

# ASTENE

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRAVEL  
IN EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

## BULLETIN



**NOTES AND QUERIES**

**NUMBER 56: SUMMER 2013**

Astene Bulletin 56: Summer 2013

# Bulletin: Notes and Queries

## Number 56: Summer 2013

Editors: Sheila and Russell McGuirk

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### Bulletin 56 : Summer 2013

#### Bulletin 57 : Autumn 2013

Submissions for the next Bulletin must be received by **15 September 2013**. We welcome articles, queries, replies and other related matters from members and interested readers. Please send contributions to Guest Editor, Robert Morkot (bulletin@astene.org.uk).

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Bulletin layout by Mina Demiren  
Cover: The Deir (Monastery) at Petra

## ASTENE NEWS AND EVENTS

### AGM

The 16th Annual General Meeting of The Association for the Study of Travel in Egypt and the Near East (ASTENE) will be held Sunday, 14 July, at 2.30 pm at Aston University Birmingham to consider the Annual Reports and Accounts, to elect proposed members to the Executive Committee, and for any other business. The following documents have already been circulated to members via email and are also available on the Website.

### Agenda

Minutes of the 15th Annual General Meeting (14 July 2012) held at St Mary Abbots Centre, London.  
Chairman's Report for 2012-2013.  
Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the financial year 2012-2013.

Would any members who are unable to access these documents electronically and who will not be present at the AGM to receive hard copies please contact the Treasurer who will then send the materials by post. (Dr Janet Starkey, The Old Post Office, 9 Main Street, Swinton, TD11 3JJ, Near Duns, Berwickshire, Scotland).

### ASTENE Conference 2013

*The Tenth Biennial ASTENE Conference: Research and Reflections* at Aston University, Birmingham, Friday, 12 July to Monday, 15 July 2013. Most members will already have received by email the full programme and listing of abstracts for the conference, which are also available on the ASTENE Website. A total of 65 papers will be presented by speakers coming from 18 countries in addition to the United Kingdom: USA, Australia, Finland, Turkey, Egypt, Russia, Poland, Ireland, Palestine, France, Croatia, Malta, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Austria and Japan.

### In Memoriam

We regret to report the deaths of ASTENE members Charles Plouviez and Nigel Hepper.

Many readers will remember Charles as an active member and contributor to the Bulletin, and his daughter Judith confirms that 'study and research into travellers was a key interest of his for many years and that he had an enjoyable and fruitful

membership' (of ASTENE). Charles was an advertising copy writer by profession, working for some time at Everetts Agency, and was a member of the Council of the IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising). He was active in community affairs in Camden, in particular an appeal to clean and repair some important stained glass in the Church of St Saviour's, Belsize Park, where his funeral was held in May.

Janet Starkey adds that Charles was the inspiration behind the al-Qusayr fort and its museum. He also edited a book published by Archaeopress entitled *Christopher Wordsworth: Six Letters from Greece* and was the only man to contribute an essay (on Princess Caroline and Lady Craven) to Sarah Searight's ASTENE book on women travellers. He was a supporter of and donor to the Qurna Discovery Project, as also was Nigel Hepper.

F. Nigel Hepper died in May 2013 at the age of 84. Nigel was active to the last, still publishing and working to complete publication in various forms of his phenological records (the dating of seasonal phenomena, such as flowers) going back to the 1940s. He wrote widely on archaeobotany and was once head of the Tropical African Section and Assistant Keeper of the Herbarium at London's Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. His most recent books are *Life on a Lake District Smallholding* (2012) and *Captain Hepper's Great War Diary* (2011). Among his earlier major works were *Plants of the Yemen* (1976) and *Pharaoh's flowers: the botanical treasures of Tutankhamun* (1990). Janet Starkey adds that he made a survey of all the cedars of Lebanon in Britain brought back by travellers, many of which feature in the grounds of stately homes.

### ASTENE's Day at Mariemont

As part of the effort to bring our international members together more often, ASTENE Member and Director of the Musée royal de Mariemont, Dr. Marie-Cécile Bruwier, welcomed members to her museum just south of Brussels on 8 June 2013. Members from the Benelux region gathered to tour the museum's Egyptian collection, as well as the temporary exhibition 'Du Nil à Alexandrie', a history of Egypt's main source of water and of the travellers who have journeyed there.

After coffee and introductions, Dr Bruwier gave a brief lecture on the history of the museum and the contents of its collection. Her colleague, Dr Arnaud Quertinmont, then led a tour through the main part of the temporary exhibit, which tells the story of the Nile and its precious supply of water through artefacts, films, models, and maps. The galleries of the exhibit overlook parts of Mariemont's permanent Egyptian collection, a very nice touch.

After lunch, Dr. Bruwier led the ASTENE group through the second part of the temporary exhibition, where rare books on Nile expeditions, antique guidebooks, photographs, and autographs of Nile luminaries are displayed. Perhaps the item that received the most attention from the group was the exceptionally rare 19th century children's book on Belzoni, published in Paris. The group then proceeded to the Egyptian galleries to see parts of the museum's permanent collection. Appropriately, the day ended under the gaze of the five-ton Egyptian bust around which the museum was (literally) built.

The attending ASTENE members were so pleased with the day out that they look forward to planning another day out in the region. All ASTENE members are welcome to participate—keep an eye on the Bulletin for further details.

'Du Nil à Alexandrie' will run until 29 September 2013. The museum is open six days a week and is situated within the grounds of Wallonia's finest arboretum. Scholars have access to over 15,000 rare books in the museum library, as well as an astounding collection of antique autographs. Parts of the permanent Egyptian galleries are currently under renovation, but quite a few choice artefacts can still be seen. For further information, visit [www.musee-mariemont.be](http://www.musee-mariemont.be).

Amanda Heggstad



## ASTENE TRAVELLERS TO JORDAN

### Searching for the 'Rose Red City'

The 2013 ASTENE travellers set off in the modern manner by air, probably with less waiting around than Messrs Irby, Mangles, Bankes and Burckhardt had when travelling in the 19th century, but with as much anticipation. Lecturer to the fourteen was Dr Robert Morkot who during our journey kept us entertained and informed in his inimitable way with the trials, tribulations and elations of those earlier travellers, and Elisabeth Woodthorpe was our incomparable tour leader and manager.

We were met at Amman airport by our trusty bus, driver Hussein, guide Mo'een (given at the start to lengthy lectures which we were too polite to interrupt) and a young policeman whose job was to ensure our 'safe passage,' courtesy of the Hashemites.

### Thursday 18 April: Amman and Salt

Trouble on Day One. Three of us wished to break away (which worried Security!) from the morning tour and instead visit Amman Station and Museum (steam trains) which had on display the early 20th century form of travel. Andrew and Edmund Wilson and I (Sally Cassidy-Odd), together with the five station staff, spent two happy hours in train sheds and on the lines which were manufactured and transported from USA, Germany and GB.

Meanwhile the main party visited the Citadel where for Elisabeth Woodthorpe a special moment was...

*re-visiting those amazing 8,500-yr-old double busts from Ain Ghazal which we saw on the first day in the museum at the Citadel; they have stayed with me since I first saw them around 20 years ago. It was very special to be able to stand in front of them again.*

Later we visited the first of several markets where food and herbs interested most of us, generating discussions about what was what and how it might be cooked. In the market in Salt, that afternoon we met an old legionnaire who had faint praise for the British, though he was quite charming about it!

### Friday 19 April: Pella, Umm Qais and Jerash

Pella is set in a beautiful valley and had a serenity common to many deserted Greek sites (probably not in its day). It was hard to imagine the trouble just across the border in Syria though the weather on this

journey cloaked the views we had been anticipating at many of the sites with mist and cloud if not rain.

Jerash is a wonderful piece of town planning which one could easily imagine full of bustle as people went about their business and chariots moved along the paved and colonnaded streets,

Sue Kentish wrote:

*As the day went on the crowds came out and it became increasingly evident [Friday] was a family day. Everywhere visitors were taking pictures of ancient remains—and of each other. By early evening Jerash, the best preserved of all the Decapolis cities, thronged with families...*



Qasr Kharaneh

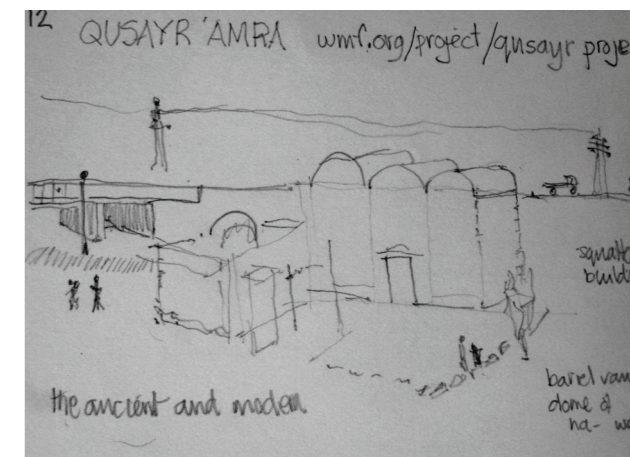
### Saturday 20 April: Desert Castles

Into the desert! We drove along the modern highway, together with the tankers going to Iraq, to find the Umayyad castles. My favourite of the three was al-Kharaneh. The logic of the plan and stone structure of the square fort was a memorable pleasure together with amazing mural decoration—such a sophisticated building—a complete multi-purpose solution. I tried to imagine how it would have looked in the rain and wind when surrounded by forest. Magical!

