

Egypt Exploration Society

Artists and Archaeologists: A Victorian fascination with Egypt, 21st November, 2020, 10 am – 3 pm

The landscape and monuments of Egypt have fascinated western audiences since their rediscovery during the Napoleonic period. Since then, they have been used to foster exoticism, and that enduring flavour of 'the orient'. As the political west again threatens to build up geographic and nationalistic boundaries, this idea of eastern 'otherness' continues to perpetuate. It is therefore understandable that scholars are increasingly looking back at Britain's own imperial past to explore its role in this enduring image and its legacy in the world today.

This online study day aims to explore these trends through the work of Victorian artists, how they contributed to this view of Egypt in particular, and its ongoing impact in 21st century. Four experts will introduce key sources, characters, and events during the Victorian period and offer some thoughts for the future.

Schedule

09:50 Event opens for attendees

10:00-11:00 On the Banks of the Nile: John Frederick Lewis's encounter with Upper Egypt, *Briony Llewellyn, independent researcher*

11:00-12:00 Beautiful ordinary things: ancient Egyptian domestic wares in the art of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Prof Stephanie Moser, University of Southampton*

12:00-13:00 Break (please do not log off the event)

13:00-14:00 Edward Poynter's Israel in Egypt (1867): observation, reconstruction, and manipulation in art and history, *Dr Robert Morkot, University of Exeter*

14:00-15:00 Orientalist Landscapes: Constructing Images of Ancient and Modern Egypt, *Prof Rachel Mairs, University of Reading*

15:00 Event closes

Please note that the Society's AGM will follow this event from 16:00. If you wish to attend the AGM then please ensure that you have registered for that separately.

Presentations

On the Banks of the Nile: John Frederick Lewis's encounter with Upper Egypt

Briony Llewellyn, independent researcher

One of the last paintings that John Frederick Lewis exhibited at the Royal Academy, shortly before his death, was *On the Banks of the Nile, Upper Egypt*. It depicts a rural scene of men with their camels, in which no hint of any of the famous ancient Egyptian temples intrudes. Despite his long ten-year sojourn in Egypt, Lewis made only one known trip up the Nile, in 1849-50, and while he was reported to have become 'an admirer & collector of Egyptian antiquities', his focus was not so much the illustrious ancient monuments, but the life and landscape that surrounded them. Many of the drawings that he made on this trip are little known, but their intense observation and bold composition is remarkable. This talk will chart Lewis's Nile journey through his drawings and will examine their significance in the wider context of Lewis's subsequent Orientalist work.

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Beautiful ordinary things: ancient Egyptian domestic wares in the art of Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Prof Stephanie Moser, University of Southampton

Artists working in Victorian Britain were captivated by the art and domestic manufactures of ancient Egypt. Inspired by museum displays and lavishly illustrated Egyptological texts, several prominent Victorian painters exhibited vivid depictions of ancient Egypt at major art exhibitions such as the annual Royal Academy in London. Beyond capturing a sense of the highly decorative and dynamic qualities of Egyptian art, these artists highlighted the proficiency of ancient Egyptian artisans in the production of utilitarian objects. While their images offered imaginary constructions of moments in the lives of the Egyptians, the meticulous attention to the material world of ancient Egypt offered important new perceptions of this culture. This presentation will address this theme through an account of the Egyptian themed paintings of the famous 'archaeological' painter, Lawrence Alma-Tadema.

Edward Poynter's Israel in Egypt (1867): observation, reconstruction, and manipulation in art and history

Dr Robert Morkot, University of Exeter

Edward Poynter's *Israel in Egypt* of 1867 combines archaeological observation and reconstruction with anachronisms, exaggerations of scale, artistic licence, and errors, to create an imposing vision of ancient Egypt that is, in details, accurate, but overall false. A close examination of Poynter's image reveals Poynter's use of sculptures such as the 'Prudhoe Lions' that he could draw in the British Museum, temple scenes and landscape that he could access in publications. The details also reveal an awareness of the contemporary Egyptological opinion about the Exodus and its place in Egyptian history.

Orientalist Landscapes: Constructing Images of Ancient and Modern Egypt

Prof Rachel Mairs, University of Reading

In many famous historical images of Egypt - such as the plates of the *Déscription de l'Égypte*, and paintings by artists such as Robert Talbot Kelly - the ancient and the modern intrude upon one another. This talk will explore how artists in the nineteenth century constructed scenes where modern figures and buildings gave context to ancient ones, and vice versa. It will also explore how the 'Orientalist gaze' is present in photographs of archaeological excavations, with the deliberate juxtaposition of images of scientific study, foreign travellers and archaeologists, and contemporary Egyptians.