EMMA KINDRED

Souvenir and source: Arthur Streeton's Cairo through the lens

ABSTRACT

Arthur Streeton produced a comprehensive body of work in response to his two-month sojourn in Cairo on his way to London in 1897. This essay explores his range of responses to the city, expanding current understandings of the artist's experience of travel through analysis of his stylistic approach to Orientalist subject matter, and examination of the degree to which he engaged with the medium of photography. The impact of the visit was much more than the brevity of Streeton's stay suggests. Cairo signalled his first significant experience of a foreign environment, with a predominately urban landscape of monumental architecture and bustling bazaars, and the opportunity for engagement with the ethnographic figure as subject. In a departure from Australian landscapes produced during the late 1880s and 1890s that were painted in situ, Streeton synthesised a number of his Egyptian subjects, employing sketches together with photographic sources. During the journey Streeton amassed a collection of photographs purchased from commercial studios, as well as amateur photographs, which have been attributed to the artist. The subjects of these photographs point to strong trends in the market for tourist imagery that influenced the artist's output. The photographs were used to provide details of costume, architecture and decoration in a small number of oil and watercolour paintings.

Recording her first impressions of Cairo, the anonymous female writer for the Australian magazine, *The Court*, in 1898 exclaimed, 'the streets where you see it all! How wonderfully beautiful they are!'[1] Arthur Streeton's *Cairo Street* c.1897 (Fig. 1) captures something akin to this elation, in shimmering patterns of blue and creamy white that vibrate across the surface of the work. The oil painting presents a vivid sunlit vision of a mosque surmounted by three minarets, with a large dome rising above the main wall, and a striped archway leading to an internal garden embellished with the verdant green of trees. At the base of the wall on either side of the large arch, the cloth awnings of an open-air market create watery shadows of brown, grey, purple and blue. The figures have a decorative role within the composition, with daubs of black and white and high-key colour used to describe the crowd, leading the viewer's eyes up the canvas and through the gateway. With a brevity that hints at post-impressionist mark making, Streeton describes the characters of this Egyptian scene: a donkey being ridden by its young handler, a woman veiled in black with a water jar deftly balanced on her head, and a vendor transporting a broad tray piled high with flat loaves of bread.

This essay is dedicated to the late Oliver Streeton.
[1] *The Court*, 1898, p. 132.
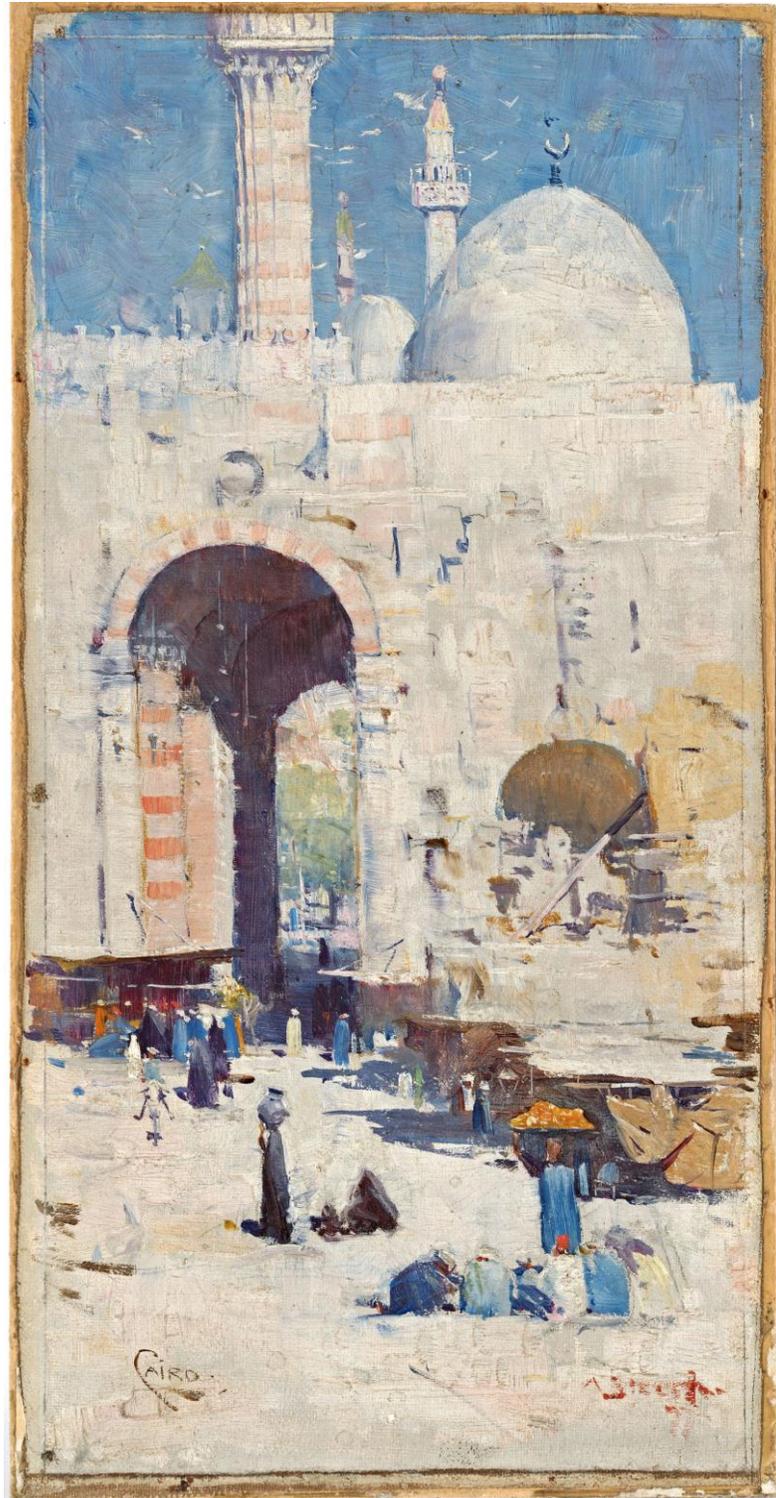
Fig. 1: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo Street* (previously *Street scene, Cairo* and *The Mosque of Imam el-Shafei*), 1897, oil on prepared canvas mounted on laminated paperboard, 33.4 x 17.1cm, Canberra, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965.

Cairo Street conveys Streeton's attraction to the city's architecture, though an accurate rendering of space and form eluded him.[2] The mosque represented in this painting has previously been identified as either that of El-Shafei in the Southern Cemetery, or one located near the cluster of monuments at the foot of the Citadel, including the mosques of Sultan Hasan and El-Rilai. Both these conclusions are problematic, as the scene has been generalised and simplified in its rendering.[3] The dome and façade have been stripped of their detail, and the architecture has become fractured, precluding any firm identification of the site. Areas of the mosque's cornices were reworked, with a semitransparent veil of oil paint at the top left wall above the gateway revealing Streeton's difficulties in resolving the structure. The main dome has also been modified. Here the artist created a more dominant form in modelled strokes of white pigment.

