost impossible to read *Death of Sardanapalus* as an endorsement of French colonisation. Not only did the French not have a significant imperial presence in the area surrounding the Upper Tigris River but also the painting depicts a fictional ruler from antiquity and has no direct relationship to nineteenth-century Levantine governance. It seems to be based more on what Maryanne Stevens has described as 'an exotic Orient conjured up in the poems of Byron and in Hugo's *Orientales*,⁵⁶² than by the prospect of French colonisation.

Recent research has shown that early-Victorian forms of loose imperialism were distinct from French methods of direct control in the early and mid nineteenth century.

Specifically, when comparing France's annexation of Algerian territory in 1830 to Britain's approach to the North Africa and the Levant in the 1830s, or, indeed the differences in French and British imperial overtures in Egypt,⁵⁶³ several attitudinal differences emerge. Specifically, the French approach appears to be based more on territorial conquest than on loose economic superiority. Since Roberts' loose imperialism was distinct from the forms of imperialism discussed by Said, we must now ask another question: Was Roberts' picturesque artistic practice fundamentally imperialistic in the way that early Victorians practiced imperialism? Their form of imperialism took the shape of overwriting their template of good governance and free trade on to other countries and placing ethnic groups on a sliding scale of development. Roberts' picturesque also applied a template to foreign territory. He forced the scenery to fit into a preconceived model, and treated Egyptian figures as nonspecific and

⁵⁶² Maryanne Stevens, 'Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914,' in *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1984), 18.

⁵⁶³ For more information, refer back to chapter three.

generalised amalgamations of different styles of exotic dress and manners – a summation of Egyptian “types”. These indistinct figures perhaps served to exemplify the ways in which Egyptians were in a debased position relative to Britons. This can be seen in a variety of images from *Egypt and Nubia*, as discussed above.

Roberts’ use of the picturesque possibly served as a form of visual loose imperialism, overwriting the British template onto Egypt’s developmental state. A greater symmetry exists between Roberts’ picturesque and early Victorians’ form of imperialism than Said’s imprecise interpretation of imperialism and Orientalism. That being said, the notion of the artist as a “visual imperialist” using Western systems of knowledge in order to pass judgment on foreign cultures does suggest a potential availability for a Saidian reading, particularly in relation to *Culture and Imperialism*. In that book Said stated that imperial culture made unfamiliar territory legible by use of standardised rubrics.⁵⁶⁴ *Egypt and Nubia* is also available to Said’s interpretation of discourse. As stated above, Roberts’ work can be seen to be discursive in the way that it echoes other descriptions of the state and recreates it within a British template. In depicting Egyptians not as individuals but as archetypes and disallowing modern manufactory from the landscape scene, Roberts clearly showed the state not as an individual location, but as one that looked like what early-Victorian writers such as St. John, Thackeray, and Lindsay had described.

Roberts diverges from Said’s understanding of imperialism and Orientalism in that his points of reference were not ahistorical and monolithic, but based on a then-new interpretation of Egypt. As was seen in chapter four, the popular British impression of

⁵⁶⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

the state underwent great changes in the 1830s. Roberts' reliance on dominant contemporary opinion suggests that the artist was not necessarily driven by a literary tradition that extended back to Dante, as a Saidian interpretation would suggest,⁵⁶⁵ but by early-Victorian publications.

Conclusion

Through the imagery and text of *Egypt and Nubia* Roberts' work can be seen to mobilise various picturesque templates in the "accurate" portrayal of Egypt. His approach suggests that he agreed with the current British opinion on the state of Egypt. Although Roberts had no political motivation for his trip, the images and letterpress presented the state as backward and ruinous – both tropes of the political consensus in the late 1830s. Roberts himself was well treated while in Egypt, but at the same time witnessed poverty and hardship. He firmly believed that Egyptians were suffering from Islamic misrule.

His use of the picturesque coloured the way in which he presented the state. He focused on ruined temples, poorly constructed modern architecture, and wretched figures. These are all elements of the picturesque, cribbed from the theories of Gilpin and Price, as well as the nineteenth-century revisionist practice in Britain typified by the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*. Roberts' use of the picturesque can be seen in the architecture that he depicted. He showed the ancient temples in a state of ruin, reminiscent of Price's theory. However, unlike Price, Roberts did not equate Egyptian ruins with the defeat of unjust political and religious systems. Instead, he attributed the temples' ruination to unjust systems, specifically Islam. He equated the religion with all the problems that

⁵⁶⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 68-70.

Egypt faced. This can be seen in the modern architecture that Roberts represented, specifically Cairo's mosques. These buildings were shown as poorly constructed. They referenced the decayed state while at the same time were aesthetically pleasing as picturesque subject matter. This can also be seen in the various figures that inhabited the landscapes.

Roberts' Egyptian figures further indicate the debt these images owe to late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century picturesque theory. Roberts' figures display the novel costumes required of nineteenth-century picturesque, while generally following Gilpin's suggestion that figures were secondary landscape elements. The artist used his figures to further the perception of decrepitude. His Egyptians were idle and unproductive. They also engaged in abhorrent practices such as slavery and governmental corruption – practices which the artist found deeply troubling, as discussed in the previous chapter. In spite of his personal feelings, however, Roberts did not use his imagery to proselytise, instead allowing Brockedon's letterpress to express moral outrage. Through the application of the picturesque framework to novel Egyptian scenery Roberts presented a potentially saleable set of lithographs that reinforced public opinion.

The salability of the lithographs was based in part on their reification of commonly held British beliefs at a time when Egypt's significance to the British Empire was increasing. While the images do suggest a basic affinity with the condescension implicit in imperialist representations, they do not function in the same ways as French imperialist imagery did. It remains to be seen how Roberts' audience accepted *Egypt and Nubia* in the 1840s. The next chapter will explore the lithographs' reception.

Chapter Six

The reception and impact of *Egypt and Nubia* 1846-1869

Introduction

The previous chapter explored Roberts' journey to Egypt and the resultant imagery.

This chapter will investigate the critical reception of *Egypt and Nubia* and the ways in which the publication may have impacted other visual and textual representations of the state in mid Victorian Britain. A central question emerges from this investigation: How was Roberts' presentation accepted by the leading journals of the day as accurate, even though the publication did not necessarily present a visually or culturally complete view of the state? These reviews, as well as other textual and visual references to Egypt will provide an index of the ways in which Roberts' perception was accepted at the time.

Given that the lithographs are the first large-scale set of British images of Egypt, it can be argued that the lithographs set a British standard for how Egypt should be visually represented. This in turn contributed to the further entrenchment of the common view of Egypt as entirely picturesque. The images articulated not only a worthy tourist destination, but also a state that was inferior to Britain. This situation will be explored through artists' images and travel literature published after the mid 1840s. The discussion will establish the impact of the lithographs' aesthetic, and will determine the ways in which the belief that the state was picturesque affected people's opinion of its developmental and political status. If tourist guidebooks, writing on the construction of the Suez Canal, and discourse on Anglo-Egyptian trade contain elements of picturesque description, then Roberts' presentation of Egypt – and its acceptance – could be seen to have influenced that discourse.

The publication, review, and imitation of *Egypt and Nubia*

Preparations for the publication of Roberts' lithographs began in February of 1840, when he signed a contract with the publisher F.G. Moon and together they began to solicit subscriptions for the series privately from British nobility and publicly through exhibitions of seventy two of Roberts' Levantine watercolours in London, Edinburgh, and a variety of regional cities in Britain.⁵⁶⁶ They were successful in this endeavour, receiving advance subscriptions from 393 celebrated individuals, including Queen Victoria, the Emperor of Russia and the Kings of France, Austria, and Prussia.⁵⁶⁷ *Egypt and Nubia* was published in two different versions; one, the Royal Subscription Edition that featured hand colouring by the publisher's studio, and a second version, the Standard Edition, which was not hand coloured.⁵⁶⁸ It should be noted that all reproductions of imagery from *Egypt and Nubia* in this project are from the Royal Subscription Edition.

These editions quickly sold out, in spite of the relatively high price of the series. The full set of Egyptian lithographs cost £52.10s. They were released as volumes: the two volumes of ancient Egyptian scenes cost £21.00 each while the volume of modern scenery, which was smaller, cost £10.10s.⁵⁶⁹ This demand led to the appearance of pirated, unauthorised editions of the lithographs almost immediately, as well as smaller, less expensive editions authorised by the publisher in 1855, 1856, and 1879.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Schuster Gallery, *David Roberts' Egypt & the Holy Land* (London: The Schuster Gallery, 1987), 8.

⁵⁶⁷ Medina Arts Gallery, 'About David Roberts Lithographs,' Medina Arts Gallery, <http://www.medinaarts.com/Publication1.htm> Accessed on 24 April, 2005.

⁵⁶⁸ Interestingly, there is no definitive count of the number of copies printed. Roberts print experts Medinaarts.com suggest that there were 393 Royal Subscription Editions printed, to correspond with the number of subscribers, but there were between 500 and 1500 copies of the Standard Edition printed in the 1840s.

⁵⁶⁹ Schuster Gallery, *David Roberts' Egypt & the Holy Land*, 7.

⁵⁷⁰ Medina Arts Gallery, 'Later, Reduced Size Editions,' Medina Arts Gallery, <http://www.medinaarts.com/Editions4.htm> Accessed on 24 April, 2005.

Arguably, the level of popular success of *Egypt and Nubia* was spurred on by its reviews in leading journals of the day.

Journals such as *The Times*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Art Journal*, and the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* warmly received the lithographs, and maintained a supportive critical stance throughout the initial publication run, between 1846 and 1849.⁵⁷¹ What is most interesting, and crucial to this investigation, is that the journals not only highlighted the artistic merit of the work, but also its verisimilitude. A reviewer in the *Athenaeum* commented that Roberts' images, 'unite to correctness a higher sense of the picturesque and the feeling of the painter. With him, the graces of style and execution are united to the severity of facts.'⁵⁷² *The Times* agreed with this view and remarked that, 'they may be relied on for their accuracy, and they are made pictorial, without any sacrifice of truth, by the great skill of the artist and the very felicitous manner in which the best points of view have been selected.'⁵⁷³ *The Times*' and the *Athenaeum*' reviewers read *Egypt and Nubia* as both picturesque and truthful.

By the time Roberts' lithographs were published, the utility of picturesque accuracy had already been established by Jackson. The nascent discourse of exotic, "revisionist"

⁵⁷¹ See 'Review of Roberts's Views in Egypt. Published by Alderman Moon 1847,' *Art Journal*, no. 9 (January 1847): 39; 'Review of 'Roberts's Sketches in Egypt And Nubia. Published by F.G. Moon,' *Art Journal*, no. 10 (September 1848): 288; 'Review of Roberts's Egypt and Nubia. Published by Alderman Moon,' *Art Journal*, no. 12 (February 1850): 66; 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1032 (7 August 1847): 843; 'Roberts's Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Part 5,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1048 (27 November 1848): 1224; 'Roberts's Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts VI. To XIV. Moon,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1104 (23 December 1849): 1302-1303; 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia Parts IX & X. F.G. Moon,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1615 (1 January 1848): 13-14; 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia Part XI. Moon,' *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1650 (2 September 1848): 587-588; 'Roberts' Egypt and Nubia. Parts XV. And XVI. Moon,' *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1671 (27 January 1849): 63; 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts XVII. And XVIII. Moon,' *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1700 (18 August 1849): 611; 'Roberts' Egypt and Nubia,' *Times* (London) 1 April, 1847.