Qusayr Amra, originally an 8th c. hunting pavilion, is now 'ancient and modern' with the highway alongside. Finally we came to the black fort at al-Azraq, made famous by T.E. Lawrence.

### Sunday 22 April: Mount Nebo and Madaba

Mount Nebo was a disappointment as a mist concealed the view of Jerusalem. Madaba next, but



From Sally's sketch book.

the crowds made it hard to view the amazing mosaic map of Jerusalem set in the floor of the church. What was in their minds? Did they imagine a bird's eye view?

To Petra, a wonderful drive south along the Kings' Highway. Up and down. What would it have been like on horseback for our 18th and 19th century precursors? Robert gave us some indication at any rate of the limited diet on which they survived, while we feasted everywhere.

Sue Kentish wrote:

*En route to Petra we went down and down and then up and up through the dizzying depths and heights of Jordan's Grand Canyon. Irby and Mangles, in whose early nineteenth century footsteps we were following, with readings from their journal by our expert Dr Robert Morkot, took one and a half hours to descend from the Petra side on horseback, to the valley of the canyon. Our ascent by coach takes five minutes!*

### Monday 23 April: Petra

Excitement and anticipation going down the siq, twisting and turning very slowly as we were lectured. Then yet another corner and behold this wonderful rose-coloured façade of the Treasury appeared through a break in the rocks and then a mass of donkeys, camels, horse buggies and the babel of excited humans. This was a moment of wonder for everyone.

Paul Hetherington, had long wished to visit Petra.

*During the 1940's (probably when I was about twelve years old) I read a book called The Flying*

*Carpet* by Richard Halliburton; it must have been published around the mid-1930's, as I later read that he died at sea in 1939 while trying to sail a Chinese junk. The idea of the book was that he and a friend wanted to go to as many exciting and (at the time) remote places as they could and write about their journeying. They decided to buy a small two-seater aeroplane which was called (or they named) *The Flying Carpet*, and in which they recounted their journeys to these distant places. Timbuktu was one of them and I remember he achieved being left alone all night in Hagia Sophia when he was in Istanbul.

The most memorable of his descriptions (for me) at that time was his visit to Petra, and it was this which made me always want to visit the city, and it was certainly in *The Flying Carpet* that he introduced me to the phrase 'a rose-red city half as old as time'. This phrase, although now over-used, stuck with me through my life and I had to wait to visit it for well over 60 years, but I made it eventually.

The book is certainly a long way from being great literature, but it does show that the right kind of writing can have a permanent effect if read at the right time in your life.



ASTENE travellers at Petra.

Sally Odd marvels:

*On my previous visit it was snowing and difficult to believe it could be so cold, but this time it was a day of warmth.*

*To walk round the city of Petra takes about three hours but if one stops to admire the ruins even our two day visit was hardly sufficient to look in any great detail at each individual edifice. The present floor bed is said to be some 3 metres above the original. What splendours await us once these layers are removed?*

*On our second day we went our various ways. My special wonder was the feat of climbing to the Monastery. A fit person would take ¼ hr though most of us took longer. No H&S here, thank the Lord, no railing to protect you tumbling down the sheer walls into the gorge below.*

Lorraine Partridge writes:

*What remains vividly of that day in Petra, was walking through the Siq in the late afternoon; turning back the Treasury did actually look 'Rose Red' in the afternoon light. Aside from us and the chariots hurtling back and forth to try and get their last fares of the day, it was so peaceful. It seemed to me that the Siq was a wonderful advertisement for what man can do in harmony with nature, the natural rock formations and the carvings were both wonderful, and even if the end of the Siq wasn't the magnificent edifice of the Treasury, the entry into Petra, must certainly be the most memorable approach to any city. I expect that even when Petra was a flourishing city it would have awed any approaching traveller. Walking in one experienced the sight much as it must have been about 1800 years ago.*

Our first day in Petra was structured by our local guide, of whom Rachel Hetherington commented:

*On the second day of the tour; Mo'een was already a bit fazed by the (temporary) loss of two members of the group on the first day. The group, released from the confines of the coach, dispersed like spilt mercury, unheeding of Mo'een's pleas to come closer and listen to him. Finally he wailed, 'I've never had a group like this...' a week later, by the time we reached the Wadi Rum, he was reconciled. I sat on a rock and in the distance saw him talking happily to a small group under a tree, while others roamed*

*around, or exited right up a cliff. Very suitably, we all looked just like the 18th century tourists in Rossini's etching of people viewing the ruins of Rome.*

#### Wednesday 24 April: Impressions of Wadi Rum

*My highlights were the meal (cooked underground) and the short walk outside the camp the following morning looking in wonder at all the tracks of small animals and wishing I knew what they were and also looking back at our camp under the hugely high cliff of red rock.*

Felicity Wood

*One unforgettable memory is lying and watching the stars at the King Aretas IV camp when the generators were switched off. The desert was so majestic in the moonlight and the stars were breathtaking. I lay in the silence for about an hour watching the stars appear.*

Myra Green

*My other outstanding memory is Wadi Rum in the moonlight, so bright that there was no need for a torch. Also so quiet at night, it's rare that one can escape noise or light pollution in the UK, unless in the highlands or some other remote area. In spite of all the traffic we saw in the day, making across the desert, it certainly had a magic and magnificence that made one feel rather insignificant in the face of nature.*

Lorraine Partridge

#### Thursday 25 April: to Kerak and the Dead Sea

On our journey back to Amman we stopped to visit the castle of Kerak, built by the Crusaders as a military base, but not to be compared to the elegance of the desert castles.

Our last night was spent at a hotel on the shores of the Dead Sea. Here is Lorraine's verdict:

*Another memory is of bobbing up and down in the Dead Sea. I must say that it wasn't an experience I really enjoyed, but I suppose at least I can say I've done it!*

This was a sentiment with which others concurred.

At the mini Conference Sue talked about her research on the British Consul to Salonika in the 18th century. Edmund spoke about the difficulties and misunderstandings that can arise from doing business between Jordan (Jerusalem) and the UK. Robert Morkot's paper on the Irish lad Curtin is printed in this bulletin and Jennifer Scarce retraced David Roberts' steps in the region, which brought our journey to a close.

Our thanks go to Elisabeth and Robert who respectively kept us on the move and entertained. I have found that to travel on an ASTENE journey is a good, happy, enjoyable experience because of the diverse interests, knowledge, good humour, and tolerance each one has of their fellow travellers. May there be many more.

Report compiled by Sally Cassidy Odd



The 'Oval Plaza' at Jerash

## OTHER NEWS AND EVENTS

### Hisham Khatib's Book Launch

On 22 May four London-based ASTENE members attended the launch of fellow member Dr Hisham Khatib's new book at the Mosaic Rooms, Cromwell Road. Among our number were Sarah Searight, who wrote the foreword to the book, and Caroline Simpson.

*Jerusalem, Palestine and Jordan: In the Archives of Hisham Khatib* is a richly illustrated account of the history and society of the Holy Land, as recorded in the writings, paintings, maps and photography of Western travellers and observers, plus postcards and other ephemera. This beautiful volume is the fruit of Dr Khatib's remarkable 40-year quest for artwork covering the history of the Holy Land. It spans 400 years of Ottoman rule, with emphasis on 19th Century watercolours, including works from Edward Lear, Carl Haag and Carl Werner. The images are accompanied by an engaging and informative text. It also includes chapters on mapping the Holy Land, panoramas of Jerusalem as well as underground Jerusalem. This is a major contribution to our understanding of how the East of Jordan and the Dead Sea were rediscovered in the early nineteenth century.

Dr Khatib treated us to an illustrated presentation on the background and rationale of the collection which the book celebrates, touching on the travels which led to some of the pictures. It is indeed a beautiful book and will be reviewed in a future issue of the Bulletin.

### EES tour of Egypt 27 February to 10 March 2014

ASTENE member Dr Aidan Dodson will be leading the Black Land Red Land—Nile Valley and Western Desert respectively—tour of Egypt for members of the Egyptian Exploration Society. Visits will include South Saqqara, Faiyum, Beni Hassan, Tell el-Amarna, Kharga and Dakhla, returning via Luxor. For more information go to [www.ees.ac.uk](http://www.ees.ac.uk).