The painting includes architectural elements set out in a pencil drawing that was completed in one of two sketchbooks containing material from his journey to London in 1897 (Fig. 2). The view looks north from Bab al-Wazir, and incorporates a cluster of monuments, including the Palace of Alin Aq and the Mosque of Ibrahim Aga Mustahfizan. The main archway on the left side of the work is comparable to a commercial albumen print that was collected by Streeton during his stay in the Egyptian capital. Taken by the Armenian photographer, G. Lékégian, the photograph shows the southern gate of the city's original Fatimid walls, the Bab Zuweila (Fig. 3).[4] The left side of the arch in *Cairo Street* bears the gate's red and white stripes, and similar structural angles, with the cloth coverings of stalls set up in a comparable double-layered manner.

Identification of these separate sites suggests that *Cairo Street* depicts a fabricated space. Painted after Streeton's arrival in London, the artist is likely to have used the sketch and photograph in combination to create the scene. Compositional inconsistencies support this hypothesis, as the artist would not have been in a position to check and realign the features of the building in situ and to rectify less convincing elements, including the cloth awnings of the market stalls that float unsupported. This use of photographic source materials in addition to preparatory sketches signals a departure from his former mode of working largely *en plein air*.[5] Streeton's Australian bush and harbour landscapes of the late 1880s and 1890s, while varied in terms of his technical approach to brushstroke and texture, have an immediacy that confirms them to be a direct

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[2] By taking the Cairene street as his subject, Streeton shifted his focus from bush scenes and harbour views to an urban environment that he had previously explored only briefly in paintings such as *The Princess Theatre and Burke and Wills' Statue* 1889; *The Railway Station, Redfern* 1893; and *Circular Quay* c. 1893. This interest in architecture would continue throughout the following decades as he sought out grand monuments across London, the English countryside, Venice, and later in France in his capacity as war artist. These depictions of the built environment followed the pattern of the non-narrative picturesque scenes for which the artist was known.

[3] Eagle, 1994, p. 8.

[4] The gateway, or *bab* — taken from the word 'door' — was built out of hewn stone, and remains one of three Fatimid gates that currently stand in Cairo. It marks the southern boundary of the original Fatimid city walls, and was once used as a ceremonial entrance for sultans coming down from the fortress on Mokhattam Hill. The Bab Zuweila was a favourite subject for Streeton, who completed numerous watercolour drawings and pencil sketches of the gateway and its towers.

[5] Research into Streeton's use of photography as a source for paintings produced after 1897 is not yet exhaustive and further investigation into his work abroad, in places such as Venice or France's Western Front, would yield a better understanding of his later working methods.

recording of subject and atmosphere. Though perhaps unintended, the structural flaws in the architectural detail of *Cairo Street* hint at the vibrancy of Egyptian light, as does the vigorous application of colour across the surface of the work. In his letter to the *Bulletin*, the artist wrote of getting 'some of the Cairo brightness in [his] work', an aim perhaps unexpectedly embodied by the imprecise spatial dynamics that in this painting translate into the gleaming effect of a brilliant winter sun against pale architecture.[6]
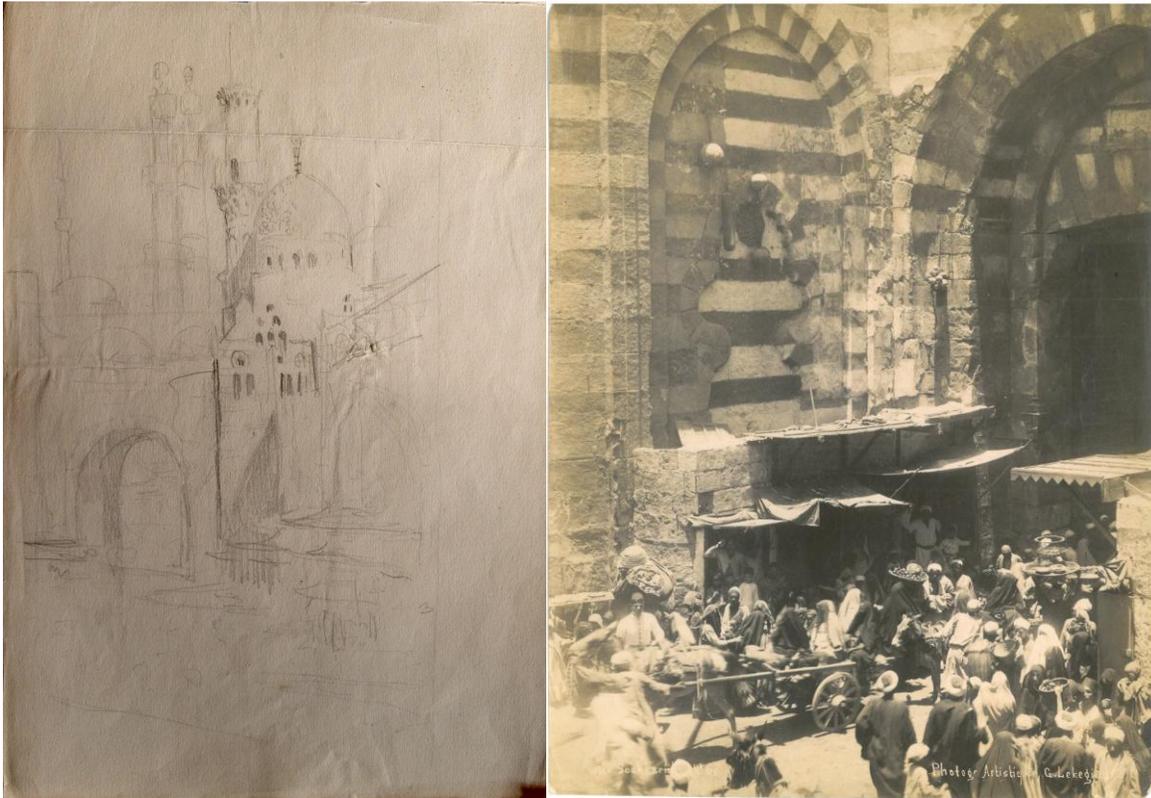

Fig. 2 (left): Arthur Streeton, [*Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Blue Mosque and Bab Zouwaleh*], 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 3 (right): G. Lékégian, [*Bab Zuweila*], c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.1 cm, Streeton Archive.

Streeton collected at least thirty-seven commercial albumen prints of Egyptian subjects. Analysis of these photographs, such as the one referenced in *Cairo Street*, together with a small group of eight amateur photographs taken in Cairo that have been attributed to Streeton, reveals their function as both souvenirs and source. While the photographs were important mementos for the artist, they also formed the basis for oil and watercolour paintings he completed in his London studio. A number of the commercial albumen prints were labelled 'Photographie Artistique' or 'Atelier Spécial de Peinture', and had been produced specifically for the Orientalist market.

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[6] Streeton, 1899, 'Red page'.

