Objects in the photographic archive:

Between the field and the museum in Egyptian archaeology

Christina Riggs

Abstract

From the late 19th century, photography was inseparable from archaeological fieldwork, and object photography in particular was crucial to the creation and circulation of the archaeological artefact. Which objects were selected for photography, how they were photographed, and what then happened to both object and photograph: these interrelated aspects of 'the object habit' require further interrogation in order to situate the historical acts of knowledge production through which archaeologists, museum curators, and a wider public have apprehended the material remains of the ancient past. In this paper, I draw on examples of object photography in Egyptian archaeology from the 1850s onwards, and in particular, the archive formed during the 1920s excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Like the objects themselves, photographs were destined to circulate between field and museum, and the photographic requirements of these complementary spaces arguably influenced both the 'look' of object photographs and the way the photographs were themselves used and catalogued, not only at the time of a given excavation, but subsequently. As this paper argues, colonial-era formations of knowledge about the object endure in the archive, obscuring the social and material practices through which photography operated.

Keywords

archaeological photography, object photography, photographic archives, colonial archaeology, Théodule Devéria (1831-71), W. M. Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), Harry Burton (1879-1940)

Photographic practices were inseparable from both the development of archaeological fieldwork and the expansion of museum collections of archaeological objects in the latter half of the 19th century. In particular, the photography of individual objects or groups of objects was crucial in the creation of the archaeological artefact, that is, a physical and material fragment from the ancient past configured as evidence for the work of the archaeologist. This work encompassed much more than creating narratives and chronologies about antiquity, often based on the comparative study of artefact types or artistic styles that photography facilitated. The work of archaeology also required the object to assume a contemporary function, in networks of relationships between the field (often, as for Egypt, a colonized space), excavation sponsors, government administrations, and the

institutions tasked with caring for an artefact once it had been 'discovered' and identified as such – in most cases, museums. The archaeological object thus needed to exist in several times and places at once. Photography helped make that possible.

This paper examines the visual modes used to 'record' (as it was understood at the time) different kinds of artefacts in Egyptian archaeology during the late 19th and early 20th centuries – from the formative years of the discipline to the peak and gradual winding-down of field projects during the interwar period, as the independent Egyptian state established tighter control over the distribution of objects to foreign expeditions.[1] Like the objects themselves, photographs were destined to circulate between field and museum, and between Egypt and the European and North American museums that were the primary destinations of excavated objects, together with the national antiquities museum in Cairo. More restrictive distribution policies threw this function of the photograph into sharp relief, which the publication of object photographs in both academic and popular sources further emphasized. The photograph had always seemed to offer a substitute for what it represented, serving as an aide-memoire for the archaeologist separated from his actual objects of study and as an aid to the imagination for academics or members of the public unable to make the journey to see objects in person in their new museum homes. But which objects were selected for photography, how were they photographed, and what then happened to both object and photograph? These interrelated aspects of 'the object habit' require further interrogation in order to situate the historical acts of knowledge production through which archaeologists, museum curators, and a wider public have apprehended the material remains of the ancient past.

Theoretically informed and critically reflective studies of how photography shaped both archaeology and museum collections have only begun to appear relatively recently, and remain few in number.[2] Most historical studies of photography and Egyptian antiquity are essentially surveys that focus either on the work of 19th-century studio photographers, like Antonio Beato, or else on the subject matter and contents of photographic archives created by individual archaeologists or Egyptological institutes.[3] Many of my observations here are thus an opening gambit in an area that

requires much further work in order to yield both granular historical and archival detail and broader insights into the role of photography as a means of knowledge production, network formation, and the creation of disciplinary values shared, or contested, between field and museum.[4] For instance, the use of photography within museums (to document objects, to record installations, or for commercial reproductions) and the development of dedicated museum photographic services are beyond the scope of this article, but both are ripe for further analysis. My focus on the formative decades of Egyptology – which I take to include all methods of study concerned with the ancient Egyptian past – also stops short of considering the significant decline and renegotiation of fieldwork between the 1930s and 1950s, a result not only of Second World War disruptions, but of the loss of control and uncertainty felt by foreign expeditions in the country. This had very real implications for photography: in the late 1940s, the Metropolitan Museum of Art closed its Luxor dig house and moved its substantial photographic archive, including its set of prints from the Tutankhamun excavation, 'home' to New York.[5]