### Museums and Exhibitions

#### Berlin, Masterpieces from the Seraglio

Persian and Mongolian paintings from the albums of the Prussian envoy Heinrich Friedrich von Diez,

3 June to 1 September at the Pergamonmuseum, Bodestrasse 1-3, 10178, Berlin. Heinrich Friedrich von Diez was Frederick the Great of Prussia's enlightened ambassador to Istanbul. When he died in 1817 his collection of manuscripts and paintings was bequeathed to the Royal Library in Berlin. Diez collected most of the contents when he was posted in Istanbul between 1786 and 1790. They are now one of the treasures of the State Library of Berlin. Diez (1751–1817) was more of a polymath than an envoy. He early abandoned a legal career to study Oriental languages and he went on to build a library of 17,000 publications and 850 medieval and Oriental manuscripts. For more information go to: <http://www.cornucopia.net/events/masterpieces-from-the-seraglio>

#### 'Tea with Nefertiti'

*Le théorème de Nefertiti* continues in Paris at the Institut du Monde Arabe till 8 September 2013. It marks the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the bust of Nefertiti in Berlin. It is an exhibition of primarily modern installations, curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, but among the 100 artworks some date back to as early as 1800 BC. Through revisiting the contested histories of how Egyptian collections have been amassed by numerous museums from the 19th century onwards, the curators explore the mechanisms by which artworks come to acquire a range of meanings and functions which can embody a number of diverse, and at times conflicting, narratives.

[www.imarabe.org](http://www.imarabe.org)

### Conferences, Lectures and Talks

#### Gertrude Bell and Iraq—A Life and Legacy Conference 11–13 September 2013 at the Royal Society and the British Academy, London

The life and legacy of Gertrude Bell in Iraq will be examined in this major international conference, organised by BISI with the British Academy, and in association with the Gertrude Bell Archive at Newcastle University. The sessions will cover a range of topics, such as Bell's experience as a woman in the man's world of British Intelligence. Other subjects explored will be her views of the Ottoman Empire, her role in the making of the Iraqi state and monarchy and her interest in Iraq's ancient past. To register for this free conference, please visit the

British Academy website:

[http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2013/Gertrude\\_Bell\\_and\\_Iraq.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2013/Gertrude_Bell_and_Iraq.cfm)

The event will be opened by a panel discussion on 'Britain and the Occupations of Iraq' on Wednesday 11 September at the Royal Society, chaired by Professor Sir Adam Roberts KCMG, FBA with panellists: Dr Ali A. Allawi, Professor Nadjie Al Ali, Professor Rosemary Hollis and Professor Charles Tripp FBA. This session will provide the opportunity for a public debate about British-Iraqi relations in the 10th anniversary year of British participation in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

#### Rumi Festival: Friday, 2 August to Sunday, 4 August 2013

The Beshara School, Chisholme House, Scottish Borders, is organising a gathering for lovers of Rumi. The Festival is a celebration of the life, work and legacy of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi. The programme starts with a solo concert from Kudsi Erguner, master of the Turkish Ney, on the Friday evening. It continues with talks and discussions about Rumi and his influence today. There will be a Whirling

Dervish Sema from Istanbul.

Tickets on sale at <http://www.rumifestival.org>

#### Bloomsbury Summer School July 2013

This starts immediately after the ASTENE conference, so some members may be lectured out by then. But from Monday, 29 July to Friday, 2 August former ASTENE member Dr Claire Malleson is flying over from Egypt and her work as Mark Lehner's archaeobotanist at Giza to teach a course entitled 'Come, tell me how they lived!, Techniques in Egyptian settlement archaeology'. For details on all the courses go to [http://www.egyptologyuk.com/bloomsbury/bss\\_programme\\_detail.htm](http://www.egyptologyuk.com/bloomsbury/bss_programme_detail.htm)

#### Victorian Transport

In the latest International Society for Travel Writing newsletter is an announcement on a conference on Victorian Transport, organised by the Australasian Victorian Studies Association (AVSA) and The University of Hong Kong (10–12 July 2014 in Hong Kong). Abstract Deadline: 30 November 2013. <http://www.english.hku.hk/events/victoriantransport/>

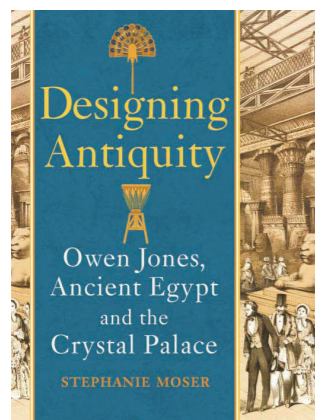


Dr Hisham Khatib signing his book.

# BOOKS AND REVIEWS

ASTENE's Bulletin Reviews Editor is Myra Green. If you would like to suggest a book for review, or if you are interested in reviewing books for the Bulletin, please contact her at mg@myragreen.f9.co.uk.

***Designing Antiquity: Owen Jones, Ancient Egypt and the Crystal Palace*, by Stephanie Moser. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012. 308pp, 80 color + 50 b/w illus. ISBN-13: 978-0300187076 \$75 (£35 on amazon.co.uk).**



Many readers of the Bulletin will be familiar with Stephanie Moser's earlier illuminating volume *Wondrous Curiosities* about the British Museum and its Egyptian collections. Here the author considers an equally important Egyptian display, and one that had even greater popular appeal, the Egyptian court of the Crystal Palace, in both the 1851 Hyde Park version and the later Sydenham successor. Being reminded of the very long life of the Crystal Palace (from 1854 to its ultimate destruction in 1936) is particularly valuable, even though it did fall into disrepair and move 'downmarket'—one tends to think of it as a mid-nineteenth century phenomenon. The numbers of visitors to both the Great Exhibition and the Sydenham Crystal Palace must have far exceeded visitors to the British Museum, and therefore been a greater influence on the public awareness of Egyptian style. Stephanie Moser also argues the case for Owen Jones as a significant contributor to ideas about Egyptian art.

The volume places the Egyptian court in its context within the whole scheme of the Crystal Palace, and also the court within the context of knowledge and understanding of Egyptian design. Owen Jones succeeded many others in his travels in Egypt,

and it is valuable to have sets of comparative views of significant monuments that were recreated, or influenced the displays, by a number of artists. For example, the Inner Court of the Temple of Isis at Philae is presented in versions from the *Description*, Belzoni, Jules Goury (with whom Jones travelled) and David Roberts. The significance of Jones's work in Egypt was the emphasis on colour and on the numerous geometric and other designs that he presented in the *Grammar of Ornament*. He therefore has close parallels in the work of near contemporaries, Gardner Wilkinson, Prisse d'Avennes, Rosellini and Lepsius. It was this use of colour that was such a sensation (and sometimes cause of criticism) in the reconstructions in the Crystal Palace exhibitions. There were, of course, numerous historical inaccuracies in the actual displays—the avenue of lions being one of the most notable. Nevertheless, the overall effect must have been quite breathtaking as is amply shown by the numerous photographs in this book. The (perhaps rather garishly painted) colossi of Abu Simbel that presided over the exhibition are well known from photographs, but Stephanie Moser has assembled here an extraordinary number of pictures from a wide range of sources. The earliest are lithographs and watercolours of the Crystal Palace displays (not all Egyptian), along with the engravings from periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News*. Many are photographs, and some of the later ones are in colour. These really do give a sense of what was lost in the fire that destroyed the palace. There are also some very clever and intriguing computer-generated reconstructions.

There is a detailed account of the exhibition from a range of written sources (such as the guidebooks) and some of the many criticisms from those who thought it all rather vulgar—the crowds that visited over the decades cared less about that! As various writers observed: the British Museum displays might be more academically reliable, but the Fine Arts Courts delivered the knowledge on 'Ninevite', Byzantine, Saracenic, mediaeval and Renaissance as 'a linked chain of sequence and divergence whose significance it is difficult to miss altogether.' And you could get lunch and tea as well.

Altogether, this is an extremely interesting volume that presents material in a much more

thoughtful and useful way than the usual studies of 'Egyptomania'. It tells us a huge amount about Jones's use of his travels and how his work relates to that of predecessors and contemporaries—and it is significant that what Jones achieved in the 1851 Exhibition is merely a half century after the Napoleonic Expedition and thirty years after Belzoni's recreation of the tomb of Sety I. The illustrations throughout (many in colour) are fascinating and considerably expand on those usually available of the 1851 exhibitions. They reveal what a typically 19th-century combination of education and technical achievement the whole Exhibition was, and explain its continuing popularity in later decades.

Robert Morkot

## Crime Fiction in the Middle East

1. *The Khalifah's Mirror*, by Andrew Killeen. Dedalus, Sawtry, Cambs., 2012. Pp. 308. ISBN 978 1 903517 97 0. £9.99.