Similar urban views and landscapes provided backdrops for studio paintings by artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme and Rudolf Ernst, while images of men and women engaged in work populated scenes as decorative flourishes or characters set out in a timeless tableau.

Many of the prints collected by Streeton are from the well-known studios of G. Lékégian and Co., Pascal Sebah, and Bonfils. They were most likely purchased in Cairo, as the subject matter is almost exclusively Egyptian, rather than being a mixed assortment of 'Orientalist' images from across the North African or Middle Eastern regions. The themes in the collection reflect a common tendency for artists who were working in Egypt during this period, including Streeton, to disregard or remain ignorant of the movements the country had made towards modernisation, and its active participation in contemporary commerce.[7] This effectively contributed to understandings of the Orient as timeless and unchanging. An exception is found in the photographs attributed to Streeton, in which the modernising regions of the city were captured alongside more commonly portrayed tourist sites, such as the Bab Zuweila.

Photographs are complex objects that possess a range of meanings for different audiences, whether they are produced for personal or commercial purposes. Professional photographers working in North Africa and the Middle East offered a broad selection of views and subjects that would appeal to a wide audience, though they were generally aimed at the tourist trade. An assessment of the Cairo photographs in Streeton's collection highlights the significant diversity of their subject matter, while also revealing the comparatively limited number of sexualised images within the group.[8] Together with urban subjects such as mosques and bazaars, a number of the albumen prints depict temples and details of carved hieroglyphics. Though Streeton did not travel elsewhere in Egypt, which meant that his experience was limited to the landscape, culture and society of Cairo and its immediate surrounds, he nevertheless painted views of some of the sites he hadn't seen. *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae* c.1897 and *Colonnades, Philae* c.1898 were based upon from commercial photographs of these popular sites. Such works present an adjunct to Streeton's presence as an Impressionist painter-traveller in Cairo. This acknowledgement of the photographic sources employed by the artist reveals a superficial engagement with Egypt's archaeological sites; they are visual signifiers of travel Streeton had not in fact undertaken.

The late nineteenth-century fashion for representing local subjects from the lower classes was encouraged by the availability of commercial photographs of 'types'. The photographs of figures, both taken and acquired by Streeton — and on which he based at least one painting of a water-carrier — indicate a preference for imagery that conformed to particular patterns of representation. For example, among his collection of commercial photographs, there were no

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[7] Britain's official occupation of Egypt commenced in 1882, and continued through to 1936. At the time of Streeton's visit, the consul general of Britain's 'veiled protectorate', Sir Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, administered Egypt. Though it was not technically considered a colony, the country's finances, government personnel and armed forces were controlled by Britain. However, many of the first movements towards modernisation and Europeanisation in Cairo throughout the nineteenth century were in fact initiated by Muhammad Ali Pasha, Khedive Ismail Pasha, and their successors. Europeanisation was not something imposed on a passive Cairene population by the British.

[8] Micklewright, 2011, pp. 99-110.

specific images of modernisation and Westernisation in Cairo. This consequently affected the manner in which the artist approached the Eastern figure as a decorative device. Stock images of cultural events and scenes of men and women collecting water also provided Streeton with *aide-mémoires*. However, as in the case of the photographs of the Philae temples and the numerous ancient Egyptian reliefs, they were often substitutes for a lived experience.

Streeton as collector

Since its invention in 1839, photography has been closely associated with travel. While the technology had become part of the construction of memory for many travellers by the late nineteenth century, it remained largely a studio driven enterprise until the beginning of the twentieth century. By this time the infrastructure surrounding amateur photography had developed extensively.[9] Photographs were attractive souvenirs, as the imagery fastened the tourist's experiences to a particular time and space. The practice of viewing and collecting photographs and postcards of distant places was also seen by some as a substitute for travel, and, through travel literature and the press, images of foreign lands became familiar. By the 1860s, professional photographers, such as Francis Frith and Antonio Beato, had begun to supply material to a burgeoning market for souvenirs documenting tourist sites. These sites, such as the Sphinx, pyramids, temples dotted along the Nile and the Sultan Hasan Mosque, were fast becoming the monuments that defined Egypt in the mind of the late nineteenth-century viewer.

Commercial photographs purchased singularly, in groups, or in complete bound albums, documented sites and monuments. The images reveal much about how people wished to represent and record their travels. According to Nancy Micklewright, from the large number of photographs available to tourists in local outlets, the selection made was indicative of their response to the country, and would be used to reinforce the memory of the experience.[10] Many tourists came to believe they should experience a site based on the specific views depicted in these photographs, and sought out particular aspects to ensure they had taken in the best of the location or monument. In the selection of such angles and closed compositions, photographers offered an idealised view, rarely hinting at the growing tourist population or the modernising city that remained just out of shot.

Although a growing destination for tourists, Cairo had few photographic studios in the 1860s, with most initially trading in *carte de visite* portraits of Western sitters or studio-based Eastern 'types'. Changes in the photographic industry followed the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869; the emergence of package tours, such as those offered by Thomas Cook and Sons; and the popularity of guidebooks, such as *Baedeker*. The 1870s saw a rise in the number of portrayals of indigenous peoples and scenes of local life. These images were produced in response to the growing market for tourist souvenirs, but were also employed as study aids for artists, historians

[9] Micklewright, 2011, p. 101, 'At mid-century, photography joined painting and drawing as ways of taking home images of Islamic art and architecture, and by the 1890s the "shilling view" and penny postcard were carrying Cairo's sights to wider audiences.' Reid, 2002, p. 220.
[10] Micklewright, 2003, p. 76.

and ethnographers. There was a boom in the photography of North African and Middle Eastern subjects from the late 1880s. The commercial centre for the sale of works was in Egypt, though the success of studios relied upon correct location and price. Most were established in popular tourist hubs, such as Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor and Port Said, and could be found near landmarks, like the Egyptian Museum and Shepheard's Hotel.

In its 1898 edition, *Baedeker* noted that, at the 'Shepheard's and other hotels in Cairo, excellent photographs of Egyptian temples are sold at moderate prices'.[11] The earlier 1885 edition included details on collections of photographs sold in groups of 25 in a 'small size', for 25 francs. It also listed photography studios, such as Schoefft on 'Abbâsîyeh Street, Place Faghalla'; Stromeyer and Heymann; Hr E. Brugsch at the Bulak Museum; 'Laroche & Co., in the Ezbekiyeh Garden'; and 'Sebah of Constantinople', whose work could 'be purchased at his depot, adjoining the French consulate in the Ezbekiyeh, or at Kauil'mann's'. The travel guide singled out Sebah for producing the best images of Egyptian landscapes and temples from the numerous photographs available to the tourist.[12]

Ken Jacobson has noted that there was little stylistic change in Orientalist photographs from the 1880s to the 1890s, partly due to the fact that tourists' views sold in the 1890s were often printed from negatives made in the preceding decades.[13] As there were a greater number of prints produced during this period, there was also a general demise in quality, with processes such as the washing of prints to minimise fading not rigorously maintained. There was also less consideration of composition and lighting, and photographers grew more likely to take immodest photographs as the trade in soft-pornographic imagery increased in popularity.[14] The various studios repeated certain scenes and subjects that were easily recognisable and appealing to the buyer. These same images of mosque façades and interiors, close-ups of hieroglyphic reliefs, bazaars and genre scenes, and types also appear in Streeton's collection.

