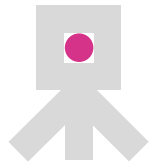


PhotoResearcher

ESHPH European Society for the History of Photography



The City and the Territory Imagining Cairo and Egypt

Guest Editor: Harald R. Stühlinger



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Editorial



Figure 1
H[enri], Béchard, N° 160,
Tombeaux des Califes, Vue générale, Caire,
around 1875, albumen print 28.5 x 41.2 cm.
Inv. no. Pk 4522, 15, Austrian National Library,
Picture Archives and Graphics Department,
Vienna.

In August 1839, only two months after the official presentation of the new photographic method announced by François Arago at the French Academy of Science, the painter Horace Vernet, his pupil Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet and his nephew Charles-Marie Boulton boarded a ship heading towards Egypt.¹ In their luggage, they carried a new daguerreotype camera. After the invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte during the French Campaign in Egypt and Syria between 1798 and 1801, scientists turned their eyes back on Ancient Egyptian culture and created the basis for archaeological research. One outcome of this military inspired scientific endeavour was the voluminous publication of the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809-1829). In many aspects, the imagery of Egypt was already preordained through the ideal perspec-

tives and vantage points used by the artists and scientists in the lavishly produced plates included in its thirteen volumes.

That was only the prologue of a genealogy of images that were then produced by the countless photographers who came to the country on the Nile. In the first years, photographic work was firmly in the hands of European photographers from France, Great Britain and the German speaking countries, followed by practitioners from Constantinople.² For decades, with Cairo and Egypt as part of the new Grand Tour of the Levant and Northern Africa, large numbers of tourists from Europe and North America were attracted to the Land of the Pharaohs – as were photographers. Especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt's geopolitical role changed dramatically and Cairo soon became the most photographed city outside of Europe in the 19th century. At the same time, the first package tours to Egypt were being organized and the country became more easily accessible to the common traveller. This was the time when a proliferation of photographic studies were made and the production of images to satisfy the needs of the tourists, as well as the people who remained in their home countries, got under way.

Among the exponents of early and later photography who have pointed their cameras towards the cityscapes of Alexandria and Cairo, taken images of the Nile and the Suez Canal or framed the Temples of Karnak, as well as the pyramids, we find names like Gustave le Gray, Francis Firth, Francis Bedford, Gabriel Lekegian, Abdullah Frères, Émile and Henri Béchard

1. Hélène Bocard, 'L'époque des amateurs', in: Mercedes Volait, *Le Caire dessiné et photographié au XIX^e siècle*, Paris: A. et J. Picard 2013, 157.

2. Volait 2013 [reference 1], 161-180.

Figure 2
H[enri], Béchard,
N° 160, *Tombeaux des Califes, Vue générale, Caire*,
around 1875, albumen print 26.7 x 36.7 cm.
Inv. no. Pk 4522, 08, Austrian National Library,
Picture Archives and Graphics Department,
Vienna.



(figs. 1 & 2), Wilhelm Burger and numerous others who are uncontestably linked to the photographs of Cairo and Egypt.

It appears to be a fruitful investigation and a good time to look at this fascination, which we consider to be an ongoing, continuous one. Not only photographers turn to the cities and the landscapes, to deserted towns and proliferating new housing projects, as well as to the people and to the well-known and stereotypical sights. Today, scholars and artists with international backgrounds turn to the endless numbers of photographs of Egypt which are still being found in archives worldwide or create their own, outstanding, new imagery. This number includes contributions by nine prominent international scholars and photographic artists working in this field. Our aim was to bring together essays which not only cover the 19th century, with its plethora of photographic production in Egypt, but also the tremendously rich output from the 20th century and up until the present time. One other goal was to bring together not only scholars of photography and photographers but also exponents of other disciplines who were certain to enrich the discourse and the understanding of photography.

Felix Thürlemann, renowned art historian, examines the role of tourist's photography in the late 19th century and touches on the notion of orientalism and romanticism in staged "street photography" ante litteram. **Mercedes Volait**, an internationally active French art and architecture historian, sheds light on the little-known, but incredibly interesting, photographer Beniamino Facchinelli who was active in the late 19th century. Besides photographing everyday life, he was also commissioned by English and French enthusiasts to depict Cairo's historical monuments to support their conservation and restoration. **Charlotte Malterre Barthes**, an urban planner and urban theorist, links the development of important infrastructural buildings along the Nile with their representation in – propagandistic – photography and represents an interdisciplinary approach in the expanded field of photo historic studies.



Figure 3
Men on shoreline at Qena, January 1950, silver
gelatin print 6 x 9.5 cm.
Found private collection, Archive Agency, Cairo.

Figure 4
Woman, standing,
overlooking the city of Cairo, April 1980,
chromogenic print 10.5 x 15 cm.
Found private collection, Archive Agency, Cairo.

Estelle Sohier, a Swiss geographer with a focus on image production, presents a commissioned photographic campaign by Fred Boissonnas which led to a luxurious book production for the self-representation of official Egypt in the 1930s. **Marlies Dornig**, an Austrian art historian, goes back to the opening of the Suez Canal and the creation of new towns along with it, which add an interesting aspect in the depiction of Egyptian cities and the territory.

Heba Farid, an internationally active Egyptian artist and scholar, presents two family photography collections and examines their roles as mediators of homeland (figs. 3 & 4). She shows selected photographs as a new form of *in-journal-exhibition* or – as she names it – an *exhibition-in-print*, inviting the readers and spectators to delve into the different ways of self-representation of Egyptians in the 20th century. With her contribution, we have the wonderful opportunity to also incorporate an Arab view of twentieth-century Egyptian photography and its interpretation by an autochthonous scholar.

The renowned Dutch, Swiss-based photographer **Bas Princen** and the Serbian, Swiss-based, urban planner **Milica Topalovic** were interviewed by Charlotte Malterre Barthes and Harald R. Stühlinger about *his* photographic approach to Egypt and *her* methodological use of photography as a professor for the Architecture of Territory. After ‘Migration as Agitation’, which was included in *PhotoResearcher* No. 26, Bas Princen’s photo essay make it possible for us to, once again, have an artistic work in our journal. This work makes it possible for us to get an advance look at some of the photographs that will soon be published in a photobook about the Nile Valley. **Harald R. Stühlinger** concludes with a glimpse at four photographic positions which manifest that Cairo and Egypt have not lost any of their sparkle and fascination for the photographers and artists of today.³

Harald R. Stühlinger, Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl
Vienna, October 2017

3. Special thanks from our guest editor to Charlotte Malterre Barthes for the inspiring talks about the urban development of Cairo.