2. *Deadline*, by Barbara Nadel. Headline, London, 2013. Pp. 373. ISBN 978 0 7553 8888 2. £19.99 (hb.). 978 07553 8890 9. £7.99(pb.) Kindle, £10.99.

3. *The Golden Scales*, by Parker Bilal. Bloomsbury, London, 2012. Pp. 400. ISBN 978 1 4088 2849 4. £11.99.

4. *Dogstar Rising*, by Parker Bilal. Bloomsbury, London, 2013. Pp. 389. ISBN 978 1 4088 2785 7. £11.99.

5. *The Janissary File*, by Gerhard Behrens. iUniverse Inc., New York, etc., 2007. Pp. 249. ISBN 978 0595 433681. £12.95(pb), Kindle £2.63

6. *The Toledo Fake* by Gerhard Behrens. iUniverse Inc, Bloomington, 2012. Pp. 220. ISBN 978 1475 964622. £10.95 (pb), Kindle £2.63



Lovers of crime fiction have been dwelling in chilly territory lately. The huge success of Stieg Larsson's *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, of Henning Mankell's Inspector Wallander series and other 'Nordic noir' crime fiction has been the most prominent feature of recent developments. But, happily for ASTENE members, another tendency has been quietly on the increase, transporting us to warmer climes. Are these books wholly escapist in character, do we just crave the heat and colour of the settings, or is there some deeper significance to the emerging popularity of Middle Eastern fictional detectives?

For those who relish a complete escape into the past, Andrew Killeen's *The Khalifah's Mirror* is set in Haroun al-Rashid's Baghdad and features the esoteric lore of Abu Nuwas, 'the Father of Locks', supreme intellectual and physical escapologist. Condemned to death by the Caliph, he is allowed someone to speak on his behalf and selects a young poet who embarks on an intricate tale which will inevitably postpone the dreadful moment... Yes, we are in *Thousand and One Nights* territory and can embark on tales such as that of the Elephant and the Dragon and the Palace in the Sky, fantasies informed by Killeen's extensive knowledge of medieval Arabic literature. When the Father of Locks ends up in the Matbaq, a prison from which no-one has ever escaped, we think we know what to expect, but there are plenty of surprises on the way.

Barbara Nadel's mysteries featuring Inspector Ikmen is a well-established series. Ikmen sleuths his way through the alleys and bazaars of modern Istanbul, though his latest outing in *Deadline* gives a nostalgic nod to the past, for the main setting is the Pera Palace Hotel and the very room where Agatha Christie stayed. This becomes, of course, the setting for a game of murder when an actual death occurs. The narrative takes a modern twist as the party is taken over by a group of terrorists who demand that Ikmen and his companions solve the murder before the sun comes up. The story is a graceful tribute to Christie combined with a contemporary narrative. Ikmen's adventures began some sixteen books ago, so there's plenty of 'backlist' reading for any new Nadel addicts.

There are some writers who perhaps choose crime fiction as their way of confronting the modern Middle East. Parker Bilal is the pseudonym of Jamal Mahjoub, a well-known London-born writer who has lived in many countries, including Sudan and Egypt. His Inspector Makana has escaped from

Sudan, where his scientist wife was under threat for teaching evolution, and is eking out a precarious existence on a houseboat in Cairo. In Bilal's previous novel, *The Golden Scales*, set before the revolution which overturned Mubarak, Makana was hired to trace a celebrity footballer, member of a team belonging to an enormously wealthy 'businessman', a modern pasha in a glittery palace. In the course of Makana's quest, Bilal is able to draw a horrifying picture of all-pervasive corruption, but also to convey the extraordinary warmth and salty wit of Cairo, the qualities which continue to draw those of us who love the city like helpless iron filings to some great rusty yet powerful magnet.

The portrait of modern Egypt in Makana's most recent adventure, *Dogstar Rising*, in which the detective leaves Cairo for dangerous researches in Luxor and an abandoned desert monastery, takes us back to 2001. A series of murders of young boys fans the flames of religious hatred between Copts and Muslims, and the intervention of a military intelligence unit makes for a terrifying 'turn of the screw'. In the background are the various tensions and antagonisms which have developed since and which make contemporary Egypt such a complex issue for our attempts at understanding.

Another portrait of modern Egypt was found in Gerhard Behrens' first novel. *The Janissary File*, set in Cairo in the 1980s where a shy academic, Professor Rietberg, an expert in Arabic legal documents is following the complexities of the 'wakf' foundations, old Islamic family trusts and benefactions which were dissolved by Nasser but which are now 'up for grabs' as descendants of the original beneficiaries seek to reclaim the properties. Some are so valuable that they can literally make a successful claimant a millionaire overnight. Dangerous entanglements are afoot for an innocent lawyer who ventures into this minefield, including being drawn into the clutches of glamorous women.

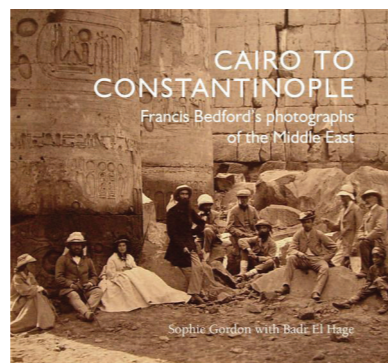
Behrens' second novel, *The Toledo Fake*, has just been published and here the initial setting is London, where Rietberg becomes involved in the market for Islamic antiquities. An immense price is paid at auction for a fake astrolabe (and here Behrens describes precisely how these instruments worked) which has Arabic, Hebrew and Latin inscriptions. The astrolabe is allegedly evidence of that lost golden time of *convivencia* in Andalusia when Jews, Muslims and Christians lived side by side. The suspicious death of the forger leads

Rietberg chasing to Iran and to the Gulf in a sophisticated story which combines a great deal of lucid information about Islamic astronomy with a lively narrative.

For some, the rise of crime fiction set in the Middle East may be seen as merely escapism, the evocation of pleasant holidays abroad. Perhaps they are thinking of the kind of light entertainment that Christie's *Murder in Mesopotamia* and *Death on the Nile* did indeed provide, with their concentration on western characters and the relegation of 'natives' to background roles. But modern writers of exotic crime fiction are surely asking deeper questions and seeking to know something about the countries they love and travel in, even if it means grappling with the problems and turbulence of the modern orient.

Jane Jakeman

***Cairo to Constantinople: Francis Bedford's Photographs of the Middle East*, by Sophie Gordon and John McCarthy. The Royal Collection Trust, 2013. ISBN 978 1 905686 18 6. £35.**



With estimable prescience, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert decided to send their eldest son, the Prince of Wales—in due course to become Edward VII—on a four-month educational tour of Egypt and the Holy Land. In addition to a group of equerries and courtiers led by the Hon. Major-General Robert Bruce, the photographer Francis Bedford was to accompany the party to record the journey and the locations they visited. This book, and the associated exhibition of the same name, is an account of this 1862 expedition. It includes extracts from the Prince's journal, and illustrates all the photographs Bedford took during the time they spent in the Near East.

Like all authentic travellers to Egypt, the Prince's arrival was to be by sea. He embarked on the royal yacht, the *MV Osborne*, in Trieste and after calling

in at ports on the Adriatic Sea, proceeded directly to Alexandria. The party spent a few days in Cairo and then went up the Nile as far as Aswan in barges provided by the Viceroy, Muhammad Sa'id Pasha. Returning north, they visited Edfu, Esna, Dendera and Luxor before embarking on the *Osborne* at Alexandria for the short sea passage to Jaffa. Their visits in the Holy Land were to Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Damascus and Beirut. The return sea journey was from Tripoli in Lebanon, via Constantinople and Athens to Malta and Marseilles.

Bedford's technical accomplishment in obtaining the photographs, while part of a large travelling party, was considerable. In addition to a heavy camera and glass plates, he required a tent in which to develop the negatives at each location. These were eventually brought back to England for processing in July of 1862. Two complete sets of the prints were given to the Royal Collection and folios of selected prints were made available for sale by the lithographers Day and Sons in London. All of the photographs taken during the tour—from Spalatro in Croatia to Malta—are illustrated in this volume, either in miniature or as enlargements, together with additional material by other photographers and artists.