This article follows a chronological structure, opening with examples of how photography began to be used to represent Egyptian artefacts on site and in museum displays, then turning to the negotiation of normative standards for object photography in field and museum alike. It concludes by using the photography of finds from the tomb of Tutankhamun to illustrate how deeply image-making practices were enmeshed in the interpretation of antiquities – in this case, objects whose status between field and museum, colony and metropole, was destabilized as the newly independent Egyptian government pushed against the colonial object habit of diverting ancient Egypt's 'treasures' to London or New York. The field and the centre (or centres) that it appears to serve do not exist in isolation: each forms the other.[6] Moreover, the circulation of capital resources, individual experts, and objects deemed culturally significant – like Egyptian antiquities – all contributed to the production and replication of 'the other' on which colonialism relied.[7] In the photographic images that archaeologists produced of artefacts, we see the creation of distinctions and differences explicitly concerned with the objects themselves – but implicitly concerned with the

structures of colonialism on which archaeological fieldwork, museums, and, in many ways, photography itself relied. There are no neutral representations, regardless of where photography took place (field, museum, or elsewhere) and what its ostensible motivation was (pre-distribution record, publication, or epigraphic tool). So convincing is the visual 'objectivity' of object photographs in the practice of Egyptology today, however, that the discipline has scarcely begun to acknowledge, much less critique, the troubled roots and troubling implications of its object habit in image form.

Facts on the ground-glass

In the mid-19th century, the use of photographic techniques was meant to optimize in-person observation in scientific endeavours, recording what the observer saw with a means that was both mechanical and reproducible. At this time, the former implied objectivity, while the latter fostered the exchange of ideas, the formation of a corpus, and the potential, at least, for consensus, all crucial to the methods and structures of emerging disciplinary identities.[8] For the ruins, inscriptions, fragments, and artworks that came to constitute the proper objects and objectives of archaeology, the photographic event often took place of necessity 'in the field', a space at once real and imagined – and either way, a space criss-crossed by colonialism and the imperialist project. What photographers saw on the ground-glass back-plates of their view cameras – the standard field camera used from the mid-19th century until well into the 20th – was upside-down and in reverse. But the image being exposed in the camera body was a likeness nonetheless. Developed, printed, projected, it was meant to show a truth, a fact – to archaeologists themselves, to their colleagues and sponsors, and to a public primed for the sight and sites of antiquity.

The heading of this section – facts on the ground-glass – is a purposeful echo of Nadia Abu el-Haj's book *Facts on the Ground*, with its important analysis of the production of archaeological knowledge in a colonial context (in her case, Ottoman and Mandate Palestine).[9] In 19th-century Turkey and the Middle East, archaeology was a significant focus of effort: the Ottoman and

Egyptian governments introduced antiquities laws that redefined sites and objects, established and funded museums, and enabled foreign organizations to undertake excavations. And in Europe and North America, the institutionalisation of archaeology – in universities, museums, and organizations such as the Egypt Exploration Fund – accelerated as nations extended their imperial reach. While these phenomena are not a straightforward matter of cause-and-effect, they are not coincidental either. As Abu el-Haj writes, 'It is worth asking *which* disciplines emerged as particularly powerful and pervasive in *which* colonial contexts, and it is worth seeking to specify how and why' [emphasis original].[10]

What Abu el-Haj asks about archaeology – why there and why then? – is similar to questions that have been asked about photography, whose 'birth pangs coincided with both the demise of a premodern episteme and the invention of a peculiarly modern conjunction of power-knowledge-subject'.[11] The mid-19th century experienced a shift in terms of what society considered to be the nature and requirements of knowledge, and this shift – which elevated 'objective' (and object-based) knowledge and positivist ideas of progress – coincided with the emergence of the modern state. Photography fit right in, not only because it seemed to create an image that matched reality, but also because of the material possibilities it opened for consulting, sharing, and storing these images in the expanding spaces of colonialism.