Albumen prints were popular souvenirs in the late nineteenth century, as they were very thin and could be rolled up for ease of transportation. While the dimensions of the prints collected by Streeton vary, a majority fall within the range of the 24 x 30 centimetre print size that became a standard during the period. It is significant that he primarily acquired this larger format, as, by the late 1890s, smaller size photographs and postcards were gaining popularity. Streeton also collected at least four photographs in the smaller size, with the printed image of each measuring around 12 x 9.5 centimetres. However, it is likely that the larger prints held a greater appeal for the painter, as they would have been easier to work from.

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[11] Baedeker, 1898, p. 226.
[12] Baedeker (ed.), 1885, pp. 234-5.
[13] Jacobson, 2007, p. 57.
[14] An example of this is the commercial photograph *Une danseuse Arabe* by the Schroeder and Cie studio (Fig. 20), which was collected by Streeton.

Like Orientalist artists before him, Streeton purchased photographs as *aides-mémoires*.[15] In 1875, Jean-Léon Gérôme acquired a selection of photographs from Abdullah Frères, who operated the most important photography studio in Constantinople, while the Austrian artist, Ludwig Deutsch, used the photographs of G. Lékégian to flesh out the backgrounds of his Orientalist paintings.[16] Lékégian had opened a studio opposite the Shepheard's Hotel on Sharia Kamel at the edge of the Azbakiya Gardens in 1887, and his images of local types, street activity, markets and architecture appear in works by a number of artists, including the Italian painter, Enrico Tarenghi.[17] Lékégian's photographs often bore the printed inscription, 'Photographie Artistique', as inscribed on *Phylaé (Temple of Hathor Aphrodité)* (Fig. 4) in Streeton's collection, or 'Atelier Spécial de Peinture', which indicated that the photographs were specifically marketed to artists.[18]

Fig. 4: G. Lékégian, *Phylaé (Temple du Hathor Aphrodité)*, albumen photograph, 21.3 x 27.7 cm, Streeton Archive.

Streeton did not visit any archaeological sites other than the pyramid complex and Sphinx at Giza, perhaps due to a lack of adequate funds for extensive excursions. Therefore, it is not surprising that his studies featuring archaeological sites mirror popular tourist imagery. Working from photographs he had collected, including those commercially produced by Maison Bonfils, the Zangaki Brothers and Lékégian, these images focus on two specific sites: the island of Philae, on the Nile (now in the Aswan Low Dam's reservoir) in Upper Egypt, and Giza. These works

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[15] Jacobson, 2007, p. 70. This trend followed from photographs principally published in Paris that were used for artists as studies for backgrounds and foregrounds known as *Étude d'après nature*, and were studies of subjects such as clouds and shrubs.
[16] Roberts, 2010, pp. 119-34; Haja and Wimmer, 2000, p. 199.
[17] Jacobson, 2007, p. 250.
[18] Jacobson, 2007, pp. 57, 249-50.

reveal the artist's use of ancient architecture as a vehicle for aesthetic investigations into light, the decorative effects of colour and the repetition of form.

In London, in the year following his journey to Cairo, Streeton completed *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae* (Fig. 5). This watercolour was worked up from the photograph, *Phylaé (Temple of Hathor Aphrodité)*, which depicted the small temple of Hathor, found immediately north of the Kiosk of Trajan on the eastern side of the island. While approximating the blue of the Nile and brilliance of the white light that fell across the ruins, Streeton remained largely faithful to the scene. Following the layout of the photograph's composition, he included elements such as the palm trees that emerge from behind the temple and line the far bank of the river, and he took care to articulate with some detail the hieroglyphics etched into the face of the stone. The fallen column in the foreground of the scene is an addition by the artist—likely a poetic gesture that reinterpreted the form of a large block that lies askew at the bottom left of the photograph.

Fig. 5: Arthur Streeton, *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae*, 1898, watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 41.6 cm, private collection.

Streeton also produced a brief pencil drawing, [*Colonnades, Philae*] n.d. (Fig. 6), and an oil sketch, [*Colonnades, Philae*] n.d. (Fig. 7), based on a Schroeder and Cie photograph of the colonnades that form part of the outer court (Fig. 8). In all, Streeton collected six photographs of the Philae site, together with one image of Abu Simbel, another of an unidentified 'petit temple',

Fig. 6: Arthur Streeton, [*Colonnades, Philae*], c.1898, pencil on paper, 18 x 29 cm, location unknown.

Fig. 7: Arthur Streeton, [*Colonnades, Philae*], c.1898, oil canvas on panel, 28.5 x 44.1 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 8: Schroeder and Cie, *Phylae, les Colonnes du Côté du nord et le Nil*, c.1890s, albumen photograph, 21.0 x 26.9 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 9: Bonfils, *Village Arabe au bord du Nil*, c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive.

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Fig. 10: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo* [*Arab village*], c.1898, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm, location unknown.

two of the Sphinx and six close-up photographs of hieroglyphic base reliefs. Additionally, there is a clear relationship between a Bonfils albumen photograph collected by Streeton, *Village Arabe au bord du Nil* (Fig. 9), and the oil painting, *Old Cairo* c.1898 (Fig. 10). The whitewashed mud brick dwellings thatched with palm fronds, and the rising trunks of date palms that give structure to the photograph, were included in Streeton's painting, as was a wooden crate, to the left of the composition. Reducing the number of people within the scene, the artist depicts only a seated figure in red and yellow, and a woman in blue balancing a water jar atop her head as she walks beside a child. Streeton introduced a number of pottery jars across the foreground, a figure sitting bent over his work in the right corner, and a domed mosque or mausoleum in the distance. The popularity of such scenes may have influenced Streeton's belief that the subjects were marketable and worth pursuing upon his arrival in London.

Streeton as amateur photographer

The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo c.1897 (Fig. 11) presents the artist's response to a more familiar urban landscape, exploring the decorative possibilities of the wide roads that lead into the rich greenery of the public grounds. The gardens were situated opposite the Bristol Hotel at Azbakiya Place, where Streeton first stayed, and just south of Sharia Wagh al-birket, where he took rooms after his travelling companion, the noted professional photographer Walter Barnett, had departed for London.[19] The painting's vertical composition recalls a Japanese aesthetic of flattened space, and a limited colour palette that was favoured by artists of the Nabis group — particularly Édouard Vuillard. There is a move away from perspective and shadow, with the focus instead on an elongated pictorial format, abstract elements of colour and line, and decorative motifs. Streeton also employed the high horizon lines and unusual viewpoints that had attracted artists of the Aesthetic Movement such as James Abbott McNeill Whistler to Japanese prints.

