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PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 10 – 2021

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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AESTHETIC JOURNEYS AND MEDIA
PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI, MAXIME DANESIN, JESSICA
BAUWENS-SUGIMOTO, MANUEL HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ,
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CONTACT: mutualimages@gmail.com

MUTUAL IMAGES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION – Headquarters
3 allée de l'avenir, Les chênes entrée 3
64600 Anglet – France

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In the steps of the Prophets: The dissemination and reinterpretation of David Roberts' Holy Land sketches through the Shows of London

Jeremy BROOKER | Independent Researcher, UK

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ABSTRACT

The body of drawings and sketches created by the Scottish painter David Roberts (1796-1864) during his expedition to the Holy Lands in 1838-9 marked the high point of his professional career. This paper will look at the period after his return to Britain in July 1839, particularly to 1842. It will suggest that although Roberts was no doubt influenced by his Scottish Presbyterian upbringing, religious faith was not as central to his trip as has often been supposed. It was instead through the business acumen of his publisher F.G. Moon that this body of work came to be regarded not merely as an aesthetic achievement but as a cause célèbre. A skilful and coordinated marketing campaign elevated these drawings to the status of a pilgrimage; a contemplative journey through the sites of biblical antiquity. Through detailed analysis of contemporaneous accounts it will show how one of the costliest publications of the era was disseminated, passing from prestigious galleries and the libraries of a wealthy elite through a continuum of public art exhibitions and popular media including panoramas, dioramas and the newly-emerging field of dissolving views. This will provide a rare case study into the interconnectedness of London's exhibition culture in the 1840s.

KEYWORDS

David Roberts; Holy Land; Panorama; Diorama; Dissolving Views; Royal Polytechnic Institution; Royal Academy.

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The enamoured Montacute hung over her with pious rapture, as they examined together Mr. Roberts's Syrian drawings, and she alike charmed and astonished him by her familiarity with every locality and each detail.

Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred, or the New Crusade* (1849, Chapter XXI)

In August 1838 the Scottish artist David Roberts (1796-1864) set out on an epic journey which would take him from the ancient monuments of Egypt and Nubia to the Sinai, Jordan and Lebanon. He returned 11 months later with 272 drawings, a collection of costumes and other artefacts, a panoramic drawing of Cairo, a set of Journals recording his experiences and three sketchbooks brimming with architectural studies and impressions of the people he had encountered. As his friend and biographer James

Ballantine noted, this would be ‘the great central episode of his artistic life’ (Ballantine, 1866: 231). An extensive literature has grown up around this body of work presenting it in the context of wider debates around Orientalism and Protestant religious art, or as a form of travelogue related to his own biography.

This study is mainly concerned with a brief but career-defining period in Roberts’ life between his arrival back in England in July 1839 and the publication of the first volume of his magnum opus *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea and Arabia* in 1842. Its purpose is to explore Roberts’ carefully managed transition from successful painter to one of the most revered artists of his day, and to consider the role of London’s exhibition economy in this process.

The suggestion will be that in order to monetise their work Roberts and his publisher set about deliberately transforming a set of picturesque views into a *cause célèbre* and publishing sensation. This was a financial gamble with high stakes. The book they envisaged would be hugely costly and time consuming to produce, and without serious backing could easily have failed. It should be recalled that Roberts had spent his own life savings on the trip, which was only completed through generous loans from friends (Ballantine, 1866: 113).

Of course, to explore this in commercial terms is not to diminish the complexity of Roberts’ motivations. As Amanda Burritt points out ‘A broad range of artistic, economic, religious and personal factors motivated Roberts to embark of his Near East journey,’ and all these factors contributed to their ultimate success (Burritt, 2020: 45). The Holy Land drawings came at a particular point in his career, when he was on the cusp of success. We also know that he had a strongly religious upbringing in the Scottish Presbyterian church which, according to his friend and biographer James Ballantine, had left him with a burning ambition to undertake such a trip (Ballantine, 1866).

What is striking, though, is the difference in tone from commentators writing in 1839 and in 1842. A review in the *Morning Chronicle* from September 1839 declared:

[H]e has brought home with him the ponderous temples and colossal statues that adorned the banks of the Nile and the rocks of Arabia Petraea. The pyramids of Egypt are now in Mornington-place. Mr. Roberts... will supply Europe —we may almost say for the first time —with portraits at once correct and picturesque of

their architectural and sculptured wonders.¹

True, the passage goes on to say that 'Cairo merits its epithet of grand, and Jerusalem that of holy' but the emphasis here is clearly on the picturesque archaeological ruins of Egypt and the Roman province Arabia Petraea; a geographical identification which excluded Palestine altogether. There is certainly no suggestion that religious sites associated with biblical events were a primary concern.

By 1842, the nature of Roberts' achievements was being couched in very different terms. At a dinner held in his home town of Edinburgh in October, he was praised by Lord Cockburn for 'having completed the finest pilgrimage of art which has perhaps ever been performed by a single man'.² Ballantine even wrote a song for the occasion, *Scotland's Painter Davie*, clearly suggesting that the Bible had been the primary motivation behind Roberts' work (Burritt, 2020: 46). As he later expressed it, Roberts was the 'pioneer who opened up that sacred country to our ken' (Ballantine, 1866). According to Amanda Burritt, lithographs were being bought by Protestant Christians for devotional use and were 'seen by many to provide evidence of the literal truthfulness of scripture... seen by many devout Christians as factual depictions of holy places whose stories embodied deep religious truths' (Burritt, 2020: 90, 109).

In his pioneering study *The Shows of London*, Richard Altick dismissed the rigid distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, instead presenting all 'displays of pictures, objects, or living creatures' as part of a continuum which encompassed the humblest booth at Bartholomew Fair, the fashionable 'exhibitions' at Daguerre's Diorama in Regents Park and the august showrooms of the Royal Institution and Royal Academy (Altick, 1978: 2).

This is not to suggest all these attractions were regarded as of equal status and for an artist with serious aspirations, negotiating this terrain could be hazardous. Roberts' older contemporary John Martin, whose gigantic paintings made him one of the most successful and popular artists of the age, was treated with some disdain by many commentators as a kind of showman. His taste for the spectacular had led art critic John Ruskin to accuse him of 'mere vulgar sensationalism'. Martin believed that

¹ *Morning Advertiser* 4 September 1839 3c.

² Address by Lord Cockburn, Edinburgh 1842 (Guiterman, 1986: 69).

representations such as panoramas or dioramas gave ammunition to critics who already dismissed his work as ‘virtual theatre, rather than fine art’ (Coltrin, 2011: 8). He even resorted to the law courts in an unsuccessful attempt to block a dioramic adaptation of his *Balshazzar’s Feast* painting at the British Diorama in 1833 (Lambourne, 1999: 159-60).

Roberts had no such qualms and was already deeply embedded in London’s exhibition culture. He was a respected artist who showed his work in prestigious galleries but had also found considerable success painting theatrical scenery and giant paintings for dioramas and panoramas. Indeed, his whole career to this point can be seen as a delicate balance between his ambitions to be accepted as a ‘serious’ painter and the demands of the show economy.

An early defining moment in Roberts’ career occurred when he was still a precocious youth. At the age of ten his exceptional draughtsmanship brought him to the attention of John Graham, Master of the Trustees at the Academy in Edinburgh; a school founded in 1760 specifically to provide instruction to those engaged in manufacturing design. By the time of Roberts’ introduction, the emphasis of the Academy had shifted towards fine art, and Graham’s advice was kindly but blunt. Given the impecunious circumstances of Roberts’ family, he recommended learning a trade through an apprenticeship with a painter of domestic interiors and perhaps returning to more formal training at some later time (Ballantine, 1866: 3).

This proved sound advice. Roberts’ few years as a house painter coincided with a fashion for elaborate interiors in Gothic-revival style, allowing him to develop the skills to create faux marble and other illusory effects while observing the tastes and predilections of wealthy clients (Guiterman, 1986: 12). This formative experience established an important precedent, encouraging Roberts to see the creation of visual spectacle not merely as an end in itself but as the means through which he might realise his ‘higher’ artistic ambitions.

From house painting Roberts made a *segue* into theatrical scenery, first with a touring circus and within a few years at Drury Lane and Covent Garden in London. He was again fortunate, arriving at a time when elaborate stage effects were in great demand (Guiterman, 1986: 27). He formed a successful partnership and rivalry with William Clarkson Stanfield which, though sometimes acrimonious, brought both men widespread recognition.