In the 1850s, photography moved to the new space of the archaeological site, for the first time documenting the process of excavation that was becoming a defining characteristic of archaeology – its 'field' in every sense. French Egyptologist Théodule Devéria, an employee of the Louvre, made paper-negative calotypes during Auguste Mariette's excavations at Saqqara, west of Cairo.[12] By later standards, this was a heavy-handed clearance operation using *corvée* labour to locate the vast temple and burial complex of the sacred Apis bulls. Devéria arrived, at Mariette's request, in 1859 and took photographs both of objects already cleared and arranged *in situ* (notably the much-admired Hellenistic hemicircle of philosopher portraits) and of clearance work among the Old Kingdom *mastaba*-tombs, where Devéria focused on reliefs and inscriptions that could be

photographed in raking sunlight. (Fig. 1) Hieroglyphic inscriptions were a particular priority in Egyptology, and recording them for epigraphic purposes would remain a distinct concern. But Devéria's image captured the tread of many footsteps in the sand, as much as the carved figures. Here was archaeology photographed in progress – as a technique and as a discipline in the making.

[fig 1 around here]

Another new space for archaeology in Egypt was the museum, since Mariette – commissioned by Said *pasha* to set up the country's antiquities service – had simultaneously re-established a national antiquities museum in 1858, in a former warehouse on the Nile at Boulaq, Cairo. The Egyptian cotton boom of the 1860s and the culmination of the Suez Canal project in 1869, overseen by *khedive* Ismail, saw central Cairo transformed into a Haussmann-style metropolis replete with commercial photography studios and suppliers. This made it more attractive than ever to photographic entrepreneurs like Émile Béchard, who opened a studio in the city in 1870 and, with his countryman Hippolyte Délié, approached Mariette with a proposal to photograph the displays in the Musée de Boulaq.[13] Museums had been photographing their objects for years – for instance the British Museum had appointed Roger Fenton its in-house photographer in the 1850s – but Délié and Béchard's efforts were the first systematic attempt to photograph antiquities in a museum in Egypt.[14] The forty plates reproduced in the *Album du Musée de Boulaq*, published in Cairo in 1872, opened with 'picturesque' views of the museum courtyard and two galleries lit by ample windows.[15] Almost all the objects themselves, however, were photographed by removing them from their vitrines and arranging them in tableaux out-of-doors, where sunlight – consistently from the left – illuminated the objects. Only the near life-size stone statue of king Khafre, far too unwieldy to move, was photographed in place, with the help of a reflector.[16]

Sculpture dominated the selection of objects in the album, which might seem to reflect a 'fine art' bias, reinforced by the dazzling travertine plinths on which many smaller items were mounted.[17] However, the album also included photographs of funerary objects, bronze and pottery vessels, and

furniture, textiles, and baskets. Many came from excavations overseen by Mariette, such as objects from the burial of queen Ahhotep, discovered in 1858 at Dra Abu el-Naga, Thebes.[18] (Fig. 2) The symmetrical arrangement of the queen's jewellery and weapons against a cloth backdrop is typical of museum display techniques in the latter half of the 19th century, and although shadows occlude parts of the objects as a result, the overall effect is to make each piece visible while emphasising the unity of the group. As Mariette suggested in his introductory remarks, the album served as a kind of illustrated catalogue to the museum, following as it did the same order as the short guide visitors could buy there. He envisioned three audiences for the album with its 'remarkable' photographic plates: travellers seeking a souvenir, artists interested in the 'difficult problems' of Egyptian art, and scholars of the hieroglyphic inscriptions, which the photographs reproduce with such clarity that the image was as good as seeing the object in person.[19] The photographic album, like the museum itself, made the fruits of fieldwork a moveable feast.