An inner arc tracing a fence-line that encloses another garden space echoes the half circle that curves into the left side of the work. It is probable that this is the circular green space that formed a roundabout between the Bristol Hotel and the Azbakiya Gardens, known as Midan al-Khaznedar. This would suggest that the painting was completed from the Bristol Hotel, and, given the elevated viewpoint, may have been painted from a window or a balcony of the artist's hotel room. Three leafless trees are set along the first arc, their thin trunks leading up towards knots of playful arabesque. Below them, men and women in blue and black *galabiyas* and *yeleks* sit or stand along the curb, while donkeys and their handlers wait ready to respond to the requests of the unseen tourist. Further up the canvas, towards the path leading into the gardens, people are described in yellow, red and pink, with the heads of men embellished with daubs of red and white to indicate the common headdress of a red tarbush around which a white turban is wrapped. The painting creates a visual analogue to Douglas Sladen's observations that '[r]eally fine impressions of native life may be made all round the Ezbakiya Gardens, when the cabmen and donkey-boys and the stalls frequented by them are to be found'.[20]

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[19] Levine and Jensen, 2007, p. 38. The Azbakiya Gardens were also variously transliterated as Ezbekiya (by Streeton), Ezbekîyeh, Ezbekiyeh and Ezbekyeh.
[20] Sladen, 1908, p. 352.
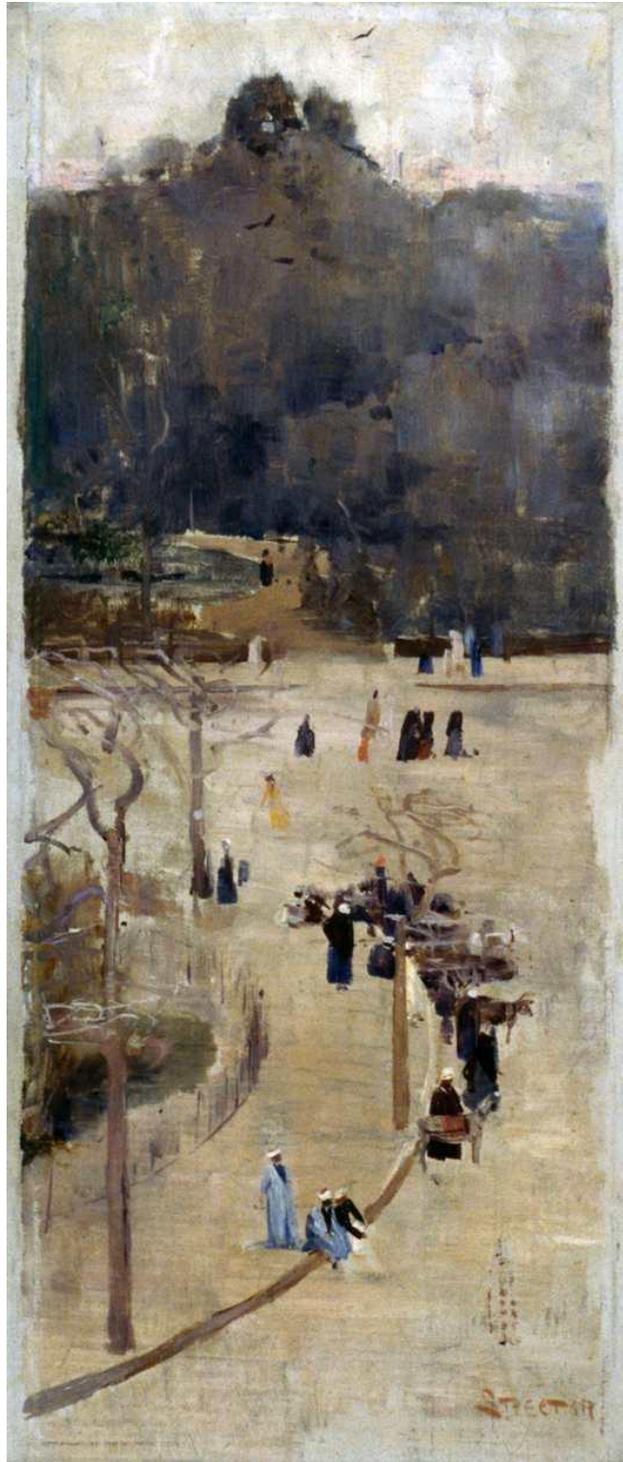
Fig. 11: Arthur Streeton, *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo*, c.1897, oil on canvas board, 46 x 21.5 cm, private collection.

In a photograph attributed to Streeton (Fig. 12), the fence on the left side most likely marks the boundary of the Midan el-Khaznedar, visible in *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo*. In the surrounding street, men and women, who are dressed in both Eastern and Western clothing, walk past a street vendor's cart and a victoria cab. Streeton has created a visual document of the varied social and cultural identities within the Frankish quarter. Comparison of the two representations highlights the degree to which he homogenised the region and its population in his painting. A second photograph taken nearby shows a camel with its back piled high with clover hay, set against a backdrop of European-style architecture (Fig. 13). In these images of the Azbakiya region, Streeton captured contrasts between the old and new by recording some of the changes in the urban landscape of Cairo that stemmed from modernisations carried out during the nineteenth century by Ismail Pasha and later by the British. Perhaps most obvious is the broad stretch of the boulevard marked by the dusty tracks of people, donkeys and horse-drawn victorias.

Fig. 12: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Azbakiya*]*,* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.5 x 12.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 13: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene with camel, Azbakiya*] 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.6 x 11.7 cm, Streeton Archive.

In another photograph, Streeton focuses on a view of a street from an elevated vantage point (Fig. 14). The building on the right is the Bristol Hotel, and the arc of Midan el-Khaznedar can be seen at the very left edge of the image. It was from this unseen area that Streeton took the two photographs mentioned above, with the photograph of the camel showing the Italianate façade of the Bristol Hotel in the background. The elevated view, and the angle at which the photograph was taken, suggests that Streeton was standing in one of the top floor rooms or on one of the large balconies at the Khedivial Hotel. From a similar elevation to the aspect captured in *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo*, Streeton angled the camera a little further across to the west. Such photographs, taken from a hotel window, register the traveller's point of view. They are inscribed with something of the individual's experience and the intimacy of the creator's private space. While this distanced vantage point separated the artist and his subject, the scenes from the street indicate a more direct engagement.
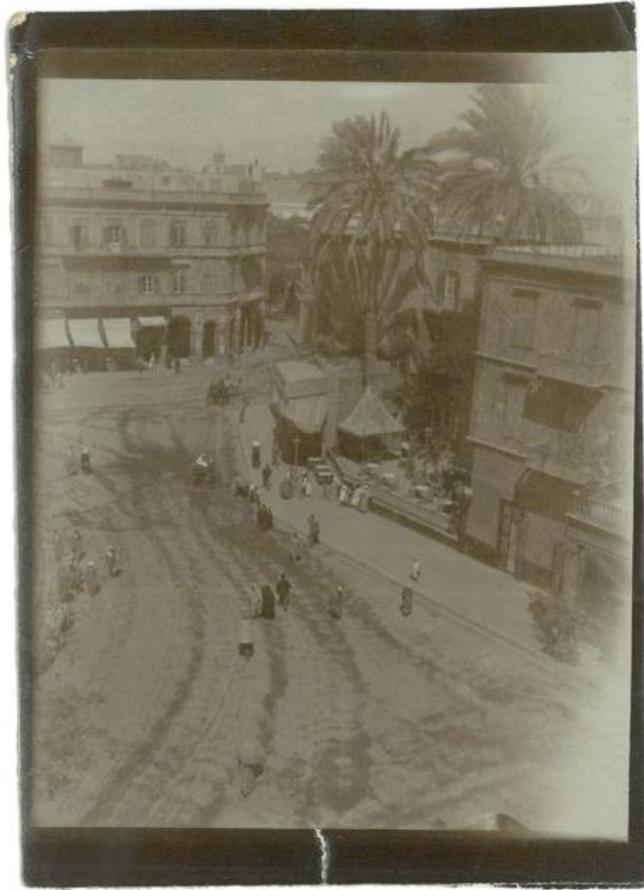
Fig. 14: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Azbakiya*]
1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper
from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.5 cm, Streeton
Archive.