As an adjunct to this work Roberts also created peristrepthic panoramas for the theatre and exhibition hall (Huhtamo, 2012). In 1825 he painted a 'series of scenes for a moving panorama, illustrating the bombardment of Algiers' with Stanfield, which went on to tour through Great Britain and the continent (Ballantine, 1866: 25; Altick, 1978: 39-40). He was also responsible for two panoramas created for pantomimes at Covent Garden in the years 1827 and 1828 (Ballantine, 1866: 30). Perhaps the highpoint of this work came in 1828 when Roberts and Stanfield created four dioramic paintings for the newly-opened British Diorama; a 'fashionable lounge' intended to attract 'high society clientele' situated in the Royal Bazaar, Oxford Street (Altick, 1978: 167-8). Each painting was 27ft high and 38ft in width (c. 8m x 12m), and these were replaced a year later with a second group of four paintings by the same artists. Unfortunately, the artificial light used to animate one of the scenes led to a fire and the entire structure, including the eight giant paintings, was destroyed. Nevertheless, Roberts had seen at first hand the possibilities for an entertainment built on these illusory and spectacular principles.

In parallel with his formidable schedule of theatrical work, Roberts was also beginning to exhibit his paintings. He gained an astute understanding of the art market and the importance of showing his work in significant venues, and embarked on a disciplined and carefully choreographed rise to prominence (Burritt, 2020: 106). His paintings were shown first in Edinburgh, and by 1824 in London at the newly-formed Society of British Arts. From 1825 he was also a regular exhibitor at the British Institution and in 1826 had his first work shown at the Royal Academy. His breakthrough came in 1829 with *The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt*, a vast canvas on an Eastern theme in the manner of John Martin which was clearly a deliberate attempt to repeat the success enjoyed by Francis Danby when *The Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* (1825) was exhibited at the Royal Academy (Coltrin, 2011). Within a few years Roberts was able to devote himself entirely to painting and withdrew from scene-painting as a profession.

Roberts' improving social status can be seen through the addresses he occupied, culminating in a grand residence in Fitzroy Street on his return from the East, where he remained for the rest of his life (Guiterman, 1986: 92-5). He numbered many wealthy businessmen and landowners among his clients, and his work was represented in the most important private art collections including those of the

Marquis of Stafford and William Beckford and, after his return, Frank Hall Standish and the Royal Collection. John Rushout, 2nd Baron Northwick, bought at least two major paintings including *The Israelites Leaving Egypt*, and twice received Roberts as a guest at Northwick Park in Gloucestershire. The London businessman and ship-owner Elhanan Bicknell was another leading collector of contemporary art who took an interest in Roberts' work, his second son marrying Roberts' only daughter in June 1841.

Roberts was also well respected by his peers, enjoying friendships with William (J.M.W.) Turner, David Wilkie and other prominent artists of the day. He was an early member of the Society of British Arts, rising to the positions of vice-president in 1830 and president 1831. However, this was a far less prestigious association than the Royal Academy and Roberts resigned his membership in 1835 as his own reputation grew.

As if two distinct careers were not enough, Roberts was also following a third calling as an inveterate traveller and creator of on-the-spot topographical sketches. Again, we can see a strategic approach as his trips increased in duration and ambition, coming to occupy increasing amounts of his time. The first was a relatively modest trip to the north French coast in 1824 which took him inland to Rouen where he made sketches of Notre-Dame cathedral. He spent part of almost every succeeding year making similar trips through France, Belgium, Germany and Scotland culminating in an extended trip through France, Spain and Morocco which lasted over a year from August 1832 to October 1833 (Guiterman, 1986: 92-3).

The resulting sketches were often used as the basis for oil paintings and several on French and Spanish subjects were exhibited at the Royal Academy and British Institution. With characteristic rigour, Roberts was also developing his knowledge and expertise in the field of print reproduction. His first direct experience of this as a potential source of income was probably in connection with *The Israelites Leaving Egypt* which was sold as an engraving by Moon, Boys and Co. in 1829 and also circulated as a woodcut on the cover of *The Saturday Magazine* on 28 July 1832 (Coltrin, 2011: 9) and the *Magasin Pittoresque* in Paris (1833). In 1831 Roberts also tried his hand at etching, producing views of the picturesque ruins of Falkirk Palace and a number of Scottish monastic sites. Around the same time his drawings were appearing as engravings in *Pilgrims of the Rhine* (1832), the *Waverley novels* (1832) and *Illustrations Landscape, Historical and Antiquarian to the Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1834).

A significant development was the production of the first in a series of *Jenning's Landscape Annuals: or, The Tourist in Spain* issued in 1835 for which Roberts made 21 drawings and nine vignettes (Sims, 1984: 63). The following year he could write to his friend David Ramsay Hay about the 1836 *Annual* congratulating himself for securing 'the highest price any artist, with the exception of Turner, has ever received for drawings of a similar nature' (Sims, 1984: 108). Similar volumes appeared in 1837 and 1838, the series only ending when Roberts set off on his Eastern expedition. In 1836 Roberts entered into a further agreement, this time with the publishers Hodgson and Graves, for 37 drawings suitable as lithographs for *Picturesque Sketches of Spain*.

Roberts can be seen learning his craft through these publications– discovering the processes for producing highest quality of reproductions, while also negotiating the pitfalls of his business dealings. For the second volume of the *Landscape Annuals* he was able to insist on the 'choice of my own engravers' (Sims, 1984: 108). When he moved on to the more unfamiliar area of lithography he was so disappointed with the results that he felt compelled to work on the lithographic stones himself (Sims, 1984: 112). In his Journal he acknowledged (in his own idiosyncratic spelling and syntax) that he had 'intirely gone over the drawings myself... erasing the Old and substituting new'. The work took seven months rather than the two he had anticipated but if he expected any gratitude from the publishers, he was to be further disappointed. Roberts had demanded £375 for his work but was forced to accept just £300. Meanwhile the books retailed at four guineas apiece and 1,200 copies were sold in two months, with the original drawings fetching an additional £300. Roberts had been put out when Jennings had previously sold his original drawings for £40 each, double what he was paid to make them, but this treatment seemed even worse. It was 'without exception the most ungrateful and base I have ever in my life met with' (Sims, 1984: 113).

Compared with French and British scholars who had preceded him, Roberts arrived in the Holy Land with little specialist knowledge of the region. His own formal education had ended early and beyond his readings of the Bible he does not appear to have engaged much with contemporary theological controversies. He went armed with a basic library comprising works by Denon and Belzoni, and a popular guidebook *Travels along the Mediterranean* (1822) with plans and engravings extending to the second cataract of the Nile, Jerusalem, Damascus and Baalbec, but he was essentially an innocent, perhaps even a naïve, traveller (Mancoff, 1999: 39).

Roberts' Spanish expedition gives a strong insight into his thinking when selecting subjects. His original intention had been to visit Italy, but he changed his destination because 'nothing has been done that gives any idea of the magnificent remains of Moorish architecture' (Mancoff, 1999: 22). This was an area little frequented by tourists and besides his friend David Wilkie relatively few artists had ventured there. It also promised 'picturesque' subjects. This was a term widely used by Roberts to refer not just to the exotic but more specifically to the aesthetic qualities of scenes; vistas which would provide worthy subjects for paintings (Burrill, 2020: 69-70). It should be added that Roberts had seen the transformation of Wilkie's painting while in Spain, introducing 'depth, drama, and exoticism' to his work (Mancoff, 1999: 22).

In his decision to eschew the most familiar sights of Italy in favour of Spain, we can sense an astute understanding of the marketplace with its demand for novelty. There is a desire for artistic challenges and perhaps also a degree of professional rivalry, measuring his abilities against those of other artists. There is perhaps also a taste for adventure. The 'sketchers' were often presented as somewhat heroic figures risking life and limb to bring their 'lithographic fac-similes' to an eager public. A newspaper account from February 1839 informed its readers that 'No tidings have reached us as yet of Stanfield from Sicily or Greece, or of David Roberts from Egypt; but we hear that Mr. John Lewis safe in Rome, after escaping from a shipwreck, without loss of life or sketches.'³

Responding to the demand for 'Landscapes, topographical renderings, religious scenes and oriental and classical subjects' in the European art market, Roberts' choice of the Holy Land was astute (Burrill, 2020: 65). Egypt was just opening up as a potential travel destination under the modernising and autocratic control of the Pasha Muhammad Ali, with the promise of European-style accommodation, improved travel facilities and a greater guarantee of personal safety. For wealthy travellers in the 1820s, a trip up the Nile and into Syria was becoming a recognised extension to the 'grand tour' (Mancoff, 1999: 35). The establishment of the 'overland mail' in 1837 through the agency of Thomas Waghorn had also caught the public imagination, creating a more direct route and faster communications with British possessions in

³ *Derbyshire Courier* 2 February 1839 4e.