⁵⁷² 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1032 (7 August 1847): 843.

⁵⁷³ 'Roberts' Egypt and Nubia,' *Times* (London) 1 April, 1847.

picturesque imagery was further developed by other writers in the 1840s and 1850s such as Henry Twining, the author of *The Elements of Picturesque Beauty* [1853]. Twining's two-volume work described all the constituent parts of picturesque landscape, several of which illuminate Roberts' reception and the connection between picturesqueness and accuracy. While he never mentioned Roberts by name, Twining wrote that exotic and unfamiliar landscapes were more picturesque than familiar British scenes.⁵⁷⁴ Twining specifically noted that the Ottoman Empire, of which Egypt was part, was especially picturesque.⁵⁷⁵ This statement reinforced the notion, discussed in chapter three, that the perception of Egypt as picturesque was based on a combination of familiarity and novelty. While the subject matter was itself novel in the early-Victorian world, the framework through which it was presented was decidedly familiar. This has been seen particularly in relation to St. John's remark that Cairene scenery was 'worthy of Samuel Prout.'⁵⁷⁶ Recall that Prout was a picturesque artist who was considered to paint accurately based on the application of a picturesque framework to novel subject matter.⁵⁷⁷

Twining further stated that artifice, or that which is unnatural, was irreconcilable to the picturesque.⁵⁷⁸ If this is the case, then it follows that the natural in part defined picturesqueness. Unnatural, in Twining's sense, referred to elements in the landscape in 'a style which is simply out of place and out of character.'⁵⁷⁹ Again, it follows that picturesqueness, particularly in exotic landscapes, was based in part on visual elements

⁵⁷⁴ Henry Twining, *The Elements of Picturesque Beauty* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 222.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁷⁶ St. John, *Egypt and Mohammed Ali*, 104.

⁵⁷⁷ 'Review of *Jennings Landscape Annual for 1834*,' *Athenaeum*, no. 312 (19 October 1833): 699.

⁵⁷⁸ Twining, *Elements of Picturesque Beauty*, 256-257.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 256-258.

that were in character with its location. How does truthfulness fit into this construct of the picturesque?

In the context of the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia*, the term ‘truthful’ suggests honesty and fidelity to the scene as it existed in nature. This connection is exemplified in a review in *Art Journal*, in which the reviewer stated that the lithographs were the most accurate ever made and that ‘the tone and transparency of the lithographic execution mark an era in the history of drawing upon stone.’⁵⁸⁰ The term ‘truthful’ also suggests that the images delineated the natural state of Egypt. This natural state would be composed of objects and scenery that were characteristic of the location. As was seen in the previous chapter, Egypt was presented as a series of almost exclusively ruined, decayed, and backward objects and figures. This suggests that the reviewers were willing to accept that the state was a decayed place, festooned with ruins and inhabited by a backward population. This view was consonant with the late 1830s travel literature discussed in chapter three, as well as Col. Jackson’s theory of picturesque accuracy, discussed in chapter two. The connection between picturesqueness and accuracy in *Egypt and Nubia* can be seen, for example, in the architecture that Roberts’ painted.

The architecture represented by Roberts and highlighted by the journals in their reviews was a mixture of decaying ancient temples and poorly constructed Islamic architecture. As was suggested in the previous chapter the state of disrepair in both types of architecture was attributed to Muslim mismanagement in Egypt. Roberts’ depiction of the state containing almost exclusively this type of building could have been perceived as a natural effect of its social conditions. This can be seen to reinforce the notion that

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Review of Roberts’s Egypt and Nubia. Published by Alderman Moon,’ *Art Journal*, no. 12 (1 February 1850): 66.

Egypt was naturally and truthfully a picturesque place in appearance. In reviewing *Egypt and Nubia* the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* noted that the architecture in the series was ‘picturesque yet natural.’⁵⁸¹

In one review, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*’ remarked that Roberts ‘allowed nothing in his subjects to escape him.’⁵⁸² This suggests that *Egypt and Nubia* was perceived as exhaustive in its coverage of the Egyptian landscape. If he presented the state as exclusively picturesque, and he depicted everything that was to be seen there, then all of Egypt could be read as picturesque. In practice, Roberts employed a highly restrictive aesthetic filter that disallowed modern and productive subject matter. There was much in Egypt that Roberts did not depict, such as the modern buildings and manufactories initiated by Mehemet 'Ali described in chapters three and four. These building did exist and they were used as evidence for Egypt’s modernisation in 1830. By the late 1830s, however, these same developments were considered to have failed. Palmerston described reports of their success, such as in Bowring's *Report on Egypt and Candia* as ‘inauthentic.’⁵⁸³ It is possible to see that these projects were considered to be “unnatural” in modern Egypt, and according to theorists such as Twining, not picturesque. As such, Roberts seems to have disallowed them from his lithographs. No reviewer criticised the artist for excluding modern manufactories or military from his images – further suggesting that his revisionist picturesque approach was acceptable to contemporary critics.

⁵⁸¹ ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia Part XI. Moon,’ *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1650 (2 September 1848): 587.

⁵⁸² ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts XVII. And XVIII. Moon,’ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1700 (18 August 1849): 611.

⁵⁸³ Bartle, ‘Bowring and the near Eastern Crisis of 1838-1840,’ 767.

The journals celebrated the accuracy, beauty, and thoroughness of *Egypt and Nubia*. Roberts' perception of Egypt was considered to be so accurate that the *Art Journal* definitively stated that there was 'nothing to be done hereafter in the way of pictorial description of Egypt.'⁵⁸⁴ Such attribution of definitive status to Roberts' representations, far from precluding further pictorial descriptions, seems to have encouraged other artists into this new and potentially lucrative market. From the late 1840s onwards, a number of publications, including volumes of lithographs, travel literature and tourist guidebooks, featured standardised picturesque images of Egypt in the style of Roberts.

These images were produced by a variety of artists, none of whom enjoyed the same level of success as Roberts. Of these publications, few were reviewed in the major journals, although the number of volumes published suggests that publishers believed that there was a market for picturesque Egyptian visual imagery.⁵⁸⁵ Nineteenth-century picturesque, as has been demonstrated, was not a neutral mode of description. Instead it was one that highlighted the exotic, the ruined, and the wretched in a foreign culture. Artists such as W.H. Bartlett largely followed this trend when depicting Egyptian scenery. This aided in maintaining a negative image of the state that was perceived as both picturesque and accurate.

⁵⁸⁴ 'Review of Roberts's *Egypt and Nubia*. Published by Alderman Moon,' *Art Journal*, no. 12 (February, 1850): 66.

⁵⁸⁵ See William Henry Bartlett, *The Nile Boat, or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & co., 1849); Charles Lamb Kenny, *The Gates of the East* (London: Ward and Lock, 1857); E. Prisse and James Augustus St. John, *Oriental Album*; J.A. Spencer, *The East: Sketches of Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land* (London: John Murray, 1850); Bayle St. John, *Village Life in Egypt*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1852); Thackeray, *From Cornhill to Cairo*, 1; Catherine Tobin, *Shadows of the East* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1855); G.W. Wheatley, *The Oriental Pocket Companion: A New Guide For Travellers to Egypt, India, China, &c., by the Overland Routes* (London: G.W. Wheatley, 1852); John Gardner Wilkinson, *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt; Including Descriptions of The Course of the Nile to the Second Cataract, Alexandria, Cairo, the Pyramids, and Thebes, the Overland Transit to India, The Peninsula of Mount Sinai, The Oases, &c. Condensed from 'Modern Egypt and Thebes.'* By Sir I. Gardner Wilkinson (London: John Murray, 1848).



Fig. 42: David Roberts, *The Hypaethral Temple at Philæ, Called the Bed of Pharaoh*, 1848, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. II

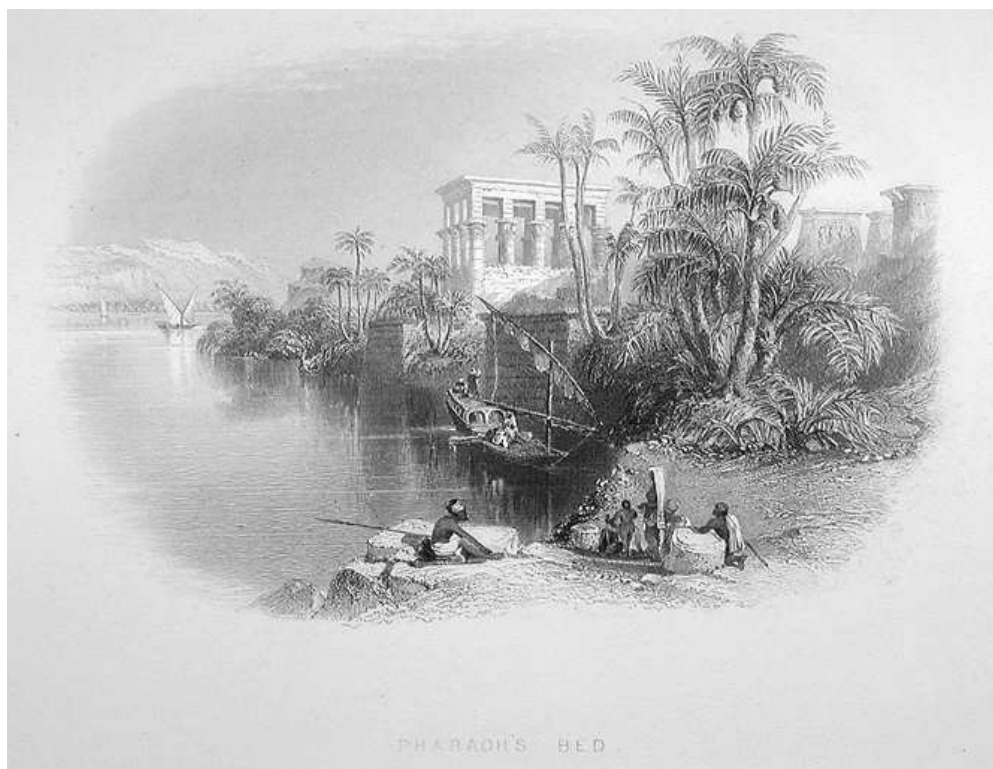


Fig. 43: W.H. Bartlett, *Pharaoh's Bed* 1849, engraving, *The Nile Boat, or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt*

An example of this tendency is *Bed of Pharaoh* from W.H. Bartlett's *The Nile Boat, or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt* [Fig. 43]. When compared with Roberts' *The*

Hypaethral Temple at Philæ, Called the Bed of Pharaoh [Fig. 42] a number of similarities emerge. Roberts' image, one of the most traditionally picturesque in *Egypt and Nubia*, featured a temple described in the letterpress as seeming 'to have been built for its striking and picturesque effect,'⁵⁸⁶ and similarly, Bartlett noted that Philæ was a particularly picturesque spot.⁵⁸⁷ Specifically, Bartlett noted that, 'It has been well observed, that Egyptian temples are more picturesque in ruin, a remark which applies particularly to a spot like Philæ.'⁵⁸⁸ This remark resonates with the theories of Gilpin and Price. Bartlett's text and image echoed Roberts' presentation of picturesque Philæ.