[fig 2 around here]

In the plates of the Boulaq album, objects established as worthy of museum display are likewise established as being worthy of photography. Smaller objects, like the Ahhotep weapons and jewellery, or the small-scale statuettes of the 'panthéon', were grouped in pleasing, display-like arrangements, while larger pieces of sculpture warranted a single plate, often isolated against a cloth backdrop. Délié and Béchard did not crop out of their plates the extraneous matter – the expanse of a backdrop, or what lay beyond its edges – that later photographers often avoided, but in other respects, their photographs suggest an emerging consensus about what made for effective photography of Egyptian antiquities: adequate light from left and above, especially for photographing reliefs; isolating significant objects on single negatives, and arranging smaller artefacts in balanced, often symmetrical, groups; and angling works of sculpture to the camera, to help convey a sense of depth and, for human figures, perhaps animate or bring out the 'lifelikeness' of the features. Alongside these aesthetic judgements were technical limitations, in particular the

need for long exposures in bright light. Yet the over-arching structure of the Boulaq album, pairing each plate with a description and categorising them in sequence ('monuments funéraires', 'monuments civiles', 'monuments historiques'), betrays too a concern for objects and their photographs alike as a source of objective knowledge. As the professionalization of archaeology gathered pace in the late 19th century, photography became the backbone of its museum work, its field practices, and its object habit.

How to succeed in archaeological photography

The generation of Egyptologists that followed Mariette – such as William Matthew Flinders Petrie, dubbed the 'father' of Egyptian archaeology – had the benefit of easier-to-use cameras and commercially prepared glass plates, as well as the generous policy of finds division pursued by Mariette's successor Gaston Maspero. From the 1880s, more accessible and portable camera technology meant that archaeologists in the field could more easily photograph both site features and artefacts, prior to any subsequent division with the Egyptian authorities or at the behest of excavators like Petrie, who distributed his own share of artefacts to sponsors back home.[20] Like the archaeological objects destined for museums, photographs – which are themselves objects, in both negative and positive states – began to multiply. No expedition in Egypt was complete without at least one camera, and the more 'scientific' its methods and self-identity became, the more rigorously archaeology made use of photography in the overlapping arenas of the site and the museum. Together with plans, drawings, and the collection of actual objects to take back to the metropole, photography allowed for the creation of a corpus and the application of comparative methods. From the Ohio River valley to the Mayan ruins of Mesoamerica, the late 19th century witnessed photography and archaeology working in tandem to recover and record the material remains of the ancient past through the material innovations of the modern era.[21]

At the turn of the 20th century, however, at least some practitioners were anxious that archaeology continue to make progress. From their perspective, its situation remained tenuous, its

disciplinary identity not yet authoritative enough, even in so well-established an arena as Egypt, where British archaeologists in particular benefited from the 'veiled protectorate' put in place by the British after their 1882 invasion to suppress the Urabi revolt. In what appears to be the first manual devoted to archaeological methods, published in 1904, Petrie himself cautioned,

> Archaeology is the latest born of the sciences. It has but scarcely struggled into freedom, out of the swaddling clothes of dilettante speculations. It it still attracted by pretty things, rather than by real knowledge.[22]

Real knowledge needed real evidence, to which Petrie accordingly devoted an entire chapter; likewise, it needed a systematic approach, which was the subject of another. Used properly, photography served both – and deserved a chapter of its own.