India. There was perhaps also a degree of nationalistic pride in Egypt as the site of Napoleon's defeat in 1801.

An extensive scholarly literature connected with Egyptology had followed Denon's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* (English translation 1802) and the monumental *Description de l'Égypte* (compiled 1809-29), drawing on material compiled during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. However, the public imagination was fired by the excavations of Belzoni and John Gardner Wilkinson and the deciphering of the Rosetta stone by the philologist Champollion (Guiterman, 1986: 72-3). Egyptian-style ornamentation adorned buildings like London's Egyptian Hall (1812) and inspired panoramas, dioramas and other popular entertainments.

In parallel with this market for Egyptian sketches, there was an established demand for 'authentic' sketches depicting biblical sites. These were often beautifully illustrated with detailed engravings, but few were by professional artists, and none could compete with the popular appeal of Roberts' exquisite, coloured lithographs. For Roberts, illustrated works like John Carne's *Syria, The Holy Land, Asia Minor, &c. Illustrated* (1836-1838) would have suggested the value of such views 'drawn from nature' and he was one of a number of London-based artists who re-worked sketches by other hands for *Landscape Illustrations of the Bible* (1836). The Introduction to that publication promised 'nearly one hundred of the most remarkable places mentioned in the Bible, as they actually exist' explaining that 'While other works of comparatively small value have employed the pencils of the first artists... little comparatively has been done towards illustrating the most important of all books — the Holy Scriptures' (Horne, 1836).

The thinking behind such publications was in part aesthetic ('exhibiting the highest improvements in the art of engraving') but also moral, the 'ruined and desolate state' of these biblical sites seeming to 'exemplify, to the most minute particular, everything that was foretold concerning them in the height of their prosperity' (Horne, 1836). As both Eithan Bar-Yosef and Amanda Burritt point out, the medieval Catholic concept of pilgrimage as a physical expedition to visit hallowed shrines was reinterpreted by many British Protestants in the nineteenth century as a metaphorical inner spiritual journey (Burritt, 2020: 47, 52). As such, accurate views of biblical sites (ostensibly unchanged since ancient times) provided a legitimate locus for religious contemplation, helping to articulate questions about the literal truth of the Bible and the nature of the lands where Jesus walked (Burritt, 2020: 109).

In a Protestant culture where ‘established pictorial traditions held no sway and belief centred exclusively on the biblical text’, painters were faced with the complex task of translating the Bible for the age (Giebelhausen, 2006: 1). For many artists the very purpose of Protestant religious art was a desire to foster an understanding of the Bible ‘aimed to make the gospel narratives comprehensible and relevant to a wide audience’ (Giebelhausen, 2006: 4). This could operate in both the private and public spheres. Roberts’ *Departure of the Israelites* (1829) was circulated in print form, but also became the subject of one of his giant dioramic paintings at the Royal Bazaar, Oxford Street where it was praised as ‘The first illustration of Scriptural History ever painted on so grand a scale.’⁴ Similarly, Frederick Catherwood spent six weeks disguised in Egyptian dress while drawing the Dome of the Rock and other scenes, later used as source material for Robert Burford’s *Panorama of Jerusalem* in 1836. According to Burritt, this was visited by ‘more than 140,000 people’ in its first season (Burritt, 2020: 55).

What little we know about Roberts’ religious attitudes is gleaned from his writings. There is a daily Journal (written, no doubt, with an eye to posterity) and there are letters; principally those he sent to his teenage daughter Christine. Given the purpose of these two primary sources, and the reticence we might expect given his religious upbringing in the Scottish Presbyterian church, it is perhaps understandable that he might be less than forthcoming about his deeper religious feelings (Burritt, 2020).

Burritt produces a highly nuanced account which acknowledges the significance of his childhood faith but questions whether this was his primary motivation in visiting the Holy Land. There are moments in his Journals where he seems to express an explicitly spiritual response. Gazing across the Suez, he speaks of the ‘moral grandeur’ derived from ‘the mighty events which took place there’ (Ballantine, 1866: 41). When leaving Petra, he describes looking back ‘at the deserted city, so sad a memorial to divine judgement’ (Mancoff, 1999: 93).

Although these observations appear to accept the veracity of biblical events, it is not easy to tell whether these were his personal views or whether he was merely ‘record [ing] what he was told, assuming his scepticism to be implicit’ (Burritt, 2020: 95). He had earlier claimed that the subject of the *Departure of Israelites* was chosen because

⁴ Unsourced press report quoted in (Mancoff, 1999: 36-7).

of the technical challenges offered by ‘that grand although simple style of architecture’ rather than its religious significance, and didn’t scruple to change proportions or add dramatic lighting effects to increase the theatrical impact of his Holy Land compositions (Mancoff, 1999: 21). Burritt concludes that although he ‘frequently recalls the Bible stories he learnt as a child’, the ‘Visual and written evidence supports the interpretation that Roberts saw everything from the perspective of an artist and as a potential picture’ (Burritt, 2020: 104).

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Roberts’ Eastern travels marked the high point of his career as a painter, the culmination of a carefully cultivated progress as he worked his way through the social strata of the London art world and left him poised for the ultimate accolade as Royal Academician. With characteristic thoroughness he had paved the way for this achievement. He was an occasional exhibitor at the Royal Academy from 1826 and in 1837 gifted a copy of *Picturesque Sketches in Spain* to its President, Sir Martin Archer Shee, and was rewarded during his absence in the Holy Land with his election as an Associate in 1838. Roberts was now part of a pool of artists from which full Academicians could be elected.

Roberts understood the benefits of publicity and whilst he was confident his new work would appeal to wealthy and influential patrons, there was also a sense of urgency if he was to benefit from the public attention his trip had created. The months after his arrival in London in late July 1839 were busy ones with a trip to Edinburgh to visit his parents, a move into new premises more suited to the reception of distinguished guests and the ongoing search for a publisher. Yet amidst all this activity he found time to produce no fewer than five canvases in time for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, which opened in May 1840.

As usual, the 72nd Royal Academy Summer exhibition received its fair share of criticism, and it was noted that the Queen and her party spent little more than an hour viewing the entire 1,250 exhibits. Turner was singled out for particular opprobrium,

his 'gorgeous extravagancies... increasing in absurdity year by year.'⁵ There were also the customary complaints about the way the exhibition was hung. Roberts was particularly unfortunate in this respect, his *Remains of the portico of the lesser temple at Baalbec* 'placed, because it is nearly the best picture of the thousand, in a locale that is commonly awarded to the obscure.'⁶

What could be in no doubt was the triumphant success enjoyed by Roberts. There was praise for his skill in rendering marble and other natural materials (a legacy perhaps of his time as a house painter), his command of picturesque effect, and the intrinsic value of his subject matter. 'Mr. Roberts, in visiting those scenes which time and fame have hallowed, has caught the true spirit of their classical grandeur.'⁷ 'Roberts is this year almost all excellence. One among several of his fine and truly classical paintings [*Remains of the portico of the lesser temple at Baalbec*] is unsurpassed by any other work in the exhibition.'⁸ Roberts joined the exclusive ranks of Royal Academicians in 1841 and a year later received the accolade of joining the hanging committee. Roberts also maintained his links with the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts, a rather grand and somewhat elitist private organisation much frequented by the nobility. His rise to prominence as an artist was complete.

During this same hectic period Roberts also began cultivating a public persona, sitting for a portrait by his friend Robert Scott Lauder. Ostensibly this is a portrait showing Roberts wearing 'clothes worn in Palestine'. However, as Burritt has shown his Bedouin costume is a confection, including elements of traditional Turkish dress and a *qilij*, a weapon issued to Egyptian soldiers (Burritt, 2020: 74). This is make-believe, but serves a deliberate purpose in creating an impression of Roberts as an intrepid explorer rather than a mere tourist.

As John Rodenbeck has shown, Westerners wearing Turkish or Arab clothes were generally concerned for their own safety or conforming to local restrictions (Rodenbeck, 2001) and Roberts only wore local dress when entering sensitive religious sites (Tromans, 2008: 104-5). He portrays himself conventionally attired in *Interview with Mehemet Ali in his*

⁵ *Morning Post* 5 May 1840 5f.

⁶ *Morning Post* 7 May 1840 6a.

⁷ *Morning Post* 7 May 1840 6a.

⁸ *Morning Post* 5 May 1840 5f.