Both images also correlate in compositional terms. The artists chose the same vantage point, displaying the Hypaethral Temple surrounded by trees and Nile greenery. The vantage point used emphasised the interplay between the ruins themselves and the surrounding landscape. In Roberts' image an overgrowth of greenery is visible on the top of the foreground portal. The interplay of ruin and landscape, a blending together of both, was redolent of both Uvedale Price's writing in *Essay on the Picturesque*, which emphasised the process by which ruins became natural features, and Twining's notion that for ruins to be picturesque, they should be natural.

The natural, or authentic, quality of both images is evident in several parts of the scenes. Roberts and Bartlett peopled their compositions with figures in Egyptian dress, and did not include figures in European costume. This was a well-worn picturesque trope that incorporated the exotic and decayed at the expense of the familiar so as to create a more authentically picturesque scene. This can also be seen in the inclusion of the *cangia*, the traditional Egyptian boat favoured by tourists who wanted an "authentic" Nile

⁵⁸⁶ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:22.

⁵⁸⁷ Bartlett, *The Nile Boat*, 212.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

experience.⁵⁸⁹ These boats were considered by Roberts to be especially picturesque and Egyptian.⁵⁹⁰ It should be pointed out that at the time of Roberts' and Bartlett's publications, steam-powered vessels were an increasingly common sight on the Nile, but do not appear in either image as they would diminish the picturesque effect of the scene. It is clear that both images bear a striking resemblance to one another, although Bartlett's composition presents itself as a vignette with blurred edges and lacks the movement of Roberts' image.



Fig. 44: W.H. Bartlett, *A Street in Cairo* 1849, engraving, *The Nile Boat, or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt*

⁵⁸⁹ Bayle St. John, *Village Life in Egypt*, 2.

⁵⁹⁰ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 29 September, 1838.



Fig. 45: David Roberts, *Bazaar of the Coppersmiths, Cairo*, 1849, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, vol. III

Another example from Bartlett's *The Nile Boat, or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt, A Street in Cairo* [Fig. 44] shares an affinity with Roberts' *Bazaar of the Coppersmiths, Cairo* [Fig. 45]. The similarity between these two images is striking. Both scenes are composed of an alley from a street-level vantage point, using linear perspective to create a cramped, narrow feeling redolent of various textual descriptions of Cairo's streets, including Roberts' own journal.⁵⁹¹ The standard picturesque tropes of exotic figures and side views, in this case the buildings themselves, are present. The background scenery in both images serves as further evidence for the similarity of the two compositions. In Roberts' *Bazaar of the Coppersmiths, Cairo* the minaret of the mosque is the focal point

⁵⁹¹ Roberts, *Eastern Journal*, 3 January, 1839.

of the background. Bartlett's image uses a similar composition, replacing the minaret with a palm tree, much to the same effect. Both these components, the minaret and the palm tree, would emphasise the exotic and picturesque quality of the scene, as both were native to Egypt and alien to Britain. The picturesqueness of Bartlett's image can also be seen in the way that *A Street Scene in Cairo* implicitly references Samuel Prout's *Swiss Cottage, Lavey*.⁵⁹² Prout's image was another example of the picturesque depicting exotic subject matter within a familiar framework. All three images feature narrow alleyways leading to exotic focal points. Again, Bartlett's image, unlike Roberts', was presented in vignette format, with blurred edges.

While Bartlett's images share a compositional affinity with Roberts' own work, other artists took Roberts' format and methods a step further and presented images that incorporated even more picturesqueness. This can be seen in two images of Aswan, one by Roberts and one from Catherine Tobin's book *Shadows of the East* [1855], drawn by John Brenan.



Fig. 46: John Brenan, *Assouan, First Cataract*, 1855, engraving, *Shadows of the East*

⁵⁹² This image has been discussed in chapters two and three, Fig. 8.



Fig 47: David Roberts, *Assouan and the Island of Elephantine*, 1846, lithograph, *Egypt and Nubia*, Vol. I

Roberts' lithograph of Aswan [Fig. 47] focused on the Pharonic ruins and the lack of vegetation at Aswan. Indeed, the ruined nature of the scene was aptly described in the letterpress of *Egypt and Nubia* as a 'wretched' reminder of past glories,⁵⁹³ and reinforced Jackson's notion that picturesqueness could be found in barren desert scenes.⁵⁹⁴ This scene lacks the lush greenery seen in some of Roberts' other lithographs, such as those of Philæ, and is unpopulated, save for the figures on the aforementioned *cangia*. Brennan reconfigured this scene, making more use of the picturesque. He removed any semblance of desolation from his image of Aswan, peopling the scene with Egyptians leisurely conversing and picking fruit. Compared with Roberts' image, the scene bursts with picturesque conventions. The ruins, highlighted by Roberts, become part of the side-view and background, as do the *cangia* in Brennan's image. The composition of this scene highlights the interplay of vegetation, ruins, and rustic figures that was a hallmark of the eighteenth-century British picturesque. Brennan's image of

⁵⁹³ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:28.

⁵⁹⁴ Jackson, 'On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel,' 385.

Aswan is, in many ways, an extrapolation of that of Roberts. Indeed, this debt was noted in the introduction to *Shadows of the East*, in which the author noted that the work was inspired by Roberts' series, particularly his Syrian lithographs from the *Holy Land* series, several of which were reproduced in *Shadows of the East*.⁵⁹⁵

Still other artists utilised various picturesque landscape components such as rural accoutrements and wretched figures. While these artists did not create specifically picturesque landscape scenes, their reliance on picturesque elements appears to have echoed Roberts. This can be seen in figure studies and even illustrations in tourist guidebooks in the 1850s. For example, John G. Wilkinson's *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* included several illustrations that help to indicate the picturesque's prevalence in representations of Egypt.⁵⁹⁶ One telling illustration, *Khonfud* [Fig. 48], gave the prospective traveller an idea of just how pre-modern life was in rural Egypt.

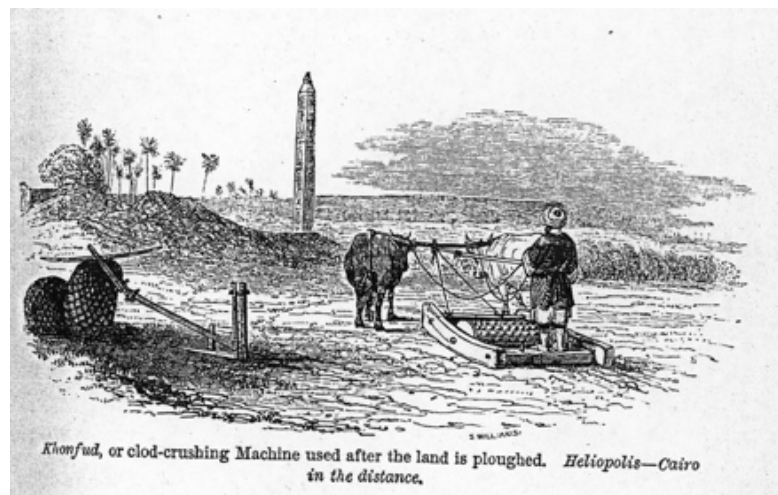


Fig. 48: *Khonfud*, 1857, engraving, *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*

⁵⁹⁵ Tobin, *Shadows of The East*, ii.

⁵⁹⁶ *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* was published by Murray, the famous London publishing firm that also published British tourist handbooks in the eighteenth-century and the *Quarterly Review*, which was discussed in chapter four.

A *khonfud* was an ox-drawn Egyptian harrow used to break up clods of earth – a design probably in use for centuries. The *Handbook*'s image conflated the ruined architecture of the obelisk with a vision of antiquated agricultural practices within a sparsely vegetated and thus implicitly unproductive land. When this image was published in the 1857 edition of the book, steam-powered machinery was widely available in Egypt. The *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* did not feature images of modern machinery or steam power, only primitive machinery and ruins, reminiscent of the approach taken by Roberts. Additionally, *Khonfud* appears to reflect a shift in allowable picturesque subject matter. Although archaic, the *khonfud* still suggests agricultural productivity. Within the rubric of eighteenth-century picturesque, this imagery would not be allowed into the scene. However, the implications of ruin, decay, unproductiveness and wretchedness might be argued to wrest the subject matter into the sphere of the picturesque, provided that they were – as both Jackson and Twining would suggest – “authentic” expressions of Egyptian life.⁵⁹⁷

Another interesting aspect of this image is the obelisk in the background. The location of the *Khonfud* image is near the Heliopolis with Cairo in the distance. This vantage point is nearly identical to that of Roberts' lithograph, *Obelisk of Heliopolis*. The solitary monument was described in the letterpress of *Egypt and Nubia* as the only remains of a once-great scholarly centre,⁵⁹⁸ thus confirming the idea of a nation in a state of decline. Again, the interplay of image and text suggests that the state had decayed from its formerly great past. This can also be inferred from Eliot Warburton's remark in the *Crescent and the Cross* that Heliopolis was ‘the Oxford of old Egypt.’⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Jackson, ‘On Picturesque Description in Books of Travel,’ 385; Twining, *Elements of Picturesque Beauty*, 256-257.

⁵⁹⁸ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 2:29.

⁵⁹⁹ Eliot Warburton, *The Crescent and the Cross*, 73.

Yet another example of picturesque components in Egyptian imagery from the 1850s was the 1851 publication, *Oriental Album*, which featured engravings by E. Prisse and a letterpress by none other than James Augustus St. John. St. John, as discussed in chapter three, was arguably the first British author to explicitly state that Egypt was a picturesque location and to describe it using picturesque terminology. The *Oriental Album*, subtitled *Characters Costumes and Modes of Life of the Valley of the Nile*, was essentially a series of figure studies, incorporating both the exoticism and wretchedness that constituted the picturesque figure along with a letterpress describing at length the habits, dress, and lifestyle of the figure represented.