With a few exceptions, the photographs show the sites in Egypt almost as you will see them today. The differences are where great cubes or columns of stone lie scattered around as if swept aside by some invisible hand. You will enjoy seeing, surely, the Colossi of Memnon, the party relaxing in the shade at the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak—where they were joined by the Prince's uncle, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, his wife Alexandrine, and the Scottish artist Jemima Blackburn—and another of the assembled group with their camels at the Giza pyramids. This eerily anticipates the photograph of the participants in the 1921 Cairo Conference which included Winston Churchill (then Colonial Secretary with responsibility for Mesopotamia), T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell. Bedford recorded rather more landscape scenes from their travels in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon where the religious sites were of particular interest. He was an early recipient of authority from the Ottoman authorities to take photographs at the Dome of the Rock, and there are a number of illustrations from this visit. The 'Street called Straight' in Damascus is shown in a ruinous state after recent local disturbances. Among works by other artists are two watercolours by Carl Haag, the noted Orientalist artist, who was

later commissioned by the Prince to produce a landscape of the party's visit to Baalbek and of his visit to the desert encampment of Agyle Aghia, a noted Bedouin leader. A splendid Turner-esque watercolour of the *Osborne* entering the Grand Harbour at Malta by Oswald Brierly concludes the book's coverage of the tour—although it has to be said that the original painting, which is in the exhibition, should be seen for the image to be fully appreciated.

The exhibition 'Cairo to Constantinople' comprises original Bedford photographs together with the associated paintings and some small antiquities which were collected by the Prince during his journey. If you were unable to see these while they were at the Queen's Gallery at Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh—it closed on 21 July 2013—you will have to wait with patience until it is resurrected at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London in October of 2014. In the intervening fifteen months or so, you may comfort yourself with this splendid volume which should be on every member's bookshelf or, better still, on a table where you and your friends may enjoy seeing this most fascinating part of the world as it was in 1862.

(Full details about the book and the exhibition are available at [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk)).

George Hutcheson

***The Bazaar in the Islamic City: Design, Culture and History*, edited by Mohammed Gharipour (American University in Cairo Press, Cairo and New York, 2012). ISBN 978 977 416 5290. \$39.95.**

This is a splendidly presented book—as we have come to expect from AUC Press Cairo—with a large number of illustrations: photographs and plans of markets from Dubai to Damascus, from Bursa to Aleppo. There are detailed, multi-lingual bibliographies for each city.

The editor has brought together the researches of a number of people with varied interests as well as family ties: architects, historians, geographers and anthropologists. The editor's interest in the architecture of the region provides the background to the book and he also draws upon the accounts of travellers such as David Roberts.

The chapters, written by various contributors, cover: The culture and politics of commerce in

the region; the development of the Damascus Suq; the formation of the Ottoman Trade Centre in Bursa; the bazaars of Aleppo; the suqs of Sanaa; the markets of Nablus; and, perhaps best known to many of us, Cairo's Khan al-Khalili. The Editor provides the background to their development: the manufactories, the politics and patronage, and the caravanserais, that linked the bazaars one to another.

When we travellers are not hurried we can go into the bazaars of the Near East to look, to feel, to taste, to smell—and to bargain for purchases. Mohammed Gharipour has provided us with splendid background knowledge to make us appreciate such visits even more.

Deborah Manley

**Homer's Turk: How Classics Shaped Ideas of the East**, by Jerry Toner. Harvard University Press, 2013. ISBN 9780674073142. 306pp. £17.99 (amazon.co.uk)

This stimulating book contributes to a relatively neglected field, and is very welcome both on this account and also because it is full of interest. A short book, it covers a huge historical and geographical range, and this is both its strength and its weakness. We have a sense of the larger picture, but often the reader, this one at least, would have liked a more expansive discussion, and more explicit drawing out of themes. The author has dealt with the size of his task by not trying to be comprehensive but instead presenting his argument through five case studies: he has chosen a small number of travellers/writers (typically two) as exemplars for each era that he discusses, and this is a sensible method for covering the field while still allowing for a certain amount of detail. After a general introduction to set the context and to outline his argument, the five chapters in the body of the book discuss his five case studies in chronological order: the seventeenth century, the age of Gibbon, the Indian Raj, imperial rule in the nineteenth century, and travellers in Arabia in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The final section of the book consists of a chapter on classics in film and one on America as a new Roman Empire. Toner's stated aim is to be both academically rigorous and accessible to a non-academic readership, and he has certainly achieved this.

For his first chosen period, the seventeenth century, his exemplars are George Sandys and Paul Rycout,

two very different men who nevertheless both used their classical knowledge extensively in the writings that arose out of their time in the East. He describes Sandys as setting 'a new benchmark in accuracy and detail for English travel writing on the Orient', but to my mind this begs a lot of questions about Sandys, whose work is much more of a literary construct than a travel account. As another scholar, Jonathan Haynes, has written of him (in *The humanist as traveller*, 1986), his text is based on his academic learning rather than his experience of travel. Rycout, in contrast, draws deeply on both his experience of living and working in the Ottoman Empire and his knowledge of classical writers, especially Tacitus.

Much of the book is about how understanding of the Roman Empire informed the ideas of Western writers about other empires and their ideas about the nature of empire in general. Imperial aspirations in the seventeenth century, and imperial government later, were both deeply affected by the experience of travel. Toner's discussion of Gibbon illuminates the complexity of this subject, and unpicks some paradoxical ideas about empire as exemplified by the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Gibbon was a more sympathetic observer of Oriental people than some, and was much exercised by the triangular relationship between civilisation, empire and the classics. Nevertheless, his belief in the power of the classics to civilise was strong: 'I know that the classics have much to teach, and I believe that the Orientals have much to learn' (p.127). One of the themes highlighted by Toner is the general trend towards a more Saidian Orientalism, and the symbiotic relationship between this trend and the way the classics were used: a striking example is the weight that was given to Latin and Greek in the exams for the Indian Civil Service, which of course made it difficult for Indians to compete equally with Britons (pp.139–40).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when a number of individual travellers explored the Arabian peninsula, another element enters the discourse: the contrast between Arabs and Turks. Arabs, unlike Turks, were seen as preservers of Greek scientific and literary texts, and were also admired as people who had retained 'the kind of pure and simple culture that Europeans had left behind' (p.210). This was linked with the attraction of the desert, which 'became nothing less than the best place to go to find your true self' in an age of growing individualism in Europe (p.211), but it is hard not to see an element of condescension here too.

There are many areas where I would have liked to know more: to take just one example, Toner discusses the career of Lord Cromer in the context of Englishmen who had been educated in the classics, but says that Cromer taught himself Greek and Latin: it would have been interesting to know why he had not learnt them at school. But there is much to admire in the book, and to take one example again, I particularly enjoyed Toner's comments on architecture, both of neo-classical buildings in England and India and of the Vietnam Veterans Monument in the US.

Apart from two sentences at the end of the final chapter, there is no conclusion, which is a pity. The index is skimpy and there is no bibliography. But this is a valuable and readable addition to the literature of a fascinating subject, which does not downplay its complexity and its paradoxes.

Lucy Pollard

EDITOR'S NOTE: Books published more than two years ago are not normally reviewed for the Bulletin. The following is included here as it is a perfect complement to the review of the book on Lady Layard published in Bulletin 55.

**The Queen's Ambassador to the Sultan: Memoirs of Sir Henry A. Layard's Constantinople Embassy 1877–1880**, edited by Sinan Kunalalp. Istanbul, The Isis Press, 2009.

Layard's memoir of his Constantinople Embassy runs to 709 pages. The volume has a perceptive introduction, indices of themes, places and names, and a note of the relevant manuscript numbers in the British Library. There is a preface noting future publications in this unique series to which can be added the forthcoming publication of the diplomatic papers of the Russo-Turkish war.

When Sir Henry Layard (1817–1894) was appointed Ambassador to the Porte in April 1877 his instructions were to try to prevent the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, to gain the Sultan's trust, to press reform, and to improve the lot of Christians.

Abdulhamid had been proclaimed Sultan on 31 August 1876, following his uncle Abdul Aziz's suicide and his half-brother Murad V's breakdown. Abdulhamid was only 35 when he was launched into a position he had never hoped to take.

<sup>1</sup> Sinan Kunalalp (ed.): *Twixt Pera and Therapia: The Constantinople Diaries of Lady Layard*. Istanbul, The Isis Press, 2010, p.26

One of the delights of this book is its portrait of the friendship between the Layards and the young Sultan. Sir Henry, aged 60, could give independent advice, and Enid, his 34 year old wife, was amusing and open hearted. Abdulhamid made a good first impression, as Enid noted, 'his nails were bitten down to the quick but he seemed full of intelligence and the desire to do right and every now and then his eyes flashed with merriment when anything amused him.'<sup>1</sup>

If the Layards' friendship seemed like a life-line, it came with severe limitations: England had declared neutrality. Public opinion in Britain was strongly anti-Ottoman. Gladstone had stirred up Christian feelings against Turkey with his *Bulgarian Horrors* and the *Question of the East* (1876) which was considered a contributory factor to the war. Turkey had reneged on its loans, and reforms remained unimplemented. They were difficult times to be an Ottoman sympathiser. Despite their verbose and sometimes repetitious nature, and Layard's endless self-justification, these memoirs are to be savoured—the period of the Russo-Turkish war, with the menacing Russian advance to the very outskirts of Constantinople and the attendant wave of refugees fleeing ahead of it reads like a *War and Peace*. There were 4–5,000 refugees in Aghia Sofia alone (p.261), and 150,000 in Constantinople, in the intense cold of winter. There were deaths from smallpox and typhoid fever, and sanitary conditions were causing alarm (p.358).