Palace at Alexandria 1839 in the company with British Consul General in Alexandria, Colonel Patrick Campbell and other European officials. However, in *View From Under the Portico of Dayr-El-Medineh, Thebes* he includes an anachronistic self-portrait, painting among the ruins in native dress. This creates the illusion that his work was somehow clandestine or even dangerous, and that he stands apart from the 'Cockney tourists and Yankee travellers' vandalising monuments or defacing them with graffiti (Ballantine 1866, 48). In truth Roberts was a highly privileged traveller under the personal protection of the Pasha, accompanied by armed guards and offered exclusive access to otherwise forbidden sites.

Alongside these activities, Roberts was at working to find a publisher. He had opened negotiations with the Finden brothers' publishing house even before leaving for the Holy Land, but they balked at the £10,000 price tag. By February 1840 he was signing a contract with F.G. Moon, granting him £3000 for the rights to reproduce his drawings. Building on his previous experiences the work was to be reproduced to the most exacting standards using colour lithography, a costly process which required a separate stone for each added tint and perfect registration. In the more expensive version, every plate would then be painted by hand. In the more expensive version, every plate would then be painted by hand. There was grandeur and perhaps theatricality in the venture, and Roberts was closely involved from first to last. Every sketch was re-drawn by Roberts who worked closely with the lithographer Louis Haghe until the publication was finally completed in 1849, ten years after he had first set out on his expedition. This time Roberts kept control of his work, selling only the reproduction rights. In 1844 he completed 122 of the drawings, 72 of which he sold to Lord Francis Egerton for £1400.

This was a highly risky venture and success was not guaranteed so in parallel with the Royal Academy show Moon set about the vital task of attracting patrons for the book. Within a fortnight of the Queen's visit to see the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1840 Moon was at Buckingham Palace showing her Roberts' drawings, and by the end of the month his private visits had included Adelaide, the Queen Dowager at Marlborough House and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace.⁹

⁹ *Sun* (London) 15 May 1840 3g; *Morning Post* 23 May 1840 6e; *Evening Mail* 1 June 1840 4e.

Having secured this illustrious support, Moon turned to the next part of his strategy—a very exclusive exhibition in central London. Some 300 ‘finished drawings’ were privately exhibited ‘to persons of distinction’ from 11-13 June at Mr. Rainy’s Gallery at 14 Regent Street. This was a very grand building, designed by the architect John Nash as part of his own residence to house his copies of Raphael paintings. As if to illustrate the interconnectedness of London’s exhibition spaces, Rainy had taken this over after Nash’s death as a business premises and exhibition space, operating until 1850 when it adopted a new role as the Gallery of Illustration, showing dioramic paintings.

Moon realised that finding the support he needed would take more than just picturesque ruins. Attracting the most distinguished patronage of the age would require subject matter of the most elevating kind; something which put the work above purely aesthetic considerations. With this in mind, he decided not to present the drawings as a travelogue representing the route of Roberts’ journey but instead to put the emphasis firmly on the biblical sites.

Fortunately for Moon, this interpretation had been inadvertently fostered by Roberts himself. While he was in Cairo, he had met the French explorer and chief engineer of Egypt’s public works Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds, who urged him not to miss the opportunity to visit Petra. He subsequently received an offer to join a party led by his new friends John Pell and John Kinnear who proposed a different route from that planned by Roberts, taking in the ruins of Petra and the Monastery of St. Catherine (Mancoff, 1999: 79). These chance encounters prompted Roberts to change his original itinerary, taking the more circuitous route out of Egypt once followed by Moses rather than the more direct journey to Jerusalem via El Arish and Gaza as he first intended (Roberts, 1989: I-9). Following the route of the Exodus was an afterthought, but served Moon’s purposes well. By reinforcing the impression that Roberts intended his work as a contemplation of places sanctified by the Bible, he lifted the whole enterprise above mere voyeuristic curiosity to become almost as an act of religious observance.

The publishing schedule would naturally reflect this change of emphasis. The lithographs were to be issued in fifty parts, each containing six drawings. The Holy Land, Palestine, and Edom would appear first, the initial 20 issues forming two volumes, each with 60 engravings. This would be followed by another two volumes of equal size relating to Ancient Egypt and Nubia, with one final volume of 60 engravings

describing Modern Egypt.¹⁰ In the event, this plan was further modified. The views of Holy Land would form three volumes rather than two, as would the views of Egypt, but the plan to celebrate modern Egypt was abandoned. It is also significant that the first volume issued to subscribers was not devoted to Mount Sinai, as the Prospectus had promised (Moon, 1840: B2) but at the Damascus Gate. Like a theatrical proscenium this would 'open' up to reveal the wonders of Jerusalem. Any notion of this as a travelogue following a recognisable route through the Holy Lands was abandoned, and the starting point was instead a symbolic one, the very birthplace of Christianity.

The text accompanying the exhibition catalogue, and later the text to accompany the lithographs, was written by the Reverend George Croly, 'Rector of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, London'. Again, Moon made his intentions clear. Rather than basing the accompanying text on the colourful diary entries created by Roberts, this would be of the most elevating and improving nature combining historical notes with biblical references. Croly was an Anglican priest, historian and poet said to possess 'a sort of rude and indeed angry eloquence that would have stood him in better stead at the bar than in the pulpit.'¹¹ There is evidence that Roberts was not entirely happy with this choice. Croly introduced a strong tone of evangelical preaching in marked contrast to Roberts' more measured mode of expression, and in places even contradicted Roberts' personal observations (Burritt, 2020: 93-4; Mancoff, 1999: 94). Roberts sarcastically described his contribution as being 'least equal to all that was expected of him' while his daughter Christine found his company 'even worse than expected' (Mancoff, 1999: 117).

The decision to downplay the Egyptian part of the journey was made explicit, with none of these images included among the 72 on show in the Exhibition. In his Introduction, Moon explained that this will be 'a series of drawings... especially with a view to illustrate the localities and landscape of Holy Scripture' (Moon, 1840). We might contrast this emphasis with the paintings Roberts had exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition just a few weeks earlier. Here, he had chosen five subjects; only one of which was central to the Christian story. There was the temple of Baalbek, a favourite subject for Roberts, and three scenes along the Nile at Thebes,

¹⁰ *Caledonian Mercury* 28 December 1840, 3a.

¹¹ S. C. Hall *A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, From Personal Acquaintance* pp. 232, 233 quoted in *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900* entry Croly, George.

Edfou and Cairo. Though much admired, the religious subject chosen for the *Interior of the Greek Church of the Holy Nativity at Bethlehem* was very much the exception. The critical commentary made little of Roberts' work as part of spiritual or philosophical undertaking. 'Mr. Roberts, in visiting those scenes which time and fame have hallowed, has caught the true spirit of their classical grandeur.'¹² 'No architectural paintings lie or stand or recede like his, and here too the management of contending lights and clashing distances, with detail and effect combined, and the admirable arrangement of groups of figures, make a magnificent whole.'¹³

We might conclude from this that Moon rather than Roberts determined the layout of the exhibition in Rainy's Gallery and the ordering of the published lithographs, knowing that the connection with the Holy Land rather than the glories of ancient Egypt would be the main selling point. Moon also let it be known that this was a noble undertaking, certainly above such sordid concerns as making money for the publisher. According to one newspaper report, 'in giving publicity to these most valuable sketches in the only form suited to their just and proper representation, he has honourably connected his name with a work which, if well done, will be of lasting benefit to history and art.' Referring to Roberts' receipt of a Royal Academy diploma, it was observed that 'These, his sketches, will live forever', even when 'time and the sand' have obliterated the original structures.¹⁴

The exhibition in Regent Street was another triumph, attracting a Who's Who of 'illustrious individuals, all well-known patrons of art.'¹⁵ The Duke of Wellington, the Duke of Marlborough and a plethora of Lords, Ladies, Earls and Countesses attended along with 'Most of the members of the Royal Academy' including the President, Sir David Wilkie, and Sir Francis Chantrey. Indeed, it was probably the success of this exhibition which prompted Wilkie to set off on his own ill-fated trip to the Holy Land in August 1840, resulting in his death and burial at sea.

After the exhibition, Moon transferred the drawings to his own premises in Threadneedle Street, where they remained available for inspection. Thereafter they

¹² *Morning Post* 7 May 1840 6a.

¹³ *The Atlas* 16 May 1840.

¹⁴ *Morning Post* 9 June 1840 5f.