The *Oriental Album* made use of the picturesque both textually and visually. The images themselves often featured picturesque backgrounds, and all the figures illustrated in the series would have been considered picturesque by mid-Victorian standards, as this chapter has demonstrated. One Egyptian figure, the fellah peasant, will serve as an example of the picturesqueness evident in the *Oriental Album* [Fig. 49]. The fellah was a recurring character in the formation of Egyptian picturesque. Writers such as St. John, Lane, and Tobin all noted the picturesque quality of the Egyptian peasant.⁶⁰⁰ Roberts' frequently made use of the fellah, as peasant figures appeared in all but eight of his lithographs.⁶⁰¹ St. John's letterpress in the *Oriental Album* followed the familiar course of describing the fellah as 'wretchedly' dressed in ragged clothes, noting that the illustration represented the best clothing to which a fellah could aspire.⁶⁰² St.

⁶⁰⁰ Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 37; St. John, *Egypt and Mohammed Ali*, 89; Tobin, *Shadows of the East*, 16.

⁶⁰¹ Proctor, 'David Roberts and the Ideology of Imperialism,' 48.

⁶⁰² Prisse and St. John, *Oriental Album*, 24.

John ascribed this social stasis to centuries of despotism in Egypt, another common opinion expressed by writers and artists, including Roberts and the above noted Lane.⁶⁰³

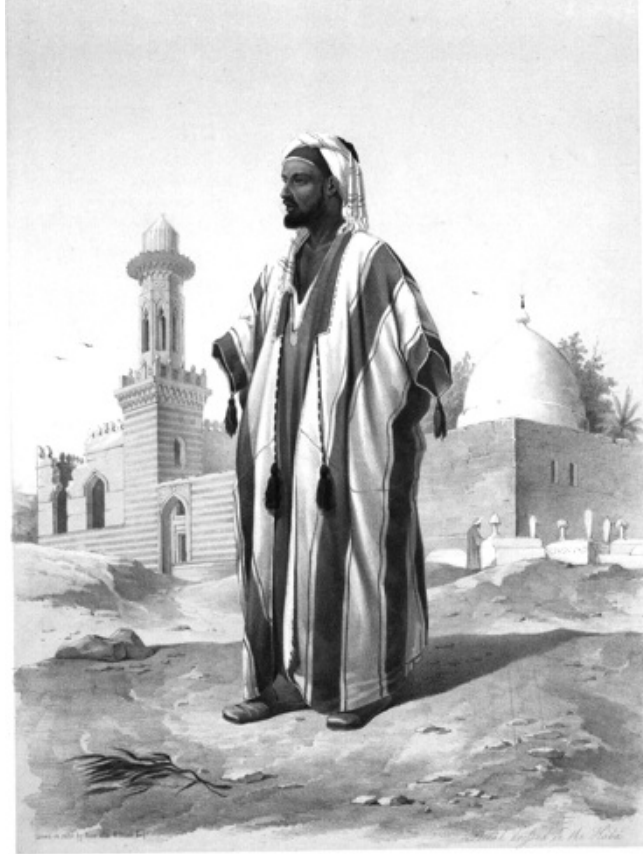


Fig. 49: E. Prisse, *Fellah*, 1851, engraving, *Oriental Album*

Prisse and St. John's focus on specific Egyptian ethnic and social groups is interesting. In *Egypt and Nubia*, Roberts failed to make such a social distinction, instead using a generalised peasant figure to enliven his scenes, add scale, and enhance the landscape. Using an artistic vocabulary similar to Roberts', Prisse presented a panoramic view of the peoples of Egypt, including the fellah, the slave, the shopkeeper and other figures. In much the same way that Brennan extrapolated Roberts' picturesque, Prisse and St.

⁶⁰³ Prisse and St. John, *Oriental Album*, 23.

John extensively peopled the scenery with an expanded social and ethnic spectrum, moving beyond Roberts' ethnic generalisations.⁶⁰⁴

As seen in *The Nile Boat*, the *Oriental Album*, *Shadows of the East*, and the *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*, imagery published immediately after *Egypt and Nubia*, as well as the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia*, indicate that Roberts' lithographs were not only celebrated but also emulated in the 1840s and 1850s. This further suggests that the relationship between picturesque description and a negative impression of Egypt had become standardised and codified. How would it be possible to interpret this data?

The sum total of imagery discussed in this chapter suggests that a picturesque description of Egypt was perceived as accurate in mid nineteenth-century Britain. I have explored what "accuracy" and "picturesque" meant at the time in relation to Roberts' work. It can be seen that a connection between these terms was also made within other contexts. An article in the *Athenaeum* from August 1847, for example, provided information on the urban geography of Cairo. The article bemoaned the Pacha's order that all streets in Cairo be named and all houses numbered on the grounds that such organisation was unnatural in Egypt.⁶⁰⁵ What does this seemingly innocuous passage indicate? It can be seen as evidence of the journal's acceptance of Egypt as a naturally picturesque place, one in which order and modernity were unnatural. This further suggests the acceptance of Roberts' view of Egypt. If it was not natural for Egypt to be ordered, then it follows that Egypt's natural state was disorder, a view Roberts held.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁴ It should be noted that while Roberts did publish several lithographs that prominently featured Egyptians, the majority of images in *Egypt and Nubia* did not focus on human figures. The *Oriental Album* focused exclusively on figural imagery.

⁶⁰⁵ 'Our Weekly Gossip,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1035 (28 August 1847): 915.

⁶⁰⁶ David Roberts to Christine Roberts, Cairo, 22 December, 1838, in Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 105.

The prevalence of this descriptive mode – Egypt as picturesque and decayed – extended beyond the visual to the textual. As has been repeatedly demonstrated in this project, picturesqueness was often as much a textual as a visual mode of description. The definitive status of truth and accuracy ascribed to *Egypt and Nubia* appears to have contributed to a broader entrenchment of this notion across a variety of media. Importantly, this coincided with the growth of the British tourist industry between the 1840s and 1860s. Literature produced within this industry helped to reify the “accuracy” of picturesque description.

Picturesque tourism After Roberts

Reviews of the lithographs made up only a small part of notices of Egypt in the British press in the late 1840s to 1860s, from the years in which Roberts published *Egypt and Nubia* to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Volumes of British newspapers, magazines, and books published information related to Egypt, particularly in the field of travel-related literature. This literature made up a large part of the media through which Roberts’ audience formed their perception of the state and was instrumental in the codification of Egypt as a picturesque place, thus providing further evidence for the perceived veracity of Roberts’ imagery.

While it would be incorrect to state that all travel literature presented an identical view to the one promulgated by Roberts’, it is worth noting that reviews of *Egypt and Nubia* stated that the lithographs were visual depictions of the travellers’ words.⁶⁰⁷ The correspondence of Roberts’ and the travel writers’ views consisted in their mutually

⁶⁰⁷ ‘Roberts’ Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts XVII. And XVIII. Moon,’ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, no. 1700 (18 August 1849): 611.

held position that Egypt was naturally picturesque. This literature shared a linguistic affinity with the travel literature of the 1830s, discussed in chapter three, in that both sets of literature used picturesque terminology. While the language of picturesque description in these later travel books remained the same, the tone that was used in the literature changed dramatically.

In the literature of the 1830s, travellers wrote of discovering views, exploring ruins, and finding the picturesque in Egypt. Many of these writers positioned themselves as explorers. By the 1850s, however, British writers' overall tone recognised that travel in the region was becoming somewhat commonplace. Bayle St. John's *Village Life in Egypt* from 1852, for example, noted that each village looked like the one that preceded it on his Nile trip, and that 'the eye perpetually recognises characteristics it has before observed.'⁶⁰⁸ This picturesque uniformity was pleasing, however, as St. John notes, 'In the East, all things change and remain the same; nothing is stable, but the old forms perpetually recur.'⁶⁰⁹

In general, the literature published during and after the publication of *Egypt and Nubia* acknowledged that the state was completely "known" to Victorian Britain. This can be seen not only in travel literature, but in the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia* as well. The *Athenaeum*, for example, noted:

How different are these, our days – when steam and omnibus take us into and over the Desert – from those when the French army, with Denon in its ranks, first opened the way to the publication of these monuments of Egyptian grandeur and intelligence!⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ Bayle St. John, *Village Life in Egypt*, 19.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶¹⁰ 'Roberts' Sketches in Egypt and Nubia. Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4,' *Athenaeum*, no. 1032 (7 August 1847): 843.

The codification of picturesque Egypt in text was both a cause and result of the familiarity that the writer for the *Athenaeum* described. This familiarity came not only from travellers publishing their tales, but also increasingly from individuals travelling to and through the state. By the mid 1840s it had become an important staging post in the Anglo-Indian trade route, discussed in chapter three. In the years following the publication of *Egypt and Nubia*, the commerce that had only begun in the early-1840s reached new heights. By the 1860s, groups of travellers on P&O, and later, Thomas Cook trips travelled in comfort, expanding the number of British visitors to the region and including a broader segment of the British public.⁶¹¹ While exact visitor numbers are not known, Egypt had by the 1860s become an established tourist destination, as noted by traveller-writers such as Catherine Tobin. She wrote in *Shadows of the East* that her party was continually meeting other travellers in the peak tourist months of December and January.⁶¹²

In the decade between Roberts' trip to the Levant and the publication of *Egypt and Nubia* great advances had taken place with regard to travel to and through Egypt. By the 1850s, P&O steamships regularly travelled from Southampton to Alexandria then on to Cairo.⁶¹³ Travel historian Sarah Searight described the P&O steamers as full of 'the oriental splendour of chandeliers, plush upholstery, gilded mouldings... [and] the gentle clink of glasses forever brimming with free alcohol.'⁶¹⁴ Upon arrival in Egypt, the British tourist had a choice of fine European-run hotels in which to stay, including

⁶¹¹ Trevor Mostyn, *Egypt's Belle Époque Cairo 1869-1952* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 125-126.

⁶¹² Tobin, *Shadows of the East*, 70.

⁶¹³ Derek Gregory, 'Between the Book and the Lamp,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* n.s. 20, no. 1 (January 1995): 29.

⁶¹⁴ Searight, *Steaming East*, 75-76.

Colombe's Hotel de l'Europe and Sheppard's Hotel, both of which received favourable mention in the travel literature.⁶¹⁵

This development in tourist travel was augmented by infrastructural developments aimed at facilitating the state's reputation as a tourist destination. Egypt's governors, beginning with Mehemet 'Ali, were keenly interested in making Egypt a tourist destination. As Searight noted in the introduction to the 1991 edition of W.M. Thackeray's *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, Mehemet 'Ali began this process in the mid-1830s by encouraging Thomas Waghorn to carry passengers and mail through Egypt instead of Syria.⁶¹⁶ Mehemet 'Ali also facilitated travel by digging the Mahmoudiyeh Canal from just outside Alexandria to the Nile at Atfeh.⁶¹⁷ These developments streamlined Roberts' visit, and the artist praised the Pacha for making Egypt safe for travellers.⁶¹⁸ After Mehemet 'Ali's death in 1848 his great-nephew Abbas Pacha continued his predecessor's work, completing a railway line between Cairo and Alexandria, the first in Africa. That same year Egypt was linked to Europe via telegraph.⁶¹⁹ These infrastructural developments were all in place by 1856; incidentally, this was the same year that Said Pacha granted Ferdinand de Lesseps the concession to dig the Suez Canal, which will be discussed below.