It is likely that Streeton borrowed a camera that belonged Walter Barnett. It was used to take at
least eight photographs of the regions surrounding the Azbakiya Gardens and the bazaar district
near the Bab Zuweila. This was not the first time Streeton had attempted photography. In 1890,
he wrote to his close friend, Tom Roberts, 'I have been having a go at photography lately — my
brother in law has a 1/2 plate camera — most interesting'.[21] It might be assumed that the
photographs were taken in the first week Streeton spent in Cairo, while the Barnetts were still in
the city, and Streeton was staying at the Bristol Hotel. However, in a letter written to his friend
between June and October 1897, Streeton explained that something had happened to the camera

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[21] Streeton, 1890.

and that he would need to provide Barnett with compensation in the form of a painting.[22] This suggests that the camera had been left with Streeton after the Barnetts had left Cairo.

While tourists embraced the trade in commercial photography, the introduction of the first Kodak box camera in 1888 meant that travellers to Egypt could produce their own souvenirs.[23] By the time of Streeton's arrival in Cairo, a tourist-driven market for materials and developing services supported the rise of amateur photography. For those tourists wishing to take photographs themselves, *Baedeker* advised its readers that photographic materials, including 'dry-plates, films, etc. [could] be obtained in Cairo', though 'it is preferable to bring a good stock carefully packed from home, taking care to attend the customs examination in person. The plates should not be more than 8 by 10 inches at the largest'.[24] *Baedeker* also noted that Heyman and Co., located next to the Shepheard's Hotel, was an agent for the Eastman Kodak Company, and supplied film and developed plates.[25] The technology developed by Kodak also made it easier for professional photographers to work without the cumbersome equipment used in the production of the albumen prints that Streeton had collected.

A majority of the amateur photographs were initialled 'AS' or 'AS/Cairo' on the verso in pencil, and while it is possible that they were taken by Barnett during the week he spent with Streeton in Cairo, their 'tourist snap' sensibility strongly indicates that they were produced by the untrained Streeton. This is perhaps most evident in the two street scenes with the Bab Zuweila in the background (Figs. 15 and 16). Both are askew and have areas of blurred shadow in the foreground. The photograph of a drink seller (Fig. 17) reveals a similarly unskilled handling of the camera, with the subject's head cropped just above his eyes. These 'tourist snaps' form part of a larger framework that saw the development of photography in private and commercial sectors, with the medium becoming a significant record, as source and souvenir, for both artists and travellers by the time Streeton was working in Cairo.[26]

Late nineteenth-century colonialism was closely related to such visual technologies, with Streeton's photographs, by extension, communicating aspects of a colonial encounter. Alongside more traditional mediums, such as oil paintings, watercolours and drawings, they were effectively another way of describing and assigning values and boundaries through representation. Through the lens, Streeton documented his experience of social and cultural identity, situating the subject as 'Other'. The photographs allowed the artist to attain a sense of objectivity — what he may have considered to be a 'truth' — that could stand for his experience of the Orient. However, accurately assessing Streeton's intentions in his amateur photographs is difficult, primarily due to

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[22] Streeton, 1897.

[23] In 1888 George Eastman introduced Kodak a portable roll-film camera pre-loaded with a 100-exposure roll of film. Once the film had been used, the camera was sent back to Rochester, New York, where the film was developed and a new roll of film could be loaded into the camera. Other cameras followed, including a folding model, the Autographic and the Brownie. These types of cameras were easy to use, and proved popular with amateur photographers such as Streeton.

[24] Baedeker, 1898, p. xviii.

[25] Baedeker, 1898, pp. 27-28.

[26] Reid, 2002, p. 89.

the fact that he was relatively new to the medium, and was using the camera in the technically challenging context of a busy foreign street.[27]

Fig. 15 (left): Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Bab Zuweila*] 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 10.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 16 (right): Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Bab Zuweila*] 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.8 cm, Streeton Archive

Unlike paintings and sketches, where he had more control over the outcome of an image and could interact with the surface of the work directly, in the Cairo photographs Streeton was dealing with a mechanised instrument that relied on light, time, chemical stability and various other factors. It is also difficult to determine whether his selected views were intended exactly as they appear, or whether certain angles or subjects were affected by his positioning at a window or other such vantage point. In the paintings and sketches, by contrast, it is possible to more confidently draw conclusions regarding what was deliberately included or excluded. However, as a photographer, Streeton did make decisions regarding the primary subject of the composition, just as he did in his paintings. This indicates that he was primarily interested in documenting the areas surrounding his accommodation in the Azbakiya region and around popular tourist sites such as the Bab Zuweila, producing un-posed images of the people and architecture alongside the posed drink seller as a type.

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[27] 'Blurred figures, obtrusive foregrounds, apparently uninteresting views and total failures [were] especially characteristic of early photographs of all sorts', and further that '[t]ravel photography was particularly venerable to such errors, the conditions for taking and processing pictures being far from optimum.' Ballerini, 1996, p. 15.

Photography and the 'type'

In his studies of urban Cairene figures, Streeton presented a consistent image of an Oriental type that was easily interpreted by a late nineteenth-century audience, while his attention to costume aligned with a popular interest in ethnography. The widely held theory that it was possible to identify and isolate ethnic types framed a complex array of ideas surrounding national character that emerged during the age of empire. Based on developments in ethnographic and anthropological study and natural history, ethnic types were recognised through physical and racial, as well as moral and social characteristics. References to types were common in literature and the popular press, and were also employed to define people from Western cultures and societies. Paintings, illustrations and photography became vehicles for the diffusion of the Victorian belief in racial hierarchies, and were a means by which information on different cultures could be documented and recorded. Art reflected and facilitated the establishment of racial ideas, as well as reiterating aspects of social and cultural order.