¹⁵ *Loc cit.*

were taken to a number of other cities. In August Sir Robert Peel saw them in an exhibition at another 'Mr. Davey's Room', this time in Broad Street, Bristol, and immediately 'added his distinguished name to the numerous list of subscribers'.¹⁶ According to newspaper reports the drawings were now divided into five sections, of which four were of sites with biblical associations. Visitors were taken from the 'Wilderness of Sinai', through 'Idumea, or Edom' and 'the Holy Land', and on to the 'Temple of Baalbec', the most distant place Roberts was able to visit. Only in section 5 could they enjoy 'a variety of subjects from ancient and modern "Egypt and Nubia"'.¹⁷ The main emphasis remained the religious significance of the collection. These drawings were now described as an 'invaluable records from the lands of Scripture and the cradle of history, the scene of the first and second revelation.'¹⁸ The views in and around Jerusalem became central, 'The third, and most important portion of the exhibition'; allowing the viewer to witness 'the very plains trodden by the patriarchs—the very cities in which the prophets and apostles preached—the very mountains and waters hallowed by the presence of the Great Sovereign and inspirer of them all.'¹⁹

The most prominent of these provincial exhibitions was held in Roberts' hometown of Edinburgh in December 1840. There was understandable local pride in the news that a series of drawings by 'our highly-gifted and distinguished townsman' would be on show and the organiser, a local publisher, was compelled to take larger premises for the occasion. From press commentary it is clear that the emphasis was again on 'the localities and landscape of the Holy Scriptures', the collection providing 'existing proof of sacred history, and of the fulfilment of those prophecies which foretold their ruin and perpetual desolation'. A detailed account in the *Caledonian Mercury* described many highlights of the exhibition but noticeably ends its description with the nine drawings of Baalbek, with no mention of the Egyptian subjects. Whether they were even included in the exhibition is unclear, but their significance was at the very least downplayed.²⁰

¹⁶ *Bristol Mercury* 8 August 1840 8b.

¹⁷ *Morning Post* 9 June 1840 5f.

¹⁸ *The Atlas* 13 June 1840 13c-14a.

¹⁹ *Morning Post* 9 June 1840 5f.

²⁰ *Caledonian Mercury* 28 December 1840, 3a; 5 December 1840, 3cd.

The publicity campaign was now in earnest, and even Roberts' entries for the 1841 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition became in effect a promotional opportunity for the forthcoming publication. Of the eight paintings each artist was permitted to enter Roberts exhibited just three, all of which would be re-worked as lithographs for wider distribution. Only *The Temple of Dendera* (1841) was from an Egyptian subject, listed in the prospectus as the *Temple of Dandour* (Moon, 1840: 39) and later appearing in Volume 4 *Egypt and Nubia as Portico of the temple of Dendera*. The other two paintings on display were *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives* and the *Gateway to the Great Temple at Baalbec* which Roberts presented to the Royal Academy as his Diploma work, the final stage in his acceptance as an Academician. Drawings of these same subjects appeared among the 72 shown at Moon's promotional exhibition, later published as lithographs in Volumes 1 and 2 of *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea and Arabia*.

Each of Roberts' entries in the 1841 Exhibition was accompanied with a passage of text drawn from diverse sources. For the most part these differ from those supplied by Croly, although a passage from the *Lamentations of Jeremiah* also appears in the Royal Academy and the exhibition Catalogue (Moon, 1840). We can probably assume these were chosen by Roberts rather than Croly, and they mark a distinct change of style from his earlier writing; a clear attempt to introduce an air of contemplative introspection in keeping with the mood Moon was trying to engender. Aside from a brief descriptive passage accompanying his view of Jerusalem these are evocative and poetic texts from the Scottish explorer James Bruce's *Travels To Discover The Source Of The Nile* (1790), Thomas Moore's Oriental romance *Lalla Rookh* (1817) and the Bible.

The Regents Park Diorama

The Royal Academy show had opened in May 1840 and by June the book had secured illustrious support through private showings and a successful private exhibition in London. By August the drawings had left the capital for a series of further exhibitions. Meanwhile, Moon kept interest in the project alive by sanctioning the use of one of the sketches in another, very different form.

Daguerre's Diorama (1823) was a well-established London attraction housed in a purpose-built structure in a fashionable part of town. Patrons were led along shadowy passages and dimly lit stairways until they found themselves sitting in a circular chamber in complete darkness. By careful control of natural light, a large painting was

revealed which combined opaque sections with translucent areas which could be lit from behind. The whole auditorium then rotated, allowing the audience to see a second dioramic painting. The application of these arrangements was highly sophisticated, and the whole designed to create a convincing illusory effect. This was greatly enhanced after 1834 by the so-called 'double-effect' by which the translucent parts of the canvas were themselves painted, allowing transformation scenes like those already enjoyed in theatrical pantomimes (Altick, 1978: 163-72).

The chance to create a dioramic painting after Roberts' celebrated drawings came at an opportune moment in the institution's history. The original French Diorama had been destroyed by fire in 1839 and the manager of the London branch, Charles-Marie Bouton, was summoned back to Paris. His replacement was Charles Renoux, and this would be his first commission in London; an opportunity to show off his mastery of the 'double-effect' diorama.

The subject chosen for his debut was *The Shrine of the Nativity at Bethlehem*, 'painted by M. Renoux, from a Sketch made on the spot by David Roberts, A.R.A., in 1839'.²¹ In a narrative sense this seems to follow on from *The Greek Church of the Holy Nativity at Bethlehem* shown at the Royal Academy in 1840, in which the grandeur of the church is contrasted with the entrance to the vault of the nativity 'sternly solemn in its aspect', leaving the observer 'stayed at its threshold in pause-filled awe.'²² This was a fitting subject to encapsulate the whole project as Moon had now conceived it; a representation of the literal birthplace of Christianity.

This same review suggests the qualities in Roberts' paintings which might have attracted Renoux:

...behind the highest cross a beautiful light breaks through as if from Heaven, upon the picture, and falls and lingers where the painter wills. The pilgrims in the foreground complete the fullness of the subject, and make up its measure of strength and grace.²³

²¹ *Morning Post* 9 September 1840 1c.

²² *Morning Post* 7 May 1840 6a.

²³ *Morning Post* 7 May 1840 6a.

The emphasis is on lighting effects and the pilgrims in the foreground who serve to create illusory depth, animating the architectural space like figures in a theatrical set.

We might compare this with similar descriptions of the newly painted Diorama, which comprised three distinct scenes. It began with a simple representation of the shrine as it then existed followed by a change of lighting which revealed a scene of monks celebrating evening mass in the church above. The most spectacular scene, however, was saved until last.

Unnoticed lamps light as stars, figures of monks and friars before unseen, take the eye and wing the imagination to the scene perhaps at that moment taking place in reality, and the whole resembles the illusions of Arabian Night's tale, or the vivid mockery of a dream... [T]he effects of the light from the lamps striking upwards on the ropes by which they are suspended, the glow and corresponding shade on the crimson canopy and drapery of the manger, and the chiaroscuro of the receding portions of the Chapel, are perfect.²⁴

Renoux was much praised for both art and artistry, demonstrating not only 'the nicest discrimination and most perfect knowledge in matters of art', but also a mastery of 'the mechanical contrivances required to produce such a graduated effect.'²⁵ He 'has produced a work of art bordering so closely upon reality... that a visitor might almost persuade himself he was gazing on the identical spot where our Saviour was born.'²⁶

This was a call to religious contemplation, the emotional and psychological impact reinforced by distant bells as darkness approached, and the 'deep tones of an organ'.²⁷ Where reviews might more routinely have confined their comments to the illusory qualities of a new Diorama, newspaper commentary spoke of this almost as a spiritual experience. 'The whole scene... [was] of a very solemn and imposing description.'²⁸ This was a 'solemn scene', which 'together with the associations to which the advent of the Redeemer gives rise, produce a sublime effect.'²⁹ 'The very hush of the spectators proves the effect produced... The *religio loci* upon them.'³⁰

²⁴ *John Bull* 12 September 1840, 9b.

²⁵ *Weekly Dispatch* (London) 13 September 1840 8c.

²⁶ *Reading Mercury* 26 September 1840, 4c.

²⁷ *Weekly Dispatch* (London) 13 September 1840 8c.

²⁸ *Sun* (London) 3 March 1842, 7b.

²⁹ *Sun* (London) September 1840 3c.

³⁰ *John Bull* 12 September 1840, 9b.

If the religious emphasis belonged to Moon's strategising rather than Roberts' aesthetic preferences, the decision to permit a dioramic adaptation of one of his drawings would have met little resistance from Roberts. The Diorama was a highly respectable place of entertainment, and it was a medium with which he was already familiar.