The ensuing Treaty of San Stefano left various issues unresolved. Russian demands for a Greater Bulgaria stretching to the Aegean were unacceptable to the Powers. England, which had been left out of the negotiations, demanded an International Congress at Berlin to re-examine the points of the treaty. This in turn left various resolutions, such as the redefinition of the Greek borders, and the cession of Albanian territory to Montenegro to be implemented, which took up much of Layard's time.

Another thorn in the flesh was Austria which, afraid of Russian pan-Slavism, demanded to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, a move strongly resisted by the Sultan. England saw Austria as a potential ally for Turkey, which might guarantee her position against Russian encroachment.

England had taken over Cyprus in exchange for intervention should any Ottoman Asian province come under threat, and hoped that a similar



arrangement, whereby Austria occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in exchange for protecting Ottoman European provinces, would leave Turkey completely protected. Austria however, was unwilling to commit, and the Sultan smarted at this forced annexation, unwilling to recognise its merit.

Despite differences in generation and position, there are parallels between Abdulhamid and Layard. Both were propelled into offices not of their choosing. Both suffered a breakdown due to stress and overwork. Both men were quite isolated, the Sultan, increasingly nervous, chose to stay within the boundaries of Yildiz, 'a Hamlet on the Bosphorus,' (p.22), and Layard within the Embassy grounds at Pera, when not at the summer residence at Therapia.

Another parallel was a sense of increasing paranoia. On 14 February 1878 the Sultan prorogued parliament indefinitely (p.285), which led to Ali Suavi's failed coup of May 20 to reinstate Murad V.

Abdulhamid began to concentrate power in his own hands, by taking over the Ministries of the army and the marine, and banishing his most energetic ministers to govern distant provinces. His attempts at self-preservation led him to take a distance from the English Ambassador's advice. Layard no longer felt fully able to trust him, feeling an increasing 'deviousness' and 'duplicity,' though socially they remained friends.

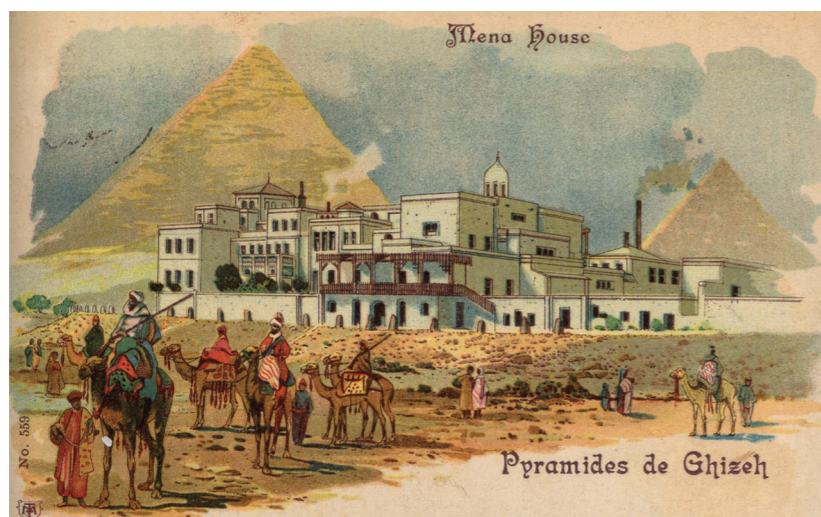
Layard feared Ignatieff's intelligence machine, which with its budget of £60,000 a year meant that no state secret was safe. In particular, he was afraid Turkey might accept punishing peace terms by treating directly with Russia, leaving no room for European intervention or advice.

Layard was also a victim of the lack of clear policy or instructions from England, and at times he was not kept fully informed, which made his position difficult and at times almost untenable as the Ottomans lost confidence in him and in the British Government. Layard even lost the Sultan's trust, and ultimately his friendship with the publication of his valedictory report. Also, inconsiderately, notice of his recall was sent *en clair* so that it was public knowledge.

For the publication of his valedictory report, Layard is partly to blame. His permission had been sought, and he had toned it down accordingly, but it was still too much for Abdulhamid to swallow. There is no doubt that Layard felt let down by the Foreign Office just as much as the Sultan felt let down by Layard.

Undoubtedly Layard wished he could have done more. His hands were tied by British neutrality, which attracted the ire and disappointment of the Ottoman establishment. He was vilified at home for being Turcophile, 'misrepresented and denounced,' abused and recalled (p.693); and he was vilified in Turkey for letting down their rational expectations for British support and intervention. It was a difficult path to tread, but one the young Sultan understood, 'I know that Sir Henry Layard is my friend and that he has a sincere friendship for me but that the English Ambassador must carry out the policy of the English Government and they may not be friendly to me,' (p.660). Time is a great healer, and almost forty years later Abdulhamid still 'fondly remembered the British Ambassador ... and called him his friend in spite of their mutual differences.' (p.25).

Rosie Randolph



The Mena House in 1886, from *L'Égypte d'hier*, by Max Karkégi and Robert Solé.

## QUERIES AND REPLIES

### Caird's Egyptian Mummy Mask

Jean Lambe, studying for an MA in the conservation of historic objects at the University of Lincoln, is currently working on an Egyptian Mummy Mask donated in 1914 to the McManus Galleries in Dundee by Sir James Key Caird (1837–1926). There are unfortunately no details in the McManus on Caird and his activities in Egypt in 1907, such as where exactly he went, nor any information about his finds. Caird also knew Flinders Petrie, but again Jean has not found references linking them. If any member has more information on this subject, please write in to the Bulletin Editors.

### Another Scottish gentleman

Victor Blunden (Assistant Editor, *Ancient Egypt* magazine) asks about a James Melton who may have visited Egypt in 1658. If he did he would have been one of the earliest Scottish visitors to that land and it would have been quite an undertaking at that date. If members have any suggestions as to how Victor can find out more about Mr Melton please write to the Bulletin Editors.

### More on the Nairn brothers

Robert Merrillees has written in connection with the enquiry about the Nairn brothers published in Bulletin 55 (Spring 2013). He confirms that for first-hand information on the foundation and history of the bus company, one need look no further than J.S. Tullett, *Nairn Bus to Baghdad. The Story of Gerald Nairn* (A.H & A.W. Reed, Wellington, Auckland, Sydney, 1968). This book was, of course, mentioned by Margaret Edgecombe—a New Zealand member—in the Bulletin 26 article but the editor had not yet tracked it down in the U.K. It purports to be the story as told by Gerald Nairn to the author, so even if it is an 'odd out-of-print book,' it is definitely something anyone interested in the Nairn story should try to find in a library (or buy from a second hand book dealer in New Zealand).

Robert adds this personal recollection:

My wife, Helen, once travelled on a Nairn bus from Teheran to Beirut, via Baghdad, in 1956, with her mother, and found the journey very well run but not unduly comfortable. Her abiding memory is physical, a comfort stop in the wide open desert at a conveniently located way-station. I first became

interested in this venture when we were posted to the Lebanon in 1975 and were introduced to the widow of Norman Nairn, who lived in a house by the sea at Byblos, where we once swam. Our memory of the visit was coloured, literally, by the oil stains which had to be washed off with spirits after we emerged from the water.

Also in the original Bulletin 26 article Andrew Wilson recommended *The Nairn Way* by John M Munro, a professor at the American University in Beirut. In 1981 John Munro and Martin Love contributed an article to *Saudi Aramco World* about the Nairns. They reported that Gerald Nairn had returned to New Zealand, where he died in 1980.

But Norman, after traveling to Bermuda and France, came back to Lebanon where he built a villa on the shores of the Mediterranean near Byblos. Until he died in 1968, he was a familiar figure at Beirut social gatherings.

This final note ties in with Robert's memory of visiting Norman's widow at Byblos in 1975.

### Who was Matilda Plumley?

David Kennedy writes regarding a query raised by Deb Manley in April 2005 (Bulletin 23) about Miss Matilda Plumley:

I have just seen this query on the ASTENE web site. Having just read the entire book (*Days and Nights in the East*), it is clear that the person she (Miss Plumley) refers to as 'another' and whose notes she uses is male (the things he does and the reference to his whiskers and moustache). But it seems highly unlikely that she (Miss Plumley) was herself one of the party of travellers. (Editor's note: what a relief, the things she would have been getting up to according to Deb Manley's quotes would have been most inappropriate for a Victorian lady!)

The book is now available on-line (Plumley, Matilda, ed.: *Days and Nights in the East: From the Original Notes of a Recent Traveler Through Egypt, Arabia-Petra, Syria, Turkey and Greece* (London: T. C. Newby, 1845)) where she is referred to as 'the Editor'. It can also be obtained as a print on demand book from the British Library Historical Print Editions.