Between the British development of luxurious Levantine travel and the Egyptian government's own developments, in the 1850s it was possible to travel to and through Egypt in comfort and safety. Female travellers such as Catherine Tobin, who visited in

⁶¹⁵ Tobin, *Shadows of the East*, 76; Thackeray, *Cornhill to Cairo*, 129.

⁶¹⁶ Sarah Searight, introduction to *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*, by William Thackeray (reprinted with a new preface) (London: Chapman and Hall, 1991), 17.

⁶¹⁷ Searight, 'Introduction,' 19.

⁶¹⁸ Sim, *David Roberts*, 123.

⁶¹⁹ Mostyn, *Egypt's Belle Époque*, 125.

1853, remarked that travelling through the country was as safe and comfortable as travelling through Western Europe.⁶²⁰ Interestingly, while Egypt's infrastructural developments aided travel through the state, they were seldom acknowledged as evidence of developmental progress in travel literature or in the reviews of Roberts' work. British publishers knew what was to be highlighted in Egypt: the picturesque.

It is clear that the British tourist expected a formulaic experience of Egypt, one that featured picturesque situations without any of the difficulties presented by travelling in an underdeveloped country. One interesting notice in *The Times* from 20 November 1849 by a writer calling himself "Bird of Passage" described the actual state of Egypt and his travel experience within this context. After beginning his letter by stating how popular and commonplace Egyptian tourism had become,⁶²¹ the author described a travel mishap that left him in a four-day quarantine in an Alexandria lazaretto. "Bird of Passage" described the lazaretto as a filthy and poorly run place engineered to extort money from travellers.⁶²² The author concluded by ruminating on the proximity of the Egypt he had travelled to experience relative to the Egypt that he was experiencing.

All my Egyptian enthusiasm vanished as we came near its gaunt prison walls. The realization of all my early dreams of the Arabian Nights, the mystic Nile, the huge remnants of Luxor and Carnac, were close at hand, so to speak; Pompey's Pillar, Cleopatra's Needle and the Sphinx herself were almost within hail; but I would at that minute have given them all up to have found myself even within smell of Smithfield.⁶²³

It appears that "Bird of Passage", instead of receiving what he expected from an Egyptian trip, was presented with the disorder and malodorous situations engendered by precisely the same picturesque qualities that he came to savour. While at first glance his

⁶²⁰ Tobin, *Shadows of the East*, 12.

⁶²¹ 'Travelling in the East,' *Times* (London) 20 November, 1849.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 8.

remarks may problematise tourists' expectation of picturesqueness, in fact this tourist's expectation reinforces the pervasiveness of the picturesque in the minds of travellers. The fact that this traveller's negative experience was newsworthy possibly signifies the level of safety and comfort that was expected. This notice, as well as other travellers' tales, suggests that they intended to maintain the same distance from the reality of a picturesque location that was presented in Roberts' images. Tourists came to Egypt not only to see the landscape delineated in *Egypt and Nubia*, but also to have a safe and comfortable tourist experience.

W.J.T. Mitchell's contention, 'Landscape is a marketable commodity to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums,' is useful here.⁶²⁴ Within the context of the publication of *Egypt and Nubia* the state had become a familiar place to middle-class Britons. It was possible to purchase and consume Egypt through travel literature, images, and tourism. These media largely proscribed any notice of the infrastructure that made such experiences possible, or, as in the case of "Bird of Passage", exposed the harsh realities of a developing state.

The desire for comfortable tourist experiences marginalised not only the infrastructural problems in Egypt, but also recent infrastructural developments there. In the majority of the literature reviewed, as well as the lithographs themselves, Egypt's developments received only a cursory mention. Instead what was foregrounded in almost every notice is the picturesque quality of the landscape and the decayed condition of the country in general. In much the same way that Roberts disallowed modern manufactories in his lithographs, authors writing about Egypt often downplayed recent advances in the tales

⁶²⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape,' ed. W.J.T. Mitchell *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.

they told, while enjoying the benefits of those advances. After describing the easy availability of ‘bitter ale and Harvey Sauce’,⁶²⁵ Thackeray commented that the old mosques of the city were ‘a thousand times more beautiful’ than the modern architecture of Cairo, which he derided as poor.⁶²⁶ Why did authors such as Thackeray highlight the picturesque qualities of the in Cairo in spite of the modern? In short, tourists wanted to experience the medieval and exotic Egypt described by Roberts and travel writers. Modern developments, while aiding travel through the state, were essentially invisible components of the trip; they exerted an influence but were not on the tourist’s itinerary. Donald Preziosi claims that these developments were necessary for framing the tourist’s experience, one in which ‘Egyptians appeared while Europeans looked.’⁶²⁷

This expectation of decayed and picturesque scenery, popularised by Roberts and contemporary travel writers, is perhaps best seen in the rise of tourist guidebooks on Egypt, which began to appear largely during the publication of *Egypt and Nubia*. While the travel literature that predated Roberts’ publication described the state in terms of the picturesque, the guide-books explicitly stated at which sites the traveller should stop, which positions at the sites offered the most picturesque prospects, and how best to “see” Egypt while on holiday. At the same time, these guidebooks take for granted the supposed ease and comfort of Egyptian travel. The *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*, discussed earlier in this chapter, is useful in this study not only for its picturesque images, but also because its author, John Gardner Wilkinson, was one of the 1830s

⁶²⁵ Thackeray, *Cornhill to Cairo*, 189.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶²⁷ Donald Preziosi, ‘The Museum of What You Shall Have Been,’ in *Making Cairo Medieval*, ed. Lufti al-Sayyid-Marsot, et al (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 128.

authors who first popularised the British notion that Egypt was a decayed place.⁶²⁸ This is significant because it establishes a link between literature published after *Egypt and Nubia* and earlier nineteenth-century conceptions of Egypt that possibly inspired Roberts' images.

Handbook for Travellers in Egypt and G.W. Wheatly's *The Oriental Pocket Companion: A New Guide For Travellers to Egypt, India, China, &c., by the Overland Routes* [1852] did nothing less than direct the traveller to the Egyptian picturesque. In this regard, the Egyptian guidebooks shared an affinity with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century guidebooks discussed in chapter two, which popularised the picturesque in Britain and gave strict instructions to the traveller concerning picturesque locations and scenery. At the same time Egyptian guidebooks followed Jackson's suggestion that scenery be described according to its unique characteristics.

What did these Egyptian guidebooks recommend that the traveller see in Egypt? Two interesting excerpts, one from G.W. Wheatly's guidebook, and one from Wilkinson's will provide an indication of how Egypt was to be seen on a picturesque tour. *The Oriental Pocket Companion* included a timetable for a journey up and down the Nile, taking in every picturesque location. Wheatly recommended that a tour of all the picturesque sites, including the sites that Roberts presented in *Egypt and Nubia*, could be accomplished in seventeen days and eight hours.⁶²⁹ This steamer trip, beginning in Cairo, stopped at the major historical and picturesque sites of Beni-Hassan, Dendera, Luxor, Karnac, Thebes, Esne, Siout, Aswan, Edfou, and turned back to Cairo just before

⁶²⁸ John Gardner Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes: Being a Description of Egypt; Including the Information Required for Travellers in That Country* (London: John Murray, 1843), 1.

⁶²⁹ Wheatly, *The Oriental Pocket Companion*, 53.

Philæ and included time to sketch and explore major sites.⁶³⁰ This trip mirrors Roberts' own; he stopped to sketch at Beni Hassan on 13 October 1838, at Aswan on 29 October 1838, at Edfou on 23-24 November 1838, at Esne on 25 November 1838, at Karnac on 28-30 November 1838, at Luxor on 1 December 1838, at Thebes on 1-5 December 1838, and at Dendera on 6-8 December 1838.⁶³¹ The difference in the amount of time required by Roberts – over two months – and Wheatly's recommended itinerary provides further evidence for the ease with which a traveller could explore the Egyptian landscape.

In *Handbook For Travellers in Egypt* Murray suggested a 23-point itinerary of interesting sites from Alexandria to Ethiopia, each point containing an instruction for what to do at each site for the most authentic Egyptian experience. These included looking for the mosques in Cairo, 'ascertaining the sites of the buildings in the old city' of Alexandria, and 'examine the sites of the ruined towns in the [Nile] Delta,' in much the same way that Roberts did.⁶³² The appearance of guidebooks such as these gives a clear indication of just how standardised a picturesque Egyptian tour had become by the 1860s.

Development and politics in Egypt after *Egypt and Nubia*

The combination of Roberts' imagery, the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia*, and travel literature presented the state as a picturesque and consumable location. Other mid-Victorian literature related to Egypt shared an affinity with this presentation. In the years between Roberts' publication and the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 a plethora of literature discussed the politics and development of the state in relation to

⁶³⁰ Wheatly, *The Oriental Pocket Companion*, 53.

⁶³¹ David Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia* (The Hague: Executive Yearbook Enterprises B.V., 1993), 206-207.

⁶³² Murray, *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*, 46.

Britain's interests. This literature included newspapers, journals, and books, and can possibly be seen to be consonant with the artist's view of Egypt. While the other literature discussed in this chapter dealt largely with the aesthetic implications of the picturesque, they rarely focused on the state's political and developmental actuality. What remains to be seen is whether the negativity implicit in picturesque description filtered down into political and developmental discussions of Egypt.

Unlike the journals of the 1830s, journals in the 1850s appear to be in agreement that infrastructural development was taking place in Egypt, but that this was at the hands of Europeans. Developments such as the travel infrastructure discussed above, manufacturing, and military advances were rarely described as Egyptian achievements. This point was made in an insightful article in *The Times* entitled 'The State of Egypt', published on 31 May 1851. In it, the author stated that there were any number of modern manufactories in Egypt, but that they were built, maintained, and operated by France.⁶³³ The author explicitly noted that Mehemet 'Ali allowed the French:

to build fortifications of immense strength, designed by French engineers, all the plans of which, even to the minutest point, are naturally in the archives of the French War Department. It is scarcely necessary to remark that any grown-up child knows that the Egyptians could never man them, and equally unnecessary to say for whom they were built.⁶³⁴

This sentiment relates to the opinions expressed in the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia*, in which the concepts "picturesque" and "accurate" were linked. In much the same way that images of decay were highlighted as natural in the press, development was highlighted as unnatural, in that neither did Egyptians execute development nor would it ultimately benefit them. This notion also explicitly links with Twining's remarks on

⁶³³ 'The State of Egypt,' *Times* (London) 31 May, 1851.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

picturesqueness. He stated that picturesqueness was defined in part by “natural” features, or features that were in character with the landscape. *The Times*’ article clearly stated that recent developments within Egypt did not fit this criterion. This sentiment also provides evidence for the currency of *Egypt and Nubia*; recall that the accompanying text for *Obelisk at Luxor* bemoaned France’s undue influence in Egypt.⁶³⁵ Also note that this sentiment was echoed in the 1847 *Athenaeum* article, discussed above, in which street names and addresses were considered to be unnatural in Cairo.⁶³⁶

If modern, French-based development was unnatural, what was considered natural in Egypt? Decay and misrule were identified in the literature as being naturally and authentically Egyptian. *The Times* showed some concern that this level of maladministration provided opportunities for political and economic intercession on the part of France. This was not a new conclusion, but its impact in the mid-Victorian world was much more profound than in the 1830s. Now Britain maintained an active trade route through Egypt, and French hegemony in the territory could result in communication lines being cut between Britain and India.