The Dissolving Views

At Easter 1842 Moon sanctioned another entertainment based on the Holy Land drawings, this time of an altogether novel kind as subjects for the Dissolving Views at the Polytechnic Institution. Again, this was a strategic decision, the launch of the series of views coinciding with the publication of the first of the 20 parts of *The Holy Land* in March.³¹ At the same time, the Diorama was re-opening for the season with a revival of Renoux's *Shrine of the Nativity, at Bethlehem*.³² These were mutually beneficial arrangements. The Diorama and the Polytechnic drew audiences attracted by topical interest in the publication, while Moon kept the Roberts drawings in the public eye at a crucial stage of his marketing campaign.

Just as the commissioning of the *Shrine of the Nativity* diorama had arrived at a propitious moment, coinciding with the arrival of Renoux, this latest application of the drawings was also serendipitous. Although the principle of dissolving views was long established, the medium was effectively invented at the Polytechnic Institution at Easter 1841 (Brooker, 2013: 52-4). A specially constructed lantern with two optical systems, each with its own oxy-hydrogen light source, allowed images to dissolve, one into the other, creating strange and sometimes baffling transitions. One image 'became' another in an entirely unfamiliar way, quite unlike the revolving auditorium of the Diorama or the shutter mechanism which masked the transitions between images at the British Diorama.

The dissolving views created an immediate sensation, and the Polytechnic embarked on a rapid process of development. Astute observers saw the comparison with the Diorama from the outset, and this was precisely what the proprietors were hoping. 'In this exhibition, we are disposed to imagine, some of the secrets of the

³¹ *Morning Chronicle* 3 March 1842, 1e.

³² *Sun* (London) 3 March 1842, 7b.

changing light and shade of the Diorama are repeated; and in a manner, we must say, likely to make the show of Regent Street a formidable rival to the show in the Regent's Park.'³³ '[T]he novelty consists in imperceptibly creating a picture on the canvas, while another picture, the predecessor of the new comer, as imperceptibly disappears from the view of the spectator; and this, be it remembered, on the same surface and without the slightest assistance from transparencies.'³⁴

The subject matter became increasingly ambitious. The first series of slides comprised 18 sequences including a battle at sea, the Royal Exchange transforming from its original grandeur to its ruinous state after a fire in 1838 and finally to the proposed new building which would rise in its place, and a representation of the passing seasons. '[H]ouses and trees covered with snow; an almost imperceptible change takes place, and the same objects are seen under the influence of spring; these in their turn give way to the heat and light of summer, which finally "dissolve" into the mellowed hues of autumn.'³⁵

These kinds of heterogeneous sequences had long typified magic lantern performance, albeit now shown with far greater sophistication. The turning point appears to have come at Christmas 1841 when the Polytechnic introduced a series of dissolving views based on engravings from Julia Pardoe's *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1838) and Thomas Allom's *Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor* (1839). The challenge of transferring these fine engravings to glass in a manner which could withstand the scrutiny of large-scale magnification on a projection screen pushed the medium to its limits.

Recognising these limitations, the Polytechnic made a bold decision. In March 1842, just a year after their commencement, the dissolving view projectors and the entire existing stock of slides was abandoned. Henceforth they would use new lanterns with improved lighting and optical systems and crucially also much bigger slides. This gave the artists a larger surface on which to work, allowing higher levels of detail and precision (Brooker, 2013: 57).

³³ *Athenaeum* 1841 p.560a.

³⁴ *Morning Advertiser* - Tuesday 20 April 1841 2e.

³⁵ *Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser* 17 April 1841 3b.

The subject chosen for the 'enlarged and improved' dissolving views was an entirely new sequence by the slide artist Charles Smith, 'from the work now in course of publication by Mr. Moon, entitled "The Holy Land".'³⁶ Without the aid of photography these had to be hand painted directly onto the glass and because of the painstaking and laborious methods involved it was announced that these would be added piecemeal over a period of times.

The Dissolving Views had already brought the Polytechnic great popular success. In December 1841 there were reports of 3,500 visitors in a single day, 'one of the principal attractions being the new dissolving views, which were exhibited nine or ten times during the morning and evening.'³⁷ '[T]he theatre in which the exhibition takes place has been literally crammed, both during the mornings and in the evenings.'³⁸ With the advent of the 'improved' dissolving views this popularity reached new heights and in December 1842 'the number of visitors exceeded by 1000 the number on any previous occasion. Several hundred persons were refused admission in the course of the day.'³⁹ On Boxing Day it was said that no fewer than 5,000 people attended.⁴⁰ If the Dissolving Views brought popular success, they also attracted distinguished visitors including the Duke of Wellington and Count Alexander Mensdorf, first cousin of the Queen, with his four sons.⁴¹

With the launch of the *Holy Land* slides the Polytechnic Dissolving Views became a serious rival to the Diorama. The Polytechnic theatre could seat 500, far more than the 200 at the Diorama, and could be shown any number of times with minimal preparation between showings. The sequence could be added to or changed at will, creating an informal travelogue. Slides were also far cheaper to produce and easier to store. The challenge was complete in 1848, when a new purpose built theatre was added to the existing Polytechnic building to seat 1500 people, specifically designed to show dissolving views. Fittingly, the *Holy Land* slides were revived for the occasion;

³⁶ *Morning Post* 30 March 1842, 3c.

³⁷ *Morning Post* 28 December 1841, 3e.

³⁸ *The Era* - Sunday 11 July 1841, 5b.

³⁹ *Cheltenham Chronicle* 29 December 1842, 2c.

⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury* - Saturday 31 December 1842, 5a.

⁴¹ *Morning Post* 3 May 1841, 3b *Morning Post* 3 June 1842 5c.

now shown, like the original Diorama, in an idealised space especially suited to their technical requirements.

Although the sequence would eventually comprise 19 subjects, no complete record of *Holy Land* slides has been found. From press reports we know there was a version of the *Shrine of the Nativity* (as also featured at the Diorama), the *Chapel of St. Helena*, and the *Interior of the Greek Church*; the very subject Roberts had used at the Royal Academy in 1840.⁴² A published account by Johann-Conrad Fischer in the summer of 1845 also mentions exterior and interior views of St Catherine's Monastery, and the salt desert around Sinai (Fischer, 1846).

It is unclear how these slides were presented in performance. A review in the *Times* mentions a 'much admired change from darkness to light' in connection with the *Shrine of the Nativity*, which appears to echo the lighting effects seen at the Diorama. Otherwise, there is no mention of effects even though these were already an established feature of the Polytechnic's dissolving views. We also know that music played a part, with 'Each scene... introduced by appropriate music', adapted from existing sources by Dr. Wallis, the musical director⁴³ (Brooker, 2005).

It is also unclear whether these were shown as a kind of travelogue or treated more as a pool of images. To judge from Fischer's account, there was in general little logic behind the sequencing of views, with various topographical subjects presented in juxtaposition (Fischer, 1846: 67-9; Brooker, 2013: 55). However, a review from 1848 mentions 'The series of views in the Holy Land from the sketches of David Roberts, which still supply the subjects of the Dissolving Views properly so called. They form a very beautiful panorama from Edom to Baalbec.'⁴⁴ This appears to suggest they were shown as a coherent sequence, forming a distinct category as 'Dissolving views properly so called' in distinction with the rest of the programme. This accords with a letter written by Roberts' daughter, now Christine Bicknell, on 10 May 1848. 'We went to the Polytechnic to see the dissolving views from my father's *Holy Land* in their new theatre. They were very well done' (Jones, 1990: 62). This clearly suggests that the slides were treated as a self-contained sequence, perhaps representing Roberts' actual journey.

⁴² *Sun (London)* 10 August 1842, 1d.

⁴³ *Morning Post* 24 December 1841, 3c.

⁴⁴ *Tablet* 11 November 1848, 14a.

The Burford Panorama

Once the first three volumes of Holy Land lithograph were complete, Moon turned his attention to the Egyptian drawings. This portion of the work had been somewhat delayed 'until Mr. Roberts and Mr. Louis Haghe could commence their portions of this important undertaking with the certainty of its progress to completion without interruption' (Burford, 1847). Roberts was hard at work in 1846 producing the finished drawings, and in November 1847 the first part of *Egypt and Nubia* was published. Though uniform with the earlier editions this was a somewhat different publication, and another writer was now entrusted to write the accompanying texts (Sims, 1984: 220-1).

The remaining volumes would be written by William Brockendon, a skilled artist as well as a writer. Though Roberts was critical of his lack of originality (Mancoff, 1999: 117), the tone was far more approachable and although there were many references to authoritative sources, these are offset with colourful descriptions and anecdotes from Robert's diaries. This allows the artist to emerge as more of a personality than in the earlier volumes.