Similarities in themes, subjects and compositions across the breath of nineteenth-century travel photography demonstrate how the medium provided a system for understanding the development and dissemination of Orientalist types.[28] At a time when markets in Europe, Australia and America were seeking out illustrations of non-Western cultures, the creation and reproduction of cultural stereotypes was expedited by the development of photographic technologies and the increased accessibility of commercial photographs and postcards for sale in major cities and tourist destinations.[29] By the 1890s, a number of photographs and postcards that were available in Cairo depicted men and women understood to be representative in terms of their physical appearance and occupations.[30] Such stock images influenced Streeton's own representations of the people of Cairo.[31]

Streeton's collection of commercial photographs includes images of the local inhabitants pursuing their daily activities, posed with props that indicate their vocation, rather than studio-based palace or harem fantasies. These photographs presented a way of recording aspects of Cairo and its people not necessarily for a more thorough understanding of the region and its culture, but for their aesthetic and picturesque qualities. Streeton conformed to popular taste and

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[28] Ayshe Erdoğdu noted that European photographers and studios based in major non-Western capitals, such as Istanbul and Cairo, responded by producing images of people in sales catalogues, specifically classified as 'types'. Erdoğdu, 1999, p. 269; see also Micklewright, 2011, pp. 97, 99-110.

[29] Gregory, 1999, p. 145.

[30] Erdoğdu, 2002, p.107.

[31] Though the repetition of specific subjects in tourist photography generated stereotypes, which in turn became the recognisable and legible images consumed by the West, there was a belief during this period that the photograph represented empirical truth, acting as 'witness'. Michael Hayes writes that though photographic representations of types were viewed as artistic, they also projected an authority based upon scientific discourses that 'recorded and constructed cultures and artifacts', in the fields of anthropology and ethnography, where the medium was used to measure and define characteristics of race. Photography was also able to assist in defining the coloniser's sense of self at the same time as imaging the environment of the 'other'. The photograph of the type thus becomes a commodity; a cultural artifact purchased as an *aide-mémoire* or as a substitute for a lived experience of the East. See Hayes, 2002, p. 176.

purchased the picturesque views and figure studies that were of more interest to him as an artist-tourist (and perhaps more readily available).

Fig. 17: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Drink seller*], 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 9.6 cm, Streeton Archive.

In contrast to the profusion of ruins and urban sites, the number of photographs of people in Streeton's collection is comparatively limited. There are five scenes of men and women collecting water and washing clothes on the banks of the Nile, produced by G. Lékégian and Co., and two agricultural vignettes by Bonfils. There are no images of the modernised labour force or the Ottoman-Egyptian elites who wore European dress. Factory workers, children attending school, Cairenes in Western garb or tourists exploring city streets are also absent, as these aspects of social change were not popular with the tourist market that sought out representations of an exotic and timeless Orient. Different photographers repeated similar themes, and, like the postcards from Algeria examined by Rebecca DeRoo, they 'reflect the interests of the commercial tourism industry … and appeal to viewers because they reinforce bourgeois attitudes about race, work and gender'.[32]

Amongst the photographs attributed to Streeton, there is a full-length portrait of a drink vendor (Fig. 17). It is a summation of vocation, as represented by the subject's costume and vessel.

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[32] DeRoo, 2011, p. 169.

Moving through the narrow passageways of Cairo, the itinerant vendor wears a striped *galabiya* covered by an apron with three horizontal bands, and holds glass flasks, a ceramic dish and a large glass jar with an ornate brass stopper. In his left hand, he adroitly grasps, with one finger, a long flywhisk, used to protect his sweet liquids. The subject in the oil painting based on this photograph (Fig. 18) maintains the same centred stance—facing the viewer. However, to accentuate the decorative verticality of the composition, Streeton made specific changes to certain elements of the vendor's costume. In the photograph, the apron has bands running horizontally across the lower edge as a border, whereas the painting features vertical stripes. These verticals are echoed by the minaret and narrow passage of blue sky. The indeterminate background, possibly including the striped exterior wall of a mosque, was painted after the figure, followed by details such as the flywhisk, Streeton's signature and an Arabic inscription of the name 'Muhammad Ali'. Although it is signed, the work appears unfinished, with pencil underdrawing clearly evident.

Egyptian drink vendor 1897 (Fig. 19), is the watercolour version of *A seller of drinks, Cairo*, and, together with the photograph, maps the artist's process of image development.[33] It is possible that Streeton painted the watercolour from the photograph in order to experiment with the colours to be used in the similarly sized oil painting. However, given the number of other watercolours amongst the artist's Cairo output, he would also have seen it as a legitimate work in its own right. The subject was initially drawn in pencil then finished in watercolour, with white body colour used for the simple doubled arcs that indicate birds flocking around the minaret.

Like the oil painting, the stripes in the watercolour subject's apron run vertically, rather than horizontally. Four wide bands are marked in transparent strokes of red, while three slightly smaller bands have been left unpainted. The *galabiya* worn by the drink seller in the oil is a purple grey with narrow pale yellow stripes, while, in the watercolour, it is yellow and has narrow orange stripes. Although there are light pencil gestures near the figure's left hand, where the top of the flywhisk would have been in the watercolour, the prop that features in both the oil painting and the photograph is omitted from this composition. The sweet liquid that swills in the bottom of the glass vessel of the oil painting and watercolour is painted in red. In the watercolour, it appears tinged with the green of the glass, however, in the oil painting, the division between the blocks of blue and red is less convincing. The figure's right hand in both iterations remains unresolved, which further suggests that Streeton was working from the photograph he had taken, where the hand is not clearly visible. Streeton also did not successfully capture the harsh contrast of light and shade on the figure's face, which, in the photograph, is cut off above the eyes. This was likely a result of the amateur photographer's error in not correctly framing the subject.

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[33] Streeton pared down certain details within the watercolour, likely indicating he was working from the small photograph—although it is also feasible the quick sketch was completed in situ. The paper is not taken from either of the two known travel sketchbooks, differing in both weight and dimension. Though it is possible that the drink seller who posed for the photograph also posed for a pencil and watercolour sketch, it is likely that both the watercolour and the painting were completed once the artist arrived in London, in the second half of 1897. The watercolour is signed lower right hand corner 'A Streeton 97'.

Fig. 18: Arthur Streeton, *A seller of drinks, Cairo* c.1897, oil on canvas on wood panel, 42.2 x 21.0 cm, private collection.

Fig. 19: Arthur Streeton, *Egyptian drink vendor* [*The water seller*] 1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 33.2 x 18.3cm, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and Richard Paul in honour of his father, Dr Oscar Paul 1965.

Fig. 20 (left): G. Lékégian, *Mère et enfants,* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.0 cm, Streeton Archive.
Fig. 21 (right): Schroeder and Cie, *Une danseuse Arabe,* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.5 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive.