The author of ‘The State of Egypt’ also discussed British influence in Cairo. He wrote that the British Consul-General was attempting to forward plans for a railway between Alexandria and Cairo with Abbas Pacha, the governor of Egypt after the death of Mehemet 'Ali in 1848.⁶³⁷ In the words of *The Times* writer, ‘all the world can benefit by’ this railway.⁶³⁸ The tone of this, and other articles in *The Times* suggested that if

⁶³⁵ Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 1:22.

⁶³⁶ ‘Our Weekly Gossip,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 1035 (28 August 1847): 915.

⁶³⁷ ‘The State of Egypt,’ *Times* (London) 31 May, 1851.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Britain were allowed to help shape Egyptian policy, then the Egyptian government itself would eventually be able to maintain development on its own. This was contrasted with French involvement in Egypt, which existed, according to *The Times*, only to advance French interests.⁶³⁹

How could this situation relate to Roberts? As demonstrated in previous chapters, British perceptions of Egypt had been oriented towards Anglo-French rivalry since the dawn of the nineteenth century. The perception of “natural” versus “unnatural” involvement with Egypt was central to this rivalry. It is possible that as a near-definitive visual representation of the state, *Egypt and Nubia* helped to consolidate the image of the state as naturally picturesque. These same journals, particularly *The Times* and the *Athenaeum*, described Egyptian development as unnatural. Readers of the *Egypt and Nubia* reviews were presented with the same conclusions about the state as were readers of literature related to Egyptian politics and developmental literature – that Egypt’s natural state was ruin and its political condition was similarly dysfunctional. This notion resonated with Roberts’ own conclusions. It can be seen that a variety of British media in the mid-Victorian world drew similar conclusions with regard to the state.

While the continuing French intervention into Egyptian development was worrying to the British press generally, what opinions were expressed about British intervention? In a review of the *Oriental Album* in the August 1848 *Athenaeum*, the reviewer stated that when Egyptians tried to facilitate development on their own, they inadvertently

⁶³⁹ ‘The State of Egypt,’ *Times* (London) 31 May, 1851.

destroyed ancient monuments by using them for building material.⁶⁴⁰ It was up to British residents in Egypt, the reviewer argued:

To rescue, even by sawing off, the inscriptions and sculptures that furnish interesting data and records of the past. The present active governor would not hesitate a moment to avail himself of them for material to build cotton mills or barracks – and thus they would be lost for ever.⁶⁴¹

The commentary on British developmental involvement differed from commentary on French involvement, in that British presence was seen as beneficial to Egypt. There was no criticism of any perceived “unnatural” quality in British intervention. This could suggest that as British interest in Egypt grew, its involvement was considered “natural”. An article in *The Times*, published in March 1846, regarding troop movement through Egypt, suggests this.⁶⁴² *The Times*’ writer noted that, ‘The passage of small bodies of troops through the ports and territories of an allied Power has, at all times, been sanctioned by the courtesy of nations,’ and therefore British involvement to maintain those routes was ‘natural.’⁶⁴³ British intervention, it was further argued by *The Times*, would benefit both Egypt and the rest of the world. *The Times* argued that European tourism would aid development as well. This sentiment can be seen in a missive from the ‘Foreign Intelligence’ section of *The Times* from 17 November 1856, in which the newspaper’s correspondent noted that:

The speedy realisation of [the British railroad in Egypt] will be looked upon as highly desirable, not only by those directly concerned in every improvement tending to facilitate or shorten communication between Great Britain and her Indian empire, but also by all who feel an interest in viewing the onward progress of this country towards the attainment of the arts and civilisation of the West... when the numerous collateral benefits it confers are taken into

⁶⁴⁰ ‘Review of *Oriental Album*. By E. Prisse and J.A. St. John. Madden,’ *Athenaeum*, no. 1085 (12 August 1848): 797. It is interesting to note that opinions about British involvement in Egyptian affairs were noted not only in political and developmental literature, but in arts criticism as well – further evidence of a cohesive and multi-layered state of knowledge.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 797.

⁶⁴² ‘Leader,’ *Times* (London) 7 March, 1846.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

consideration, there can be none to question the high importance of promoting and encouraging it by every possible means.⁶⁴⁴

According to the press it was up to British intervention to make Egypt into a modern, viable state. This sentiment was reinforced by several letters to the editors of *The Times* in which Britain was called upon to rectify deficiencies in Egyptian development.⁶⁴⁵

The received knowledge appears to have been that Britain needed to maintain mercantile presence in Egypt, and that all other nations, especially France, should have a far less involved presence. This perception is in line with British policy regarding Egypt since the 1831-1833 crisis. Unfortunately, the construction of the Suez Canal eroded the possibility of a leading British presence in the state until the 1880s. The construction, led by French engineers, undoubtedly upset the balance of power in Egypt.

Without question, the most significant development in Egypt in the years following the publication of *Egypt and Nubia* was the development of the Suez Canal.⁶⁴⁶ When the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps received the commission in 1856 to build the canal, the aim was to bring Asia closer to Europe.⁶⁴⁷ This was a goal that would benefit Britain and her Indian trade, as De Lesseps intended the canal to be open to all nations. Parliament, however, refused to have anything to do with the canal's construction, instead preferring the railway that was already being built under British auspices.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ 'Foreign Intelligence. (FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT),' *Times* (London) 17 November, 1856.

⁶⁴⁵ See 'The Overland Route to India,' *Times* (London) 22 February, 1848; 'Cleopatra's Needle,' *Times* (London) 22 August, 1851; 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 7 March, 1846.

⁶⁴⁶ T. Spratt, *An Inquiry into the Soundness of M. De Lesseps' Reasonings and Arguments on the Practicability of the Suez Canal* (London: George Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1858), 1.

⁶⁴⁷ Searight, *Steaming East*, 105.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 108-110.

In the face of this governmental obstacle, a wealth of British publications appeared defending the project on economic, political, and philanthropic grounds.⁶⁴⁹ It was argued by various French and British authors that the canal would benefit British trade immeasurably, increase British presence in Egypt and the Mediterranean, and facilitate modernisation. Interestingly, revisionist picturesque language was utilised by British supporters of the Suez Canal. This can be seen in the text and illustrations in partisan publications on the subject, such as Thomas Kerr Lynch's *A Visit to the Suez Canal* [1866] and Charles Lamb Kenny's *The Gates of the East* [1857]. Both authors made powerful and personal arguments on behalf of British involvement in the canal. Lynch and Kenny constructed a relationship between the canal, a thoroughly modern and European venture, and the popular perception of Egypt as archaic.⁶⁵⁰ This was accomplished by a sophisticated pairing of modern development and established picturesque Egyptian motifs such as the ruin and the dispossessed peasant figure – two elements popularised by Roberts.

The ways in which these authors negotiated this pairing is significant. Kenny emphasised the potential for Egyptian development after centuries of decay. He wrote that the fellah was a direct descendant of the respected ancient Egyptians, but, 'centuries of barbarism and misgovernment have deteriorated the race,'⁶⁵¹ itself a familiar sentiment. The state had become 'overrun by tribes of vagrant Arabs,' but the canal

⁶⁴⁹ See Ferdinand De Lesseps, *The Isthmus of Suez Question* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855); Ferdinand De Lesseps, *Inquiry into the Opinions of the Commercial Classes of Great Britain on the Suez Ship Canal* (London: John Weale, 1857); Ferdinand De Lesseps, *Isthmus of Suez Canal. To the members of the Chambers of Commerce and Commercial Associations of Great Britain* (London: John Weale, 1857); Kenny, *The Gates of the East*, 1; Daniel Adolphus Lange, *The Isthmus of Suez Canal Question, Viewed in its Political Bearings* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1859); Thomas Kerr Lynch, *A Visit to the Suez Canal* (London: Day and Son, 1866); Old Indian, *Routes to the East* (London: Spottiswoode and Co, 1857); Benjamin Oliveira, *A Few Observations Upon the Works of the Isthmus of Suez Canal Made During a Visit in April, 1863* (London: Harrison, 1863).

⁶⁵⁰ Emily Haddad, 'Digging to India: Modernity, Imperialism, and the Suez Canal,' *Victorian Studies* 47, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 366.

⁶⁵¹ Kenny, *The Gates of the East*, 26.

would bring the Egyptian peasant in closer contact with Europe, and, therefore, modernity.⁶⁵² By describing the state in terms of ruin, vagrancy, and wretchedness, Kenny established a connection between modern, Eurocentric Egypt and picturesque, decayed Egypt – indeed a direct correlation between his words and Gilpin’s description of the wretched figure he encountered at Tintern Abbey can be inferred. In a statement reminiscent of Twining’s theorisation of nineteenth-century picturesque, Kenny stated that it was ‘natural’ that Egypt be the meeting point of East and West.⁶⁵³ Similarly, Lynch relied on the contrast between the modern and the revisionist picturesque in various Egyptian scenes, contrasting agricultural development and the rugged Egyptian landscape: ‘Nothing could be more effective, as we approached Cairo, than the contrast between this verdant plain, waving with corn and trees, and the sun-burnt cliffs of the Egyptian desert.’⁶⁵⁴ Lynch returned to this concept repeatedly in his text, reporting that fecundity abounded around every picturesque corner. ‘We wound our way through dusty, filthy Arab huts, to an open space, in which were piled pyramids of corn and seed of every description.’⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵² Kenny, *The Gates of the East*, 46.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵⁴ Lynch, *A Visit to the Suez Canal*, 17.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