There are also noticeable incursions from the modern world. At Aboo Simbel, Roberts complains about the 'contemptible relic-hunters, who have also been led by their vanity to smear their vulgar names on the very foreheads of the Egyptian deities.' There are also depictions of Roberts' travelling companions clambering up the colossal statues at Thebes and he includes a group of tourists lolling in front of the portico of Deir-el-Median. There is even a depiction of Roberts' meeting with the Pasha, Mohammed Ali and his entourage.

To mark the publication of *Egypt and Nubia* Roberts' work was utilised for yet another popular attraction, this time at the Panorama just off Leicester Square. This purpose built structure had been in continuous operation since 1794 initially under its inventor, Henry Barker and from 1826 under the sole proprietorship of Robert Burford (Altick 1978, 137). The building was a realisation of Barker's 1787 patent for an illusory space where viewers could experience a 360⁰ painted vista, as if observing the natural world from some elevated position. Imitators soon appeared and the word 'Panorama' entered the lexicon but few if any copied the full circle of Barker's original conception, most opting for curved or even flat surfaces. This novelty, coupled with an adroit choice of subject matter, made this one of the great survivors among the London

shows. The Panorama would finally close its doors in 1863, two years after Burford's death, after a continuous existence of almost 70 years.

Burford was a talented painter who occasionally exhibited at the Royal Academy, and was a personal friend of Roberts. In a diary entry written in Cairo on 29 January 1839, Roberts records the genesis of the sketch from which the Panorama would be made. 'Mr. Pell promises to be ready in eight days, and I shall fill up the time here in making a panorama of Cairo for my friend Burford.' He completed the task in four days, 'four and a half sheets— not bad for the time; the subject is excellent'⁴⁵ (Ballantine, 1866: 113).

This sketch was not part of the agreement with Moon and was never intended to be part of the *Holy Land* publication and he could have handed it over to Burford at any time. Money was clearly not a major consideration. Roberts charged just £50 for his work, and we must assume that Roberts deliberately withheld it until this moment when it would help launch the new series of publications.

The *View of Grand Cairo* was painted by Burford and his regular collaborator Henry Selous. Selous was a well-known illustrator and artist in his own right; a former student of John Martin who showed 60 paintings at the Royal Academy during his lifetime. The Burford panoramas were painted in eight sections at a studio in Kentish Town and assembled on-site, where they were tensioned between two rails, each 283ft [86m] in circumference (Altick, 1978: 139). Roberts was closely involved in the work, even loaning costumes from his own 'extensive and splendid collection of dresses' (Burford, 1847). Unlike the Diorama or the Dissolving Views this was a form of self-guided travelogue in which the observer could search out buildings, natural features of the landscape and even named individuals from a published guidebook.

Though this exhibition may have been beneficial to Moon he was not explicitly involved in the project, which feels more like a puff piece for Roberts than a tool to sell books. A copy of the programme which accompanied the exhibition of the panorama has survived, in which hagiographic descriptions of the forthcoming publication appear not only in the portion allotted to advertisements but as a preface. 'The interest and value of the forthcoming graphic Illustrations of Ancient Egypt and Nubia cannot fail to be acknowledged when the ability of the Artists—pre-eminent in their power to

⁴⁵ This pencil and watercolour sketch is reproduced in (Tromans 2008, 102-3).

produce such a work' are considered. These encomiums sit awkwardly alongside advertisements for an invisible ventilating peruke, a purveyor of carpets and domestic furnishing in nearby Leicester Square, an invisible support to correct deformities of the spine and more prosaic items such as water closets, hair oil and cigars (Burford, 1847).

This clumsy and blatant commercialism raised a few eyebrows, and certainly lacked Moon's deft touch for keeping the financial aspects of the publication at arm's length. 'The prefatory notice... that Mr. Burford has appended to the description, seems to us a want of good taste, so warm a eulogium upon the artist employed to take the present view, and upon an unpublished work.'⁴⁶

The Panorama was not hugely successful and closed early in 1848. The show depended on good natural light and there were complaints about the weather.⁴⁷ Roberts felt that Burford had let him down, and suggested that had he charged a higher fee the proprietor might have tried harder (Sims, 1984: 250). It is also possible the fault lay with Roberts, in his attempts to reconcile the romance of Egyptian antiquity with the more mundane reality of a modern city. 'The city is not presented in the dress which poetry and romance have hung upon it. A mass of ruins, rather than a crowded metropolis, seems to be pictured.'⁴⁸

The Overland Route to India

Roberts' Holy Land drawings travelled from his notebooks and through the various strata of the London show economy as part of a carefully orchestrated marketing campaign. The success of this campaign is indisputable. Moon and Roberts managed to create a mystique around these drawings which elevated them into a *cause célèbre*; not merely a sightseeing tour of exotic places but a mystical experience which took the viewer to the very sites described in the Bible.

Of course, the journey did not end there, and other places encountered Roberts' work in a variety of forms. The exhibition of drawings which started in such grand style

⁴⁶ *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* 14 March 1847, 5e.

⁴⁷ *Morning Post* 12 March 1847, 5e.

⁴⁸ *Morning Post* 12 March 1847, 5e.

continued, passing through the Music Hall, Leeds in 1842 and other provincial towns.⁴⁹ There were also other, perhaps less ‘official’ adaptations trading on Roberts’ fame and reputation in heterogeneous presentations which almost invariably added the suffix ‘R.A.’ to his name and emphasised the authenticity of the views.

In September 1841 we find Moses Gompertz at a Masonic Lodge in York with his *Grand Moving Diorama through Turkey and Syria*, culminating in spectacular fashion with the bombardment of St. Jean D’Acre in 1840. Also included in the programme were three dioramas representing the heroism of Grave Darling, the death of Nelson and (in block capitals) the *Holy Shrine of the Nativity at Bethlehem*, ‘Where Jesus was born in the days of Herod the King— Matt. ii. 1.’ Gompertz promised his visitors an ‘extraordinary’ picture, ‘acknowledged to surpass all similar Productions of the kind.’⁵⁰ It was presented with ‘solemn vocal music’⁵¹ and, like the original in Regent’s Park, comprised ‘three distinct effects’.⁵² ‘The diversity of shade, together with the brightness of the silver lamps in the chapel, is emulated very successfully. The latter is a very superior production, and cannot fail to arrest the attention of a discerning public.’⁵³ This proved a popular attraction, maintaining its place in Gompertz’s repertoire through the 1850s,⁵⁴ and was subsequently adopted by the famous touring company run by the Poole family (Huhtamo, 2012: 236-7; Powell, 1996).

In July 1848, a *Grand Moving Panorama* ‘conducted’ by Mr. W. S. Kelly at a hotel in Lincolnshire rather incongruously included two of Roberts’ paintings in its representation of Napoleon’s funeral and the sights of Paris.⁵⁵ In September of that same year Mr. Marshall appeared at the town hall in Cheltenham with ‘Four Views of Jerusalem and Vicinity, Painted from sketches taken on the spot by David Roberts, Esq., R.A.’ alongside three dioramic views of the stable of Bethlehem, ten views of Mexico and a diorama of *The Late Dreadful Attack On The Palais Royal—Late Revolution In Paris*.⁵⁶ In

⁴⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer* 5 March 1842, 5d ‘It will be the recollection of our readers, that the original sketches were exhibited at the Music Hall a few months since... and that they elicited, universally, the strongest expressions of admiration’.

⁵⁰ *York Herald* 11 September 1841, 2d.

⁵¹ *Cheltenham Looker-On* 29 July 1843.

⁵² *Morning Post* - Thursday 15 December 1842 3d.

⁵³ *Liverpool Mail* 15 January 1842 2d.

⁵⁴ *Kentish Gazette* 28 December 1852.

⁵⁵ *Lincolnshire Chronicle* 28 July 1848 4b.

⁵⁶ *Cheltenham Journal and Gloucestershire Fashionable Weekly Gazette* 4 September 1848 2d.

October Mr. Mackenzie 'of London' announced 'The Holy Land, from illustrations by David Roberts, R.A.', together with some 'beautiful Cosmorama, taken from Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land', at his Royal Gallery of Wax Models in Exeter.⁵⁷

Roberts' drawings again came into service at Easter 1850 as part of a moving panorama representing *The Overland Route to India* (Altick, 1978: 207). With an extraordinary circularity, this was shown at the New Gallery of Illustration, 14 Regent Street; the very hall where Roberts' sketches were first shown ten years earlier. The arrival of Banvard's giant panorama of scenes on the Mississippi River had created a new enthusiasm for these giant moving canvases which unrolled past the seated audience as if vicariously experiencing the various phases of the journey at first hand. Often referred to as *The Overland Mail to India*, it represented the route from Southampton via Gibraltar, Cairo and Suez to Ceylon and Calcutta pioneered by Waghorn and latterly administered on behalf of the government by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, P&O. Altick seems to suggest that part of the canvas was painted by Roberts, but this appears unlikely and the prospectus acknowledges only the 'kindness of David Roberts, Esq., R.A.' in supplying his 'Sketches in Egypt'⁵⁸ (Gallery of Illustration, 1850).