'Another' subsequently crossed to Aqaba, where he was joined by three more; the party of nine then went on to Petra. They included the Rev H.P Measor who published his own account in London in 1844 (*A Tour in Egypt, Arabia Petræa and the Holy Land in the years 1841-2*). So although we now know

that 'Another' was a man, we still do not know his identity, nor indeed how Miss Plumley came to have his journal.

If anyone has further information on this mystery please tell the Bulletin Editors.

## RESEARCH RESOURCES

### International Society for Travel Writing

In connection with the Plenary Session on travel writing to be held at the ASTENE conference, members may like to know of the Monthly Newsletter of the International Society for Travel Writing <http://istw-travel.com>

### Iroquois Indians help the British on the Nile

Cassandra Vivian points out that the following interesting e-book is available free on-line:

*Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: a narrative of what was seen and accomplished by the contingent of North American Indian voyageurs who led the British boat Expedition for the Relief of Khartoum up the Cataracts of the Nile*, by Louis Jackson.

<http://archive.org/details/ourcaughnawagasi32995gut>

## FOOTPRINTS

### The 'Irish lad' James CURTIN, 'servant' to the Belzonis

(Paper delivered at the ASTENE mini-conference in Jordan 2013)

In the story of Giovanni Belzoni it has become quite normal to bemoan Sarah's rather relegated position and her 'trifling account', but their 'young servant' James Curtin only ever seems to enter the narrative as exactly that, an appendage. Curtin's fate is much the same as that of the many other 'servants' or 'dragomans' who accompanied travellers, shared the adventures, but left no personal accounts. Giovanni Belzoni generally refers to him as 'the Irish lad in my service', and occasionally as 'James'. Sarah is less obliging. On her arrival at Philae in June 1817, where her husband, Irby, Mangles and Beechey were preparing to go into Nubia, she says that she was left behind, but 'I had a servant with me at this time, who had been with us some years.' He gets no mention on the journey to the Holy Land until she was left on her own: 'The gentleman [Thomas Legh] who had engaged my servant, who wanted to return to England, was good enough to permit him to come

and guard me till we should depart.'

Yet Curtin is mentioned by his other employers in a more positive way.

Roger De Keersmaecker (*Bulletin 10*, October 2000, p. 21-22) has sketched what is known of Curtin from the various narratives. To this we can now add Curtin's death and burial, and contemporary newspapers also tell us a little more about this 'servant'.

Although he is referred to by all his employers as 'James' the elegant inscription he carved at Philae is for 'H.J. Curtin' and tells us that he was a native of Limerick, where he must have been born around 1796. [RDK 915, Philae, Temple of Isis, main temple, first pylon, right side, inside near the top. He made another graffito in the same temple, RDK 1168, on the roof, back of the second pylon. J. Curtin, no date. See also Berlin photo 299.]

Thomas Legh tells us that when he employed Curtin in March 1818, he had been with Belzoni for eight years, suggesting 1810 for their meeting. In the

*Narrative* Belzoni calls him 'James Curtin' and says he had 'acquired him' in Ireland. James is named as Cortin on the passport which Belzoni received for the 1812/13 voyage from Cadiz-Gibraltar-Malaga.

James was with Giovanni and Sarah Belzoni when they sailed from Malta 19 May 1815, arriving in Alexandria 9 June. They travelled to Cairo with William Turner, who mentions the Belzonis, but not Curtin, in his publication (*Journals of a Tour of the Levant*, 1820). They arrived in Cairo in July. The early part of their residence in Egypt was when Belzoni prepared and demonstrated his hydraulic wheel to Muhammad Ali. Having gained the Pasha's interest, and a small stipend, the Belzonis were set up in a small house in Shubra, and the next months were spent on producing the wheel. During this time, they became acquainted with William Bankes, Henry Salt, and J.L. Burckhardt amongst others. Finally the wheel was demonstrated to the Pasha in June 1816, and it was during this that James was thrown from it and broke his thigh. The wheel project abandoned, Belzoni entered Salt's employ, a point bitterly disputed later. The Belzonis left Cairo on 30 June, arriving in Luxor 22 July, where they set to work on the removal of the 'Younger Memnon'. There were various troubles and Belzoni tells us that 'the Irish lad' was sent to Cairo 'as he could not resist the climate'. As Roger De Keersmaecker notes, it may have been the thigh, rather than (or in combination with) the heat that was the real problem.

James is not heard of again until January 1817 when he accompanied Sarah from Rosetta to Alexandria by land while Belzoni took the Memnon by boat. He had presumably rejoined them on their arrival in Cairo 15 December 1816: did he stay with Salt or other British representatives (such as Cochini) during this period?

When Belzoni returned to Thebes, Sarah was left in Cairo with the family of Mr Cochini 'the British chancellor'. Belzoni took Salt's secretary, the skilled but wayward Henry Beechey, with him and makes a few disparaging remarks, as Sarah does later, about his silver spoons and fork (although while at Philae, Curtin was allowed to wash them—suggesting somebody was using them while Beechey was in Nubia!).

James presumably travelled with Sarah Belzoni to Philae where they arrived 5 June 1817. On 16 June, Belzoni, along with Irby, Mangles, Beechey and others went off into Nubia to 'open' the temples of

Abu Simbel. They returned to Philae in August when the whole party travelled back to Thebes. Curtin and the Belzonis remained in Thebes where Straton, Fuller and Bennet arrived soon after. Those three continued on to Nubia with Finati and returned about the same time that the Belmore party arrived in Thebes. Finati and the 'three gentlemen' returned to Cairo where Finati was to wait for Sarah Belzoni who was 'resolved' to go to Jerusalem. The Belzonis arrived in Cairo 21 December; the narrative says 'Mrs. Belzoni set out for Jerusalem, accompanied by James the Irish lad and a Janizary, who went to meet a traveller [William Bankes] in Syria, to escort him to Egypt.' Finati—the 'Janizary'—tells us that Mrs B and Curtin were 'both wearing the dress of Mameluke youths'.

Finati had been summoned by his earlier employer, William Bankes, to meet him at Acre. It was a long journey: Sarah's own account says that she left Cairo on 5 January 1818, arrived at Damietta on the 10th where they were detained for two months; they then went by boat to Jaffa, arriving 9 March; setting out again on the 11th for Rama, they arrived in Jerusalem 12 March. Finati found Bankes's servant at Acre and waited there, but then learning that Bankes was at Jerusalem went to join him. He found Sarah Belzoni and her 'servant', along with Bankes and other travellers from Egypt—Irby, Mangles, and Belmore's large party (of 20). They were then joined by Thomas Legh of Lyme Park, Cheshire, who arrived from Moscow via Istanbul.

Now Curtin apparently said that he wanted to return to England, and joined Thomas Legh as interpreter. Thomas Legh gives a much more positive comment on Curtin's abilities than the Belzonis ever offer:

By birth an Irishman, [he] had been for eight years in the service of M. Belzoni; his zeal, fidelity, and knowledge of the Arabic language, were of the greatest use to me.

During the Petra expedition, other than his new employer, James was travelling with a number of old acquaintances: Irby and Mangles he had met a few months before; Bankes he knew from Cairo on his arrival in Egypt in 1815; Finati he must have known quite well by now. If James wanted a quick way back to England he had made a mistake: the Petra journey with Bankes, Irby and Mangles followed; and after Petra, Curtin travelled with Legh to Jerash, Baalbek, Damascus, Palmyra, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Antioch, and Scanderoon, then over the Taurus to Iznik and

on to Istanbul. No doubt thoroughly saddle-sore, James Curtin eventually arrived back in England.

In April 1819, he produced a short account of the opening of the Abu Simbel temples for John Murray (who presumably wrote the title), 'A note respecting the operations and discoveries of Belzoni in Nubia. By Curtin, an Irish youth who accompanied him.' *The Quarterly Journal of Literature, Science and the Arts*. Volume VII, No. XIV, Art. XVI. London, April 1819 John Murray (Ed.), pp. 344-346.

Whether he was unable to gain employment in London, or was simply keen to travel again, it was not long before he advertised his services, also using John Murray. The advertisement seeking a new job appeared in *The Morning Post* (London, England), Monday, April 5, 1819; pg. [1]; Issue 15041. (19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.):-

Wants a Situation, a Young Man, who has been for eight years last past travelling in Upper and Lower Egypt, Nubia, the Holy Land, and Arabia Petrea ; he is perfectly acquainted with Sheich Nasa, and the other different Sheichs of the Deserts ; would have no objection to travel on the European or Asiatic Continent as INTERPRETER, in which capacity he has recently returned with an English Gentleman, and as such can have the best of references; likewise speaks five European languages, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and English. All letters will be punctually attended to, or communications. Direct, post paid, for J. C., at Mr. Murray's, Albermarle-street, Piccadilly.