Petrie's detailed instructions about how to photograph sites and objects readily conceded that photography was not the optimal recording method for some kinds of evidence, such as inscriptions, though it was 'essential' for objects deemed to be works of art.[23] Delivered in Petrie's characteristic plainspoken style, the acknowledgement that photographic representation had its limitations, as well as an aesthetic potential, may seem to jar with his prevailing rhetoric of method and evidence. But it is entirely in keeping with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century expectations of image making and image use. On the making of photographs, much of the advice Petrie gave was quite different from what his near-contemporaries recommended. He was satisfied with a rudimentary camera, recommended handheld (rather than view) cameras for object photography, and thought that a quarter-plate negative size – about 8.5 x 10 cm – was ample. He shunned wide-angle lenses and advocated long exposures and small apertures, which he expressed in the Dallmeyer system of the 1870s rather than the f-number and Uniform systems that had gained acceptance in the 1890s.[24] Developing, too, was a back-to-basics affair: no darkroom required (simply work after sunset) and no new-fangled or ready-mixed chemical solutions.

[fig 3 around here]

His self-sufficient approach to photography goes some way towards explaining the results Petrie achieved, some of which were rudimentary at best. (Fig. 3) A bronze figure of the goddess Isis nursing Horus, which could not sit upright because of the tang that originally slotted into a wooden base, was instead photographed leaning against a box of what look like tacks or staples, against a simple paper or cardboard backdrop. Neither the object nor the mode of its photography sought a refined aesthetic: Petrie had, after all, decried 'pretty things' over 'real knowledge'. Here the photograph serves as aide-memoire, a record of what this object looked like straight-on – and a record, too, that it was not (yet) a museum object, mounted for upright display like similar bronze figures in the Boulaq album or the privately printed set of board-mounted photographs made for subscribers to the 1895 Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition, 'The Art of Ancient Egypt'.[25] The exhibition, to which Petrie contributed, grouped objects in cases by material (stone vessels, wood, bronze) or subject matter (gods, scarabs), in a way not dissimilar to the Boulaq album – but the twenty-seven photographic plates made for the subscribers were of necessity selective, not only for quality or interest, but because of the need to balance objects by size (not too large or small) and by colour, since 'in some cases the brilliancy of the colours would have rendered the photographic representation so confused as to be valueless'.[26] The uncredited photographer had managed, nonetheless, to create a composition of core-formed glass vessels carefully balanced for colour, sheen, and size (Fig. 4)The vessels had been lent to the exhibition from the private collection of Henry Wallis as well as the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum.

[Fig 4 around here]

Rather than group objects together thematically or as if on display, field photographs like Petrie's tended to sort them according to archaeology's two favoured principles, either by find-spot

(objects from a single tomb or burial, for instance) or by type, the latter of which appears to be the case for a group of stone bowls and footed cups arranged on a table and two suspended shelves (Fig. 5). Like the photograph of the bronze Isis, and unlike the Burlington exhibition plate, this group photograph revels in a certain casualness, with the cloth backdrop skewed so that it bypasses the vessels at far left and drops off at the top right and bottom of the negative, to a greater extent than cropping alone would rectify in a printed version. At the same time, however, the vessels have been placed with care, equidistant from each other, tallest and heaviest items at the bottom (the shelves could not support much weight) and footed cups together, in alternating heights. Perhaps 'pretty things' and 'real knowledge' had reached a sort of truce.

[fig 5 around here]

Published manuals like *Methods and Aims* went some way towards communicating a set of shared standards in archaeology, both among would-be or active practitioners and with the public whose interest archaeology cultivated through press coverage, exhibitions, and lectures. Photographs played a role in this, too. They were not meant only for the excavator, but for the communication of his work to specialist and non-specialist audiences alike – something at which Petrie excelled. In setting up what to photograph, he advised, beginners should keep the 3x3-inch format of lantern slides in mind.[27] The distribution of published reports was also a significant way to communicate excavation results, and images of objects – both in photographs and in line drawings – were a significant feature of such publications. In *Methods and Aims,* Petrie also included specific advice on the arrangement and production costs of published plates; his own plates crowded as many tables, drawings, and photographs as possible onto the printed page.