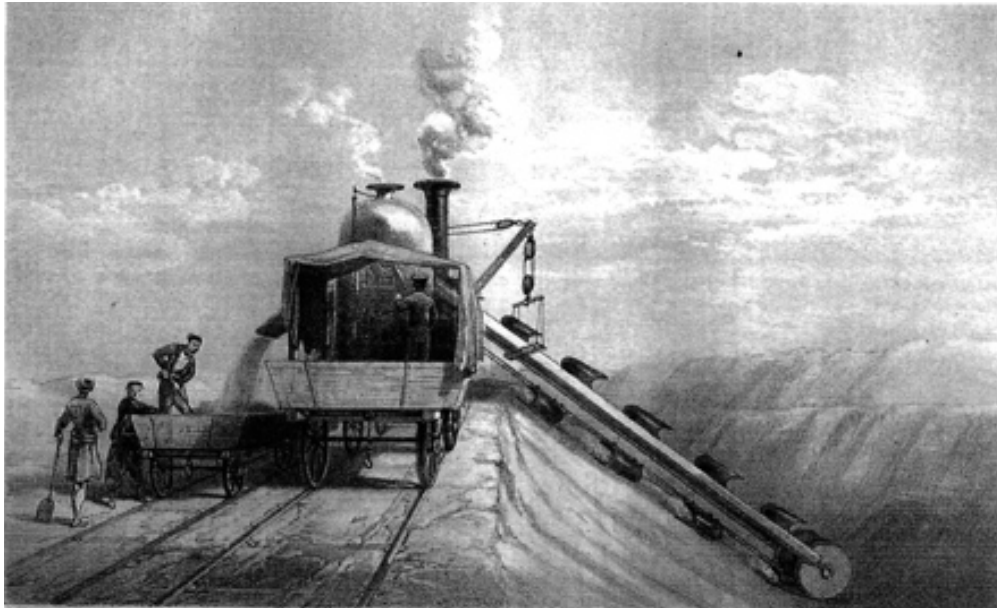


Fig. 50: Thomas Kerr Lynch, *Dredging Machines*, 1866, engraving, *A Visit to the Suez Canal*

To emphasise the contrast between Egyptian and European, Lynch included several illustrations in his book. One interesting image, *Dredging Machine* [Fig. 50], provides evidence for how Lynch understood the Suez Canal project, and Egyptian development. Lynch's image features a figure in Western clothes operating a steam-powered earth moving machine, cutting out the path of the canal, while figures in Egyptian dress use shovels to shift the upturned earth. Lynch highlighted the speed at which the machine could cut the canal, noting that the machine cut, 'from a depth of twenty feet to the top of the bank, where, situated on rails, each machine emptying the sand into wagons, filled seven of them in fifteen minutes.'⁶⁵⁶ These dredging machines were invented specifically for the construction of the Suez Canal and were considered to be a modern engineering marvel by the Victorians.⁶⁵⁷ They were understood as European, not Egyptian, innovation.

⁶⁵⁶ Lynch, *A Visit to the Suez Canal*, 44.

⁶⁵⁷ Haddad, 'Digging to India: Modernity, Imperialism, and the Suez Canal,' 365.

In this image, as well as in Lynch's text, a series of binary oppositions exist between picturesque/productive, un-modern/modern, manual labour/steam powered labour and Egyptian/European, and recalls the sentiment expressed in the 1851 *Times* article 'State of Egypt' that Egyptians could not operate modern machinery.⁶⁵⁸ This image also echoes aspects of the revisionist picturesque in that the exotic Egyptian figures on the left are relatively distant from the modernity of the engineer as seen by their tools, clothes and the fact that they are not using steam power. The cultural distance between picturesque figure and consumer of the picturesque landscape was a commonplace first established by Gilpin. In this instance, although there are Europeans in the scene, it is possible to overlook them as subject matter. The Egyptians, however, are firmly planted as picturesque tropes. While the image was obviously included in *A Visit to the Suez Canal* to show Egyptian and European cooperation in the construction of the canal, the image can be read as one in which the modern/European side of the binary opposition is actively impacting the landscape while the Egyptian patiently assists.

The division between the modern European who acts upon the scene and the un-modern Egyptian who is acted upon further suggests that Egyptians could be read in picturesque terms. In the theory dating back to Gilpin, the figure traditionally served as a personification of the landscape scene. In this case, the passive, ruined Egyptian landscape was perhaps waiting to be impacted upon and modernised by the European and his technology. The personification of the Egyptian landscape as the figure helping to build the canal in this image possibly reflected a tacit acceptance of Egypt as a picturesque location. This is even more possible given that, as we have seen, the text of the book made use of picturesque description.

⁶⁵⁸ 'The State of Egypt,' *Times* (London) 31 May, 1851.

At first glance, the conflation of picturesqueness and modernity with regards to the Suez Canal is so convoluted as to nullify the significance of the term “picturesque”. In actuality the relationship between these two concepts in the above literature is far more straightforward. The elements of Lynch’s and Kenny’s descriptions incorporating the picturesque referred to Egypt in its perceived debased state, whereas the elements that incorporate modernity and development were ascribed to European intervention. It is important to remember that Kenny and Lynch, as well as the other authors writing about the canal at the time, described it as a European, and therefore foreign and modern, endeavour chiefly of interest to the British and the French.⁶⁵⁹ The necessity of European intervention into Egyptian development suggests just how widely accepted the perception of picturesqueness was. The Egyptians were picturesque; the Europeans were not. The seemingly necessary interjection of Europeans directly into the state’s developmental prospects, along with the binary opposition discussed above, links in with Edward Said’s theorisation of the Orient/Occident discussed in previous chapters. While imagery circulated within texts concerning the Suez Canal was not picturesque in a way that Roberts would recognise, it does appear to have mobilised some of the same stereotypical descriptions as those used by Roberts. These stereotypes, such as the Egyptian population needing European intervention in order to modernise, were consonant with the impression presented by David Roberts – decayed and ‘backward’ Egypt.

⁶⁵⁹ Searight, *Steaming East*, 122.

Conclusion

Roberts' publication served as a vital component of the framework in which Britain understood Egypt. Along with various contemporary publications, *Egypt and Nubia* can be seen to have helped to standardise the British perception of Egypt as a decayed and picturesque place. Reviews of *Egypt and Nubia* unequivocally agreed that Roberts' work was the definitive visual record of the region. Roberts work was considered by journals such as *The Times*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, and the *Art Journal* to be both picturesque and accurate. The same view is evident in the mid nineteenth-century theories of Twining, who maintained that the picturesque could serve as a vehicle for accurate representation. Twining's judgment was based on whether or not artists chose 'natural' subject matter that was reflective of the landscape scene. When the reviews of *Egypt and Nubia* are read in this context, it is possible to see how the publication could be viewed as both picturesque and accurate within its contemporary British context, thus helping to codify the notion that Egypt was developmentally inferior to Britain. The acceptance of this view can also be seen in the imitations of Roberts' mode of representing Egypt by Bartlett, Prisse, and Brenan throughout the 1850s. The similarity of these artists' work to those of Roberts further highlights the pervasive impact *Egypt and Nubia's* had in consolidating the impression that the state was both backward and picturesque.

This impression can also be seen in travel literature, particularly tourist guidebooks, in the 1850s. These guidebooks corresponded with the image of Egypt as picturesque presented in *Egypt and Nubia*. The popularity of this image was reinforced by the increasing numbers of British tourists who experienced the state through the medium of formulaic travel experiences such as package tours directed by the *Handbook for*

Travellers in Egypt and the *Oriental Pocket Companion*. These tourists' experiences were augmented by a modern infrastructure that eased travel but at the same time was invisible to tourists in search of picturesque scenery. British tourists followed in Roberts' footsteps, enjoying the sights along the Nile safely and comfortably.

The picturesque mode through which Britons consumed Egypt suggests that they viewed the state as backward and decayed. The negativity implicit in picturesque descriptions filtered down into discussions concerning Egypt's political and developmental state. There existed a generalised perception in early- and mid-Victorian Britain, that Egypt was an inferior state that required selective and circumspect Western intervention in order to develop and modernise. French influence on the state was considered to be "unnatural" and predicated on a desire for imperial control whereas the British were considered to exert a positive influence. The position that Britain was only interested in the flow of free trade and Indian communication was maintained by *The Times* as being a less coercive, and therefore 'natural' stance.⁶⁶⁰ It was seldom assumed that Egypt could develop without European intervention, which provides further evidence for the standardisation of the notion that Egypt was a decayed and backward state during the 1840s and 1850s. This perception was consonant with the impression that the state was picturesque.

The connection of backwardness and the picturesque can be seen also in the debate surrounding the construction of the Suez Canal. British writers such as Kenny and Lynch wrote books explaining that the canal would be beneficial to Britain, Egypt, and the world at large and used oblique references to the revisionist picturesque in their

⁶⁶⁰ 'Leader,' *Times* (London) 7 March, 1846.

arguments. The authors' assumed that the state was unable to be productive on its own, and described this situation using picturesque language. In these assumptions, the connection between picturesqueness and negativity in relation to Egypt can be seen to continue.

The overwhelmingly positive reception of *Egypt and Nubia*, seen through a variety of media, suggests that Roberts' work was central to the codification of "picturesque" Egypt in the mid nineteenth century. Despite the fact that picturesque language, both visual and textual, had been employed in representations of Egypt since Napoleon's invasion, it was Roberts' lithographs that standardised the way in which decayed, ruined, and picturesque Egypt "looked".

Conclusion

This thesis has examined and contextualised historically significant aspects of the ways in which David Roberts' lithographic publication *Egypt and Nubia* (1846-49) represented the "Orient", using a methodology concerned with close scrutiny of journals and literature concerning both Roberts and the Levant. In relation to the research questions initially posed, the analysis has demonstrated that Roberts largely used picturesque tropes to depict Egypt as a backward and unenlightened state. The overwhelming contemporary perception of this representation as definitive can be seen to relate, not only to a revised notion of the picturesque as an "accurate" mode of description, but also to British responses to shifting political relationships with Egypt and the Ottoman Empire between 1830 and 1869. The research outcomes serve to extend and problematise histories of British picturesque art, and recent accounts of the visual culture of imperialism, such as Linda Nochlin's.

The perception of Egypt as a picturesque site occluded modern subjects such as manufactories, steam travel and a modern army from the visual record. This can be seen in Roberts' lithographs – where almost every image presents decayed ancient temples, poorly constructed modern architecture and colourful yet decrepit figures set within a legible framework. Such images contain strong echoes Roberts' work in the *Jennings Landscape Annuals* and what I have identified as nineteenth-century British revisionist picturesque practice in general. Evidence of the artist's use of picturesque conventions can be seen when examining his images within the context of William Gilpin's and Uvedale Price's eighteenth-century theories. Specifically, Roberts appears to utilise these conventions through the location of architecture and figures within the composition.

Roberts' showed ancient Egyptian temples in a state of ruin, in a similar way to the eighteenth-century theorists' representations of post-dissolution British Catholic architecture. Like Gilpin, Roberts focused on crumbling structures featuring tonal and textural variety. Additionally, the artist can be seen to utilise a modified version of the moralist theories of Price. While Roberts did depict architectural decay as a process, unlike Price, however, he did not equate Egyptian ruination with the defeat of unjust political and religious systems. Rather, Roberts considered the ruins to be symbolic of Egypt's current state and a result of Islam. The crumbling modern architecture in his images reinforces this reading of the lithographic images and resonates, as we have seen, with contemporary textual descriptions of the state.