Perhaps his transfer from the Belzonis to Legh as 'interpreter' was a way of improving his position from 'servant' to a more professional—and presumably better-paid—position. His new employers were George Waddington and Barnard Hanbury. The published narrative of this journey (1822) was written by Waddington. Waddington tells us that travelled to Venice in January 1820 where he met up with his friend Barnard Hanbury who was planning a trip to Dongola. As Waddington had intended to travel only around Greece, we might assume that it was Hanbury who had engaged Curtin's services, but whether he travelled with him, or went ahead to Egypt is not stated. Waddington and Hanbury arrived in Alexandria in August and the next we hear they are at Wadi Halfa on 20 November 1820, where Curtin and the rest of the group are first mentioned. After an adventurous journey to the Fourth Cataract in the wake of

Ismail's invasion of the Sudan, they returned to the Second Cataract 31 Jan 1821 where the narrative ends.

We lose sight of James for a short period, but his relationship with the Belzonis was not at an end. He may have rejoined them on his return from Egypt, presumably sometime in 1821 (Waddington arrived in Rome in August). The Belzonis' first London exhibition ended with the auction of June 1822. Later that year, the casts and paintings of the tomb of 'Psammis' (Sety I) were on display in Paris, and by the time that Giovanni Belzoni set out on the ill-fated expedition to Benin in 1823, James Curtin was in charge of the Paris exhibition. He is referred to by James Smithson, in an article – 'An Examination of some Egyptian Colours' – published in *The Annals of Philosophy* (n.s. vol. VII Jan-Jun 1824, London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, Paternoster-Row, pp. 115-117). Smithson, an illegitimate son of the first Duke of Northumberland, was a physicist and mineralogist, and the founding donor of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington: he carried out some experiments to determine what pigments the Egyptians had used. Dated 2 January 1824, Smithson's article tells us that he had 'received from Mr. Curtin, who travelled in Egypt with Mr. Belzoni, a small fragment of the tomb of King Psammis. It was sculptured in basso relieve, which were painted. The colours were white, red, black, and blue.'

An article in *The Times* (Saturday, 11 Dec, 1824; pg. 3) and advertisements in *The Morning Post* (e.g. Tuesday, 12 April, 1825; pg. [1]; Issue 16945. 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.) announced the new exhibition, which was held at 28 Leicester Square and opened on Easter Day (3 April) 1825. They tell us that it was 'erected under direction of Mr Curtin' or 'Mr James Courtine' (*Times*) 'to whom the care of the tomb at Paris was entrusted'. But the next month James was dead.

Finati (but probably Bankes who clearly added much to the memoir) writing in 1830 of the Petra expedition tells us that 'this young man [Curtin] died afterwards in London.' The circumstances are not recorded in any newspaper article I have yet seen. It is clear that the exhibition had not attracted as much attention as had been hoped, and that the expenses of removing it from Paris had been considerable. An article in *The Times* of Monday 28 Nov 1825, reprinted from the *Cambridge Chronicle*, is part of a lengthy series on the financial distress of Sarah Belzoni, but it also states: 'we cannot help

lamenting the apathy which prevailed in London with regard to the Exhibition in Leicester-square. If the public had but evinced a liberal feeling for the success of an undertaking which had cost the life of one of the party (James Courtine, Mr. Belzoni's assistant)...' Whether James's death was caused by stress or accident is not stated. His funeral took place at the nearby church of St Martin-in-the-Fields on 26 May 1825. The registers record him as Henry James Curtin, aged 29, and his residence Leicester Square [Bishop's Transcript of registers of St Martin the Fields London: Metropolitan archives DL/T/093/044].

James Curtin had an adventurous life: joining Belzoni in Ireland as a teenager, he accompanied him from England to Spain and on to Egypt, where he worked for some three years before the long journey back to England via Palestine, Syria, Turkey and across Europe with Legh. He was one of the first Europeans to visit Petra in modern times, and amongst the first to reach Gebel Barkal and other sites of the Nubian Nile. Yet, for all this, he is, like so many other dragomans, interpreters, and 'servants', relegated to a secondary place in the narratives. At least in the references to him during those last two years of his life he had been referred to as 'Mr. Curtin' rather than dismissed as merely 'the Irish lad' or 'my servant'.

*Robert Morkot*

### **Enamour/Ain Amur**

In Bulletin 55 Deb Manley sent in a snippet on a spot in the Western Desert of Egypt described as Enamour in an 1827 travel guide. Cassandra Vivian has confirmed that the spot is Ain Amur, as described in her book (*The Western Desert of Egypt: An Explorer's Handbook*). Here is a description of the site as Cassandra found it.

Ain Amur, Spring of the Lovely One, is not within any oasis. Kharga lies to the east and Dakhla lies to the west. Its significance is that it was the only water source on the Darb Ain Amur, one of two desert tracks connecting Kharga to Dakhla. Because of its strategic importance, a stronghold was established at Ain Amur.

Ain Amur is totally isolated. It is not a place that one stumbles across, and how it was ever found in the first place is baffling. It is dominated by the elements. When the wind blows there is a howling which seems to penetrate the very soul and when

it dies the silence is unbearable. In the stillness, if one places pencil to paper the graphite sounds like running a fingernail down a chalkboard. Ain Amur is awesome.

The spring itself is 525 meters (1,680 feet) above sea level, an unusually high elevation for any spring and it is fed by surface water trapped in the limestone scarp. The area surrounding the spring is unexpectedly flat with several palm trees and ancient ruins. The most impressive are the ruins of a Roman temple/fort which is only decorated on the back wall. There is graffiti on the jambs of the main gateway. In fact there is plenty of graffiti to be found at Ain Amur, some dating as far back as Palaeolithic times. The Coptic graffiti found on the jambs of the temple were left there by hermits living in the caves around Ain Amur during the Christian era. Part of this graffiti tells of an Arab traveller in early Christian times. He was 'faint from thirst' and 'came to [Ain Amur] in the latter part of the night... and it saved him.'

Explorers of the nineteenth century also left their mark. Among the most noteworthy are A. Edmondstone in February 1819 and I. Hyde, 17 December 1819, Drovetti—Rosingana, one above the other with only the year.

There is one other name here at Ain Amur worth talking about, that of Ismail Abu Shanab. He travelled with Frederic Cailliaud, was French by birth, but became a soldier for the Pasha. These men were called French Mamluks. He chose the name Ismail Abu Shanab as his Islamic name. It means, Ismail, Possessor of a Moustache. Here he signed his name Le Torzec, Ismael Bouchenape, 1820, a bastardized French version of the Arabic.

Ain Amur has yet to be adequately excavated and a plethora of artefacts await the archaeologist, including tombs with mummies, a great quantity of shards and a large cemetery. But according to Cassandra in 2012 people with a bulldozer as good as destroyed the site. Any new information would be welcome.

### **John Charles Bowring**

John (later Sir John) Bowring was sent to Egypt on a semi-official Mission by Palmerston and wrote a very long Report on Egypt and Candia (Crete) also published as *Egypt Under Mohamed Ali 1823-1838*. John Charles Bowring was his elder son, then about 20, and accompanied his father for at least part of

his father's six-month journey. Many years later this son donated various Ancient Egyptian artefacts to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter (from whence the family came).

Due to a broken link in the Wikipedia article on the subject, Mr Philip Bowring, a descendant of these Bowrings, contacted ASTENE and eventually did get through to Mr Thomas Cadbury, Curator of Antiquities at the Exeter Museum. Mr Cadbury was able to provide a list of the artefacts donated by John Charles Bowring, which among a very long list of beetles included such objects as 21 skull fragments & 1 tooth; Child's skull in fragments, Egypt J.C. Bowring, Abydos, January 20th 1838; items from Colonel Campbell's tomb, Giza; Bronze figure of Osiris, Egypt, collected by donor and his father, Sir J.Bowring when on government mission in 1837-8; Head of Jupiter Serapis carved in stone, surmounted by a modus, Pyramids, Lower Egypt. Even more fascinating for Mr Philip Bowring was

that the museum also has in its possession a number of architectural fragments from the ancestral home, Larkbeare House, including a garderobe (toilet) seat, a carved stone doorway and a carved stone fireplace lintel, all of which are on display. So if you're in Exeter look out for these exhibits at the Museum. <http://www.rammuseum.org.uk>

#### Castle Coole on TV

All over the British Isles members rang each other at eight o'clock on the evening of Sunday, 21 April to ask, 'Are you watching the Antiques Road Show?' — the BBC programme where people bring their antiques to be valued by experts.

The reason was that the venue was Castle Coole in County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland whence the Belmore family set out for Egypt in 1816, and where the ASTENE tour of Ireland was welcomed by the present Earl during our visit to Ireland last summer.



Beirut c.1900.

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