Various artists provided drawings for different parts of the journey, with Roberts' sketches representing the route through Egypt. The music (comprising 'National Airs' of various countries) was arranged by the Irish violinist and composer Michael Rophino Lacy and included Egyptian and Arabian melodies,⁵⁹ with an engaging commentary from journalist, author and raconteur J.H. Stocqueler.⁶⁰ Roberts' portions of the journey were represented not only among the 32 wood-engravings which illustrate the exhibition prospectus but, in an engraving, published in the *Illustrated London News*.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Western Times* 7 October 1848 4b.

⁵⁸ Altick suggests the programme included some stationary views, though this appears to be incorrect. Several parts were shown in this form for the press night, but the complete moving panorama was assembled in time for the public opening. See *Sun* (London) 30 March 1850, 3b; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* 31 March 1850, 2e.

⁵⁹ *Lady's Own Paper* 13 April 1850, 197-8.

⁶⁰ *Sun* (London) 30 March 1850, 3b.

⁶¹ *Illustrated London News* 30 March 1850, 220-1.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the emphasis on biblical sites in the lithographic publications which recorded Roberts' great expedition was due in large part to the astute publisher Moon who made this, rather than Egyptian antiquities, the primary focus. The layout and content of the promotional exhibition, the publication sequence, the selection of subjects sanctioned for use in public entertainments, and above all the choice of Croly to write the accompanying text came to define this as a primarily religious undertaking. That this strategy was successful can be gauged by the list of eminent subscribers from all walks of life keen to put their names to the project. These included many crowned heads and emperors, and a fair number of churchmen including the Supreme Governor of the Church of England Queen Victoria, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and at least 27 other Reverend gentlemen.

Amanda Burritt has suggested that Roberts' religious upbringing might only be one factor in his decision to visit the Holy Land. To judge from his subsequent paintings, it was Egypt and the ruins of Baalbek which held his imagination, and attracted his patrons, from the period of the Royal Academy exhibition in 1840 until the end of his life. Although Roberts continued to travel and received many prestigious commissions, he confided in a letter to Christine in 1843: 'Whether the impressions made on my mind by Egypt are never to be effaced, or whether places I have visited here are not interesting, I have felt little inclination to do anything' (Mancoff, 1999: 117). It would also appear that he was somewhat ambivalent about the attention he received, perhaps knowing that the praise for this as a noble religious undertaking was misplaced. At the reception in Edinburgh where he was eulogised for his 'pilgrimage of art' he chose to downplay his own role, suggesting that any competent artist could have done as much with such subject matter and politely refused an invitation to be similarly fêted in Glasgow (Mancoff, 1999: 115).

We can perhaps see the difference between Moon's and Roberts' visions play out in the relative failure of the Burford panorama. Part of Roberts' intention was to portray the modern Egypt under the benign influence of Mohammed Ali, 'One of the most extraordinary persons that figure in Mahomedan history' under whose care 'Egypt is approaching a state of civilization long unknown.' The opening sentence of the exhibition booklet accompanying the Panorama describes Cairo as 'the metropolis of Modern Egypt,' and alongside the antiquities we see glimpses of European-style

gardens and modern infrastructure to support tourism, and hear of the development of a European-style school system offering access to military, naval, and medical colleges alongside manufactories and the equitable rule of law. These incursions from the modern world reminded visitors that Egypt, like Britain, was subject to both social and technological change.

This is an altogether different message from that promoted by Moon, and perhaps suggests why the proposed final volume on modern Egypt was never produced. Roberts had arrived in Egypt as a tourist, an outsider, expressing typical unsympathetic views about local people and customs. As his journey progressed, he came to admire the people he met and was in general respectful in his encounters and impressed by the progress being made. Yet for many British Christians back home the appeal of the Holy Land was precisely that it appeared ‘unchanged and unchanging’; a “time capsule’ of the ancient and biblical world’ where scenes described in the Bible could still be witnessed (Burrirt, 2020: 71). Burrirt sees an often unconscious tension between a metaphorical and a geographical Holy Land– ‘belief in a religion which was Near Eastern in origin, a reverence for the Holy Land as a place where the historical Jesus lived, theology of a heavenly Jerusalem and a view of the contemporary reality of the region as totally alien and sometimes decadent and degraded’ (Burrirt, 2020: 47).

Elsewhere, Burrirt describes the production of lithographed folios as a ‘cost effective’ way to reach the ‘widest audience’ (Burrirt, 2020: 106). But is this really true? The 606 listed subscribers could choose between two distinct editions– a ‘standard’ version and a ‘deluxe’ version ‘laboriously hand coloured to give the impression of a watercolour rather than a print’ (Price, 2021). Even the cheaper edition would cost subscribers in excess of £43, and though sources are not consistent the more expensive one appears to have cost between £87 and an eye-watering £150 for the set. There are no records to say how many of each edition was produced, but it is estimated that the combined number probably did not exceed 1,000 copies (Price, 2021). This was one of the costliest publications of the era and it stands to reason that the number of people who saw it must have been small. Even if we factor in pirated editions and a cheaper version with fewer illustrations sanctioned by Moon in 1843, the numbers who had access to these images in printed form must have been relatively modest (Mancoff, 1999: 114).

Far greater numbers would have seen the series of promotional exhibitions organised by Moon or the paintings on similar themes exhibited at the Royal Academy.

However, these numbers were dwarfed by those visiting the Diorama where (as we have seen) a successful painting could be experienced by upwards of 140,000 people, while the Polytechnic could boast as many as 3,500, and in exceptional circumstances 5000 visitors in a single day. All this, it should be remembered, even before the first batch of lithographs was dispatched to subscribers. If we add the numbers who attended popular touring exhibitions like those of Gompertz it is clear that provincial audiences were also catered for and though it might be objected that these exhibitions would show only a tiny number of images the reputation of Roberts and his Holy Land drawings was hugely magnified through this process.

This paper might therefore be regarded as a detailed case study into the interconnectedness of London's, and to extent Britain's, exhibition economy. Roberts' work encompassed the whole range from exclusive private audiences for distinguished individuals and invitation-only exhibitions to regional touring panorama shows.

All this might be seen as evidence of the 'dissemination of knowledge' which was such a guiding principle for many in the 1840s. Wealthy industrialists, churchmen and radicals all promoted this ideal as a vital precondition for economic prosperity and societal change. Roberts was himself an exemplar for the attractive notion that low-born individuals could aspire to greatness by virtue of talent and hard work, and the distribution of his drawings through a variety of popular media allowed at least the possibility of access to this most exclusive of publications for all but the poorest and most remotely situated.

Alternatively, we might see this as evidence of the commoditisation of knowledge during the same period as ingenious individuals found ways to monetise its distribution. Chromolithography would in time bring colour not only into middle class homes through children's books and fine art publications but into the streets through posters and other advertising material. Dissolving views marked the beginnings of large-screen entertainment catering to mass audiences. The *Illustrated London News*, founded in 1842, ushered in a new age in illustrated print publications. Though Brockendon's claim that 'Thebes has become to the English traveller what Rome formerly was, and a visit to the Nile is not an adventure but an excursion' might be somewhat disingenuous, this period also saw the beginnings of popular tourism with the first Thomas Cook excursion in 1841 and the early activities of P&O. None of these developments were without precedent but all were effectively reinvented at precisely

this time, and all played their part in the dissemination and reception of Roberts' work. As always, his timing was impeccable. Fate so often seemed to be on his side at each phase of his career, and in retrospect we can see these sketches poised at a moment of change. Lurking behind the scenes was the new miracle of photography, a force which would revolutionise all aspects of image making and change notions of accuracy and truthful representation forever more.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy BROOKER is an independent researcher into various aspects of magic lantern performance practice. His particular areas of interest are the use of music and live action in conjunction with screen-based images, science as spectacle, stage illusion and optical magic. He has undertaken a number of site specific studies, notably on nineteenth-century institutions the Royal Polytechnic Institution, the Adelaide Gallery, the Royal Panopticon, the Royal Institution, and the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Jeremy Brooker is a founding member and current Chairman of the Magic Lantern Society. He formerly held the post of Research Officer, and was the first editor of its flagship quarterly publication *The Magic Lantern*. He is a regular participant in international conferences related to his fields of interest.