It is tempting to take a towering figure like Petrie, and an avowedly authoritative manual like *Methods and Aims,* as representative of archaeological and photographic practice in a given period. However, the production of guidelines and 'how to' manuals is a sure sign that there were multiple forms of practice in play, so that the manuals serve as boundary markers between different

disciplines, practitioners, and schools of thought. In this regard, it is interesting to compare Petrie's 1904 manual to J. P. Droop's slim, engagingly written volume *Archaeological Excavation,* which was published in 1915 and drew on Droop's years of experience with the British School in Athens as well as a season working for the Egypt Exploration Fund at Abydos, under T. E. Peet.[28] His Egyptian experience seems not to have left a positive impression, and Droop criticised the country's policy (in comparison to Greece) of allowing almost unrestricted export of antiquities, whether through the dealer-driven market or the division of finds with archaeologists. The practice of *partage* had made archaeologists too focused on objects rather than where they were found, preventing excavators from focusing 'on the development of scientific digging', he wrote.[29]

Objects were, however, fundamental subjects for photography – which, like Petrie, Droop considered a necessary archaeological skill: the excavator 'should be an efficient photographer, a photographer, not a mere taker of photographs.'[30] Some of Droop's specific advice about on-site photography contrasts with Petrie's approach. A proper darkroom was essential, likewise immediate development of the plates (no waiting until sunset) to know whether the desired image had been captured: 'until it is known that the picture is a good one, operations must be suspended to allow of its being taken again'. Droop also wrote specifically about 'museum photography', that is, the photography of objects already located in museum collections. Even if the museum had a staff photographer, he cautioned, only the archaeologist would know what features of the object mattered and how to capture them in raking light. Ideally, a museum's in-house photography would be done by an archaeologist. This was the solution the antiquities museum in Cairo reached, after it had moved from Boulaq to the Giza Palace and then, from 1902, to a purpose-built new building in Ismailia (now Tahrir) Square: Egyptologist Emil Brugsch was himself responsible for photographing antiquities for museum publications like the serial *Catalogue Générale,* although scholars could also arrange to take their own photographs in the galleries.[31]

On site, where excavators still had control of the artefacts they found, Droop did not suggest they go to the lengths Petrie did in preparing objects for photography, for instance by filling in

details with chalk or charcoal for contrast. Nonetheless the cleanliness of both objects and site features was essential for a sharp image and ultimately for the published photograph, which should be printed as it was, with no doctoring of the plate.[32] This point had become a crucial marker of scientific photography: for the image to be trustworthy, it had to be 'true', with minimal physical interference on the plate. Photographers regularly used dodging and burning-in techniques, respectively to lighten or darken the tones in part of an image when printing their negatives, to help bring out details otherwise lost in highlights or shadows. They might also touch in specks left by dust in the emulsion of a negative, or use a taped or painted-on mask to neaten the edges or exclude unwanted parts of the image. But there were limits to what was acceptable, and in Droop's mind, these were to do with the limits of photography itself:

> At the risk of being wearisome I must repeat that the camera must not be made a fetish; that though often indispensable it is not always enough, from its fatal habit of seeing too much, so that in its pictures sometimes the essential does not stand out clearly against the unessential background: I must urge again that whenever this seems likely to happen the photograph should be supplemented by a drawing.[33]

Photography, in other words, was just one tool among many to be used in recovering and recording the past. The camera and its working life belonged to the wider material culture of archaeological practice: in Droop's book, detailed discussion of photography appears in a chapter on equipment, alongside drawing materials, squeeze paper, trays and boxes for storing finds, and methylated spirits, paraffin wax, and shellac for cleaning and conserving objects.