As with two full-length photographs of women in Streeton's collection of commercial images — *Mere et enfants* (Fig. 20) and *Une danseuse Arabe* (Fig. 21) — Streeton's drink vendor does not represent the subject as an individual. There is little indication that the artist sought further information about his subject, other than perhaps the type of drink sold, and possibly his name.[34] However, unlike the commercial examples, the photograph documents a specific time and space — one of engagement between the artist/tourist, and the subject/vendor. The drink seller was likely a willing participant, who stood still long enough for the photograph to be taken without the blur of movement. It bears witness to a moment of contact between these two men.

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[34] In a rare descriptive note recorded in one of his Cairo sketchbooks, Streeton wrote of 'Sitting at [a] native café overlooking old deserted water canal: all Mahomedans — order lemonade & after drinking see the man with the skinful of water going off to make it into café & lemonade'. Cairo sketchbook B, Streeton family papers. Though given a generic title, the oil painting, *A seller of drinks, Cairo*, unlike the watercolour, bears the inscription, 'Muhammad Ali' in Arabic. Although it is possible that Streeton may have known the name of this sitter, it is difficult to determine whether the inscription was in fact the actual name of the subject or a fictional means by which the artist sought to claim authenticity and assert his connection with his sitter. It is also unclear whether the Arabic script is in the artist's hand.
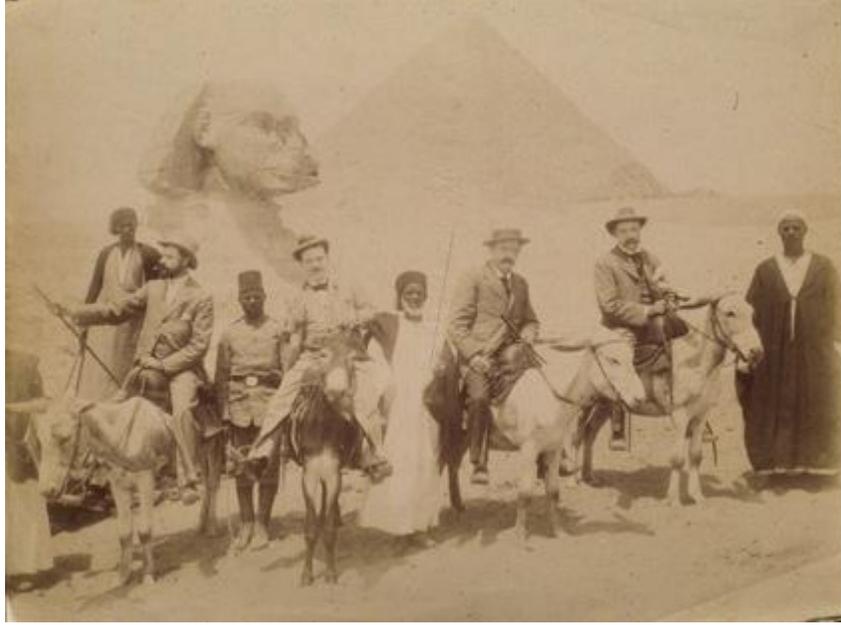
Fig. 22: Unknown photographer, [*Arthur Streeton with fellow tourists in front of the Sphinx and Pyramids*] 1897, albumen photograph, 19.9 x 26.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

In the final photograph examined in this essay, Streeton himself became the subject (Fig. 22). Posed before the Sphinx and Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops), the artist is captured taking part in the common exercise of creating a souvenir of his visit. The albumen print depicts Streeton with three travelling companions mounted on donkeys flanked by Bedouin guides and a uniformed Egyptian man wearing a tarbush. This is the only pictorial record of the artist in Cairo. Dressed in a light-coloured three-piece sack suit with a handkerchief in his left breast pocket and a white cravat, he wears common lace-up leather shoes, made dusty by his travels to the popular tourist site, and a felt square-crowned bowler hat. Unlike his fellow travellers and guides, who directed their focus to the camera, the artist looks out of the picture to his right. With a cigar pursed between his lips, and holding onto a long bamboo riding cane angled forward from his body with right arm outstretched, he affects an adventurer's stance, surveying the landscape around him. Though part of this group of Western men enjoying a customary jaunt to the pyramids, Streeton's gaze reinforces his knowing self-fashioning of a status beyond that of the standard tourist.

While engaging with the late nineteenth-century tourist experience, Streeton contributed the first response to Egypt by an Australia-born career-artist, and the only Impressionist vision of Cairo within the field of Orientalism in Australia. He responded to the stimulus of a foreign land and its people by creating a body of work that aestheticised an urban environment dominated by monumental architecture and bustling bazaars, and rendered the local inhabitants ethnographic 'types'. In this essay, the previously unexplored influence of photography on Streeton's Cairo paintings has been addressed through analysis of both the photographs that Streeton himself took

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while in Cairo, and those he purchased from commercial vendors. By identifying where photographs were used as the basis for artworks, this study has established their importance in shaping and recording Streeton's Orientalist encounter.

Emma Kindred

Dr Emma Kindred is an art curator at the Australian War Memorial. She is also currently working on the Arthur Streeton Project with the National Gallery of Australia. In 2012 she completed her doctoral thesis, 'Passages through the Orient: Arthur Streeton in Cairo'.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Arthur Streeton, *Cairo Street* (previously *Street scene, Cairo* and *The Mosque of Imam el-Shafei*) 1897, oil on prepared canvas mounted on laminated paperboard, 33.4 x 17.1cm, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965.

Fig. 2:. Arthur Streeton, [*Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Blue Mosque and Bab Zouwaleh*], 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 3. G. Lékégian, [*Bab Zuweila*], c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.1 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 4. G. Lékégian, *Phylaé (Temple du Hathor Aphrodité)*, albumen photograph, 21.3 x 27.7 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 5. Arthur Streeton, *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae*, 1898, watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 41.6 cm, private collection.

Fig. 6. Arthur Streeton, [*Colonnades, Philae*], c.1898, pencil on paper, 18 x 29 cm, location unknown.

Fig. 7. Arthur Streeton, [*Colonnades, Philae*], c.1898, oil canvas on panel, 28.5 x 44.1 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 8. Schroeder and Cie, *Phylae, les Colonnes du Côté du nord et le Nil*, c.1890s, albumen photograph, 21.0 x 26.9 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 9. Bonfils, *Village Arabe au bord du Nil*, c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 10. Arthur Streeton, *Cairo* [*Arab village*], c.1898, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm, location unknown.

Fig. 11. Arthur Streeton, *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo*, c.1897, oil on canvas board, 46 x 21.5 cm, private collection.

Fig. 12. Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Azbakiya*]*,* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.5 x 12.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 13. Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene with camel, Azbakiya*], 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.6 x 11.7, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 14. Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Azbakiya*], 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.5 cm, Streeton Archive.

Fig. 15. Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [*Street scene, Bab Zuweila*], 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 10.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

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Fig. 20. G. Lékégian*, Mère et enfants*, c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.0 cm, Streeton Archive.

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Fig. 22. Unknown photographer, [*Arthur Streeton with fellow tourists in front of the Sphinx and Pyramids*], 1897, albumen photograph, 19.9 x 26.0 cm, Streeton Archive.