Roberts believed that the architecture's dilapidated nature – and the shambolic state of Egypt generally – was the result of negative Islamic influence. He blamed the destruction of ancient temples, the dismantling of historical sites for building material, poorly built mosques, and modern hovels choking archaeological sites, on the state's dominant religion. Above all, the artist equated Islam with the cause of Egyptians' misery. His figures were idle, unproductive, and lacking civilisation, a situation the artist attributed to Islam's malevolent influence, which had stripped the state of its ancient grandeur. Despite this jaundiced view, *Egypt and Nubia* was considered to be “accurate” when described using the revisionist picturesque, a legible mode for depicting squalor. Interestingly, while he considered such figures to be wretched, the artist presented Egyptians as aesthetically pleasing elements of a landscape scene. Notwithstanding the decrepit state of Egypt, they displayed the variety and novelty required of nineteenth-century picturesque practice. In thus depicting the people and the

architecture as picturesque, his primary concerns were aesthetic and commercial, but in relation to this it is impossible to ignore the political rubric in which he represented Egypt.

Through an investigation of Roberts' early life and career in chapter two, it has been possible to pinpoint the development of the artist's style, relying on picturesque conventions in order to make marketable imagery. Roberts' art, like that of his contemporaries Samuel Prout and Clarkson Stanfield, elaborated upon eighteenth-century British picturesque conventions, incorporating a wide range of exotic subject matter, while retaining a formulaic compositional mode. Though this revisionist picturesque practice, these artists made diverse European and North African scenery legible to their audience. It was this artistic mode that gave Roberts his first taste of success, illustrating the popular *Jennings Landscape Annuals* in the 1830s, directly before his Levantine voyage.

Roberts' Spanish engravings, particularly those relating to Moorish Spain, mobilise the revisionist picturesque conventions that would later be seen in *Egypt and Nubia*. Dominant features of Roberts' work at this time, such as dilapidated architecture, wretched figures, tonal variety, and the adherence to an existing compositional template, were utilised to present Spain as a wild and ruinous place, bursting with novel scenery. Additionally, Roberts included an element of moral judgment in his art at this time, suggesting that ruined Moorish architecture in Spain and North Africa were results of Muslim maladministration. The judgmental tone of the engravings, and, specifically the artist's apparent suggestion that Muslim societies were unable to govern themselves, encourages a Saidian interpretation of the engravings. In examining the *Jennings*

Landscape Annuals through Said's notion that Orientalist description 'melt[ed] away the Orient's geographical identity by dragging the Orient into the West,'⁶⁶¹ it can be seen that Roberts presented an essentialised and stereotypical set of images, a representational mode he would recycle in *Egypt and Nubia*.

It has also been demonstrated in chapter three that there existed a wide variety of visual and textual material in Britain describing Egypt as an exotic and ruined location. This material could have inspired Roberts to create his lithographs. His assumption that revisionist picturesque Egyptian imagery would be marketable could have been based in the popularity of publications such as Denon's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* and the *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les orders de Sa Majesté l'empereur Napoléon le Grand*, which paved the way for comprehensive treatments of Egypt. Additionally, Roberts had access to design and architecture of European "Egyptomania" inspired by the failed French invasion of Egypt, as well as Egyptian artefacts at the British Museum.

Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt formed the immediate context for *Egypt and Nubia*, particularly in the struggle for commercial supremacy in the region, spurred on by Egypt's governor, Mehemet 'Ali. Roberts' choice of Egypt as an exotic locale of interest to Britain was well timed; the state was a central concern of the British Empire at the time and was seldom out of the public eye. Often, debates concerning Egypt made use of the picturesque, focusing on decay, wretchedness, and a lack of modernity when describing the contemporary state, while deleting modern manufactories and

⁶⁶¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 92.

development from their descriptions. This position was distinct from earlier in the decade, when British writers highlighted the state for its modernity.

In the ensuing years, Pacha Mehemet 'Ali's expansion into Syria forced British commentators to reconsider their opinions about the state. This shift in British opinion was identified through studying contemporary journalism and recent historiographical work by historians of the British Empire and of Egypt. The research has established that, by the time Roberts travelled to Egypt in 1838, it was considered to be decayed and unable to develop itself, in spite of the various modernisations undertaken by Mehemet 'Ali. This negative attitude helped to standardise the British perception that Egypt was a picturesque locale, thereby priming interest in Roberts' publication.

Glowing reviews for the series stated that it was both “picturesque” and “accurate”. The connection of these two concepts has proved to be an intriguing one; as discussed earlier, picturesqueness was defined by the exclusion of visual elements as much as their inclusion, which suggests a lack of accuracy. However, it appears that reviewers were willing to accept that the state was best described using the language of the picturesque and that it was defined by decay, wretchedness and developmental inferiority. Other artists imitating Roberts' style in the 1840s and 1850s, as well as the acceptance of “picturesque Egypt” in a variety of media reinforced the perceived ubiquity of *Egypt and Nubia*'s imagery. During this period, the picturesque and visual accuracy were, in fact, coterminous.

My research shows that elements of what has been termed early-Victorian loose imperialism can be seen in Roberts' lithographs,⁶⁶² particularly through sliding scales of cultural development, interpreting the exotic through familiar templates, and the belief in trade aiding the advancement of underdeveloped countries. In all likelihood, the artist did not believe that Britain should rule Egypt; instead he simply wished the desert to once again become a developed trading centre, 'the busy haunt of men'.⁶⁶³ This stance problematises Saidian readings of Roberts' publication, and I have argued that while some elements of Saidian theory are helpful for an understanding of Roberts' work, there are limitations to this approach, such as historical inaccuracy and a tendency to see Western imperialism as a singular phenomenon. Saidian analysis must be tempered with sound historical research in order to be useful.

Indeed, my primary contribution to knowledge is a contextual, critically informed reading of *Egypt and Nubia* within the histories of British picturesque art and the visual culture of early-Victorian imperialism. These histories are changed by the inclusion of *Egypt and Nubia* to them. My methodological approach centres on a critical reading of Said's theories using visual and textual histories taken from volumes of picturesque imagery, journalism, Roberts' ephemera, and travel literature in order to undermine some of Said's assertions and the ways in which they have been applied to Roberts' work. This approach has unearthed layers of meaning unexplored by previous writers. For example, the shortcomings of a strict Saidian reading are only evident when research is undertaken into the shifting reportage on Egypt in the 1830s. Without this study, it would not be possible to pinpoint the ways in which Egypt was misinterpreted in the British press at the time. Additionally, without exploring the *Eastern Journal* and

⁶⁶² Gallagher and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade,' 6.

⁶⁶³ Ballantine, *Life of David Roberts*, 91-92.

Roberts' letters his personal opinions and artistic inclinations would not be evident. The established state of knowledge on the artist, the picturesque, and nineteenth-century British perceptions of Egypt reflect this.

In reading Roberts' work as picturesque, I have contributed to the knowledge of the history of British picturesque art. The established histories, such as in Andrews' *Search for the Picturesque*, suggest that the style was an eighteenth-century fad that was replaced by other artistic movements in the early nineteenth century. Evidence from the *Jennings Landscape Annuals*, *Egypt and Nubia*, and a host of other publications, however, implies that the picturesque was a viable representational mode well into the mid-nineteenth century and that it was used to understand novel and exotic territory through its "revisionist" phase. This position can be seen in Jackson's and Twining's theories, discussed in chapters two and six. Twining based his theory on whether or not an artist chose "natural" subject matter that was reflective of the landscape scene. For him, picturesqueness sprung from authentic subject matter presented in a legible framework. Jackson suggested that the picturesque could impart a more accurate understanding of a given scene than a purely objective one. Taken together, it is possible to see how *Egypt and Nubia* could be viewed as a work of nineteenth-century revisionist picturesque art that presented an "accurate" view. Both the chronology and implication of the lithographs comprise departures from some established histories of the style.

Also, I have mapped the political and cultural context of the series, and its role in establishing British perceptions of Egypt in the mid nineteenth century. Roberts travelled to the Levant and published his images at a crucial moment in Anglo-Egyptian

relations. This was the period in which the state became an essential staging post in the global circulation of British manufactures; both Roberts and his audience were familiar with the significance of the time. Through investigating this significance, I have contributed to knowledge through an in-depth analysis of 1830s journalism and literature related to Egypt. I conclude that his presentation of the state as backward, decayed, and “naturally” picturesque was timely and widely accepted. These concepts are linked; Roberts used various picturesque frameworks in order to present squalor within a readily legible, aesthetically pleasing, and commercially viable format. The connection of these concepts alters the state of knowledge not only on imperial historiography, but also on the history of British picturesque art. When the historical context and the picturesqueness of *Egypt and Nubia* are examined together, the series is seen to be reflective of its period and also informative for the development of British perceptions of Egypt in the mid nineteenth century.

There is a wealth of research still to be undertaken in the study of *Egypt and Nubia* and its context resulting from my study. Questions surrounding the longevity of Roberts’ images will be central to further research. Was the series still considered authoritative by the 1880s, when Britain began to exert more pronounced control over Egypt; what impact did the invasion of 1882 have on this situation? What impact did new technologies such as photography have on the popularity of Roberts’ lithographs? When did *Egypt and Nubia* cease to be considered accurate? Beyond the historical significance of the history of the images, a range of art historical inquiries related to exotic themes in British art and the picturesque can also be pursued. Largely, this thesis has not examined other painters' reactions to Roberts’ work, specifically his paintings. The artist was a full member of the Royal Academy and significant figure in the London art world

and study of how his paintings were received would compliment this thesis.

Additionally, investigating the reactions of other nineteenth-century artists and critics, such as John Ruskin and J.M.W. Turner, both of whom commented on Roberts' paintings, would provides a trajectory for future research.

Beyond the immediate significance of *Egypt and Nubia*, other elements of the context of Robert's work might benefit from further investigation. The significance of revisionist picturesque art extends far beyond Egypt; it was a representational mode used to describe exotic subject matter from around the world. Indeed, the methodological stance used in this thesis could be applied to the study of picturesque representations of any number of other countries. The impact of photography and other technological innovations on the picturesque generally is also worthy of additional study.

Finally, the textual basis for how Egypt was "known" to Britain in the later nineteenth century could also be explored. While my own research ends with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, British involvement in Egypt continued throughout the century. Particularly, further study into British perceptions of Egypt after 1882 would provide a fascinating addition to my own research. Undoubtedly, perceptions would have shifted away from the early Victorians'. The ways in which that shift occurred, and indeed, what elements of Egypt were highlighted and which were excluded from those perceptions, would further my own conclusions.

The list of potential avenues for further study highlights Robert's singular importance as a painter. Closer scrutiny of his work and the context it which it took shape shows the

work of an artist creating the definitive British images of Egypt. These images were produced at a time of great upheaval in the second British Empire, when Egypt was central to developing trade networks and the use of new steam technologies, the twin engines of British imperial development at the time. His juxtaposition of the revisionist picturesque with a negative and ostensibly “accurate” representation of the state suggests that Roberts was an artist of singular importance in early and mid-Victorian Britain.

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