For all that handbooks like Petrie's and Droop's – or the unpublished advice written by the director of the Harvard-Boston Museum of Fine Arts expedition at Giza, George A. Reisner[34] – imply a codification of photographic field techniques, practices remained diverse, and individual preference for one method or another could underpin claims to authority as well as undermine the competition. Field and museum were both spaces where object photography remained central to the

work of archaeology, and where ever greater control of light conditions, backgrounds, and the positioning of artefacts help optimize the distinctive role of objects and the 'look' of object photographs. Depending on an excavator's priorities and resources, photography could map the progress of an object from the moment of discovery to its object-ified state, decontextualized, numbered, measured, recorded, and slotted with other artefacts of its find-spot or type. (Fig. 6) Between this Reisner photograph of metal vessels from a Giza *mastaba*-tomb, and Petrie's photograph of stone bowls and cups (see Fig. 3), there are obvious similarities in the use of a cloth backdrop and shelves, the arrangement of vessels by size, and the even spacing between individual objects. It is these surface similarities that have made object photographs easy to overlook in museums and archives.[35] Moreover, many archaeology specialists are still trained to see the value of such photographs as lying only in what they represent, not in the photograph or the historically situated act of photography itself: archaeologists look not at photographs but past or through them, to the object itself. As Bohrer has observed, artefacts 'virtually become their photographs', in part because photographs circulated more easily than artefacts once the latter were in museums.[36] The drawback is that archaeologists no longer see the significance of photographic practice as a whole, nor its embeddedness in the discipline's colonial roots. But by looking more attentively at photographs and the circumstances of their creation and circulation, we can see how modes of photographic visualization helped shape the colonial knowledge formations that both field and museum shared, just as they shared the object habit that kept Egyptian antiquities in flux between the two.

[Fig 6 around here]

Tutankhamun's treasures

Photography was the 'first and greatest need' that Howard Carter identified after realising the nature and extent of the tomb he had discovered in November 1922.[37] Carter was an adequate

photographer who had always taken his own field photographs, but for the tomb of Tutankhamun, he accepted an offer of help from colleagues at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Museum ran an excavation nearby and already had a close relationship with Carter and his patron the Earl of Carnarvon, having bought antiquities from the pair for the collection in New York.[38] The Museum's offer of help was made partly out of this collegiality and partly out of an expectation that it would receive a share of finds from the tomb, after the anticipated division with the Egyptian antiquities service. At Carter's request, the Museum lent the expertise of Harry Burton, their English-born, Florence-based photographer, and Burton was the only person apart from Carter and the Egyptian staff who worked on the project throughout the 10 years it took to clear the tomb.[39]

If the interwar period was a 'golden age' for archaeology in the Middle East – with significant discoveries from Giza to Dura-Europa, and Ur to Mohenjo-Daro – it was a 'golden age' for the practice of photography in archaeology as well, and one in which Burton's photographs from the tomb of Tutankhamun have often been held up as exemplary.[40] The even lighting he achieved (helped by several Egyptian assistants holding and shifting a series of mirrors) lent Burton's photographs of tomb interiors and their decorated walls a clarity that met the priorities of Egyptology – legible shots of inscriptions, for instance, or *in situ* images of apparently untouched spaces, collapsing past and present via the act of discovery. At the tomb of Tutankhamun, however, it was the myriad objects found within the tomb, not the rather plain structure itself, that proved to be the focus of the work. These objects, quickly characterized as proof that ancient Egyptian 'art' existed, were to provide the primary scholarly evidence for interpreting the burial.[41] Much of this interpretation was first presented through the press, because of the vast public interest the discovery generated – and because of an exclusive contract the sponsor, Lord Carnarvon, signed with the London *Times* for access to the excavation team and, crucially, the rights to Burton's photographs.[42] The contract infuriated rival British and American papers as well as the Egyptian press and the antiquities service staff (French, British, and Egyptian nationals) who had administrative responsibility for the tomb. In early 1922 Egypt had won limited independence from Britain, and

the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb captured the imagination of the Egyptian public at this pivotal moment: the reawakening of the long-buried, little-known king spoke to the reawakening of Egypt after centuries of Ottoman and British control.

Photographs of individual objects or prepared groups of objects comprise around two-thirds of Burton's total output of some 3,000 negatives for the tomb of Tutankhamun. Thanks to intense news coverage, especially in the first two years of the work, these photographs helped shape the heroic presentation of the find, with its narrative of splendid treasure. The public reception of his photographs may have been one factor influencing Burton's choices, but the initial discovery was so unexpected, and the subsequent years so strenuous, that in some ways, one has the sense that Burton did the best he could under the circumstances – working in ways that were already familiar to him and that rarely earned any comment in his correspondence at the time (he himself kept no notes or diaries). In the press, and in the books that were published about the tomb, Carter and Burton stressed the rigorous organization of the work: objects were numbered in situ, photographed in situ, then removed, with the number card, to a nearby tomb, dubbed the 'laboratory', where they were repaired, recorded, and finally, photographed.

That was the ideal: the reality was different.Depending on how one counts the number of objects found in the tomb, between 15 and 20% of the total found were never photographed.[43] They represent the small (fragmentary pieces), the serial (faience finger-rings, weapons), things made from mundane materials or craft techniques (baskets, pottery) – or, simply, the missed-out or forgotten, like some furniture from the last of the four tomb chambers to be cleared. When Burton did photograph small objects, such as jewellery or multiple *shabti*-figures, he used a method Droop had already described a decade earlier: the objects were placed on a sheet of ground (frosted) glass set in a frame about a foot off the ground, with a sheet of white card or paper underneath it, and the camera fixed above, pointing directly over the glass.[44] Objects photographed in this way appeared to be floating or suspended in space, since the combination of ground glass and paper almost eliminated shadows and any reflection from the camera lens. Depending on the size of the objects,

several could be laid on the glass and photographed on a single plate, minimizing the number of negatives required. (Fig. 7) The arrangement of objects might be based on size, shape, and balanced composition, as we saw with the Petrie and Reisner photographs, but the act of photography also imposed its own logic. Burton grouped the Tutankhamun *shabtis* first by material (faience, wood, stone) to get a consistent effect from the light, and then by size. The 'type' of *shabti* (headdress, hand-held implements, inscription) was another internal factor, as was the specific shrine in which each had been found, so that the appropriate numbered cards could be lined up with each object.

[fig 7 around here]

The aesthetic of balance and order manifest in the finished *shabti* photograph was disrupted, however, by the use Carter made of the printed version. On the index cards used to document objects from the tomb, Carter pasted a photograph of each *shabti*-figure cut down from a print that had been made directly from Burton's 18x24 cm glass negative. How archaeologists used photographs is as important as what the photographs themselves look like or depict, a point that has largely been overlooked in studies of archaeological photography. Moreover, questions of use extend far beyond the record value of photographs, on which archaeologists continue to place so much emphasis. The circulation of photographs among colleagues and between institutions; the eventual deposit of photographic prints, albums, and negatives in museums, universities, or research archives; and the public dissemination of photographic images, both at the time of an excavation and subsequently – all of these require closer attention in any consideration of the relationship between photographic practice, the museum, and the archaeological field.

In Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one basis of that relationship was the division of finds made between the antiquities service and foreign expeditions, who were motivated to excavate in part to develop or add to museum (and private) collections back home. The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun coincided not only with Egyptian independence but also with the more conservative division practices introduced by Pierre Lacau, who took up his post as

head of the antiquities service at the end of World War 1. Lacau took a firmer line on enforcing existing antiquities laws, to the irritation of archaeologists like Petrie, who eventually moved his work to Palestine as a result. Where Carter and Carnarvon had expected to receive a portion of the Tutankhamun finds, which they could then share amongst themselves, the Metropolitan Museum, and the British Museum, for instance, Lacau insisted on the wording of their excavation permit, which stipulated that intact tombs or finds of special interest would remain the property of the Egyptian government. This tension over the ultimate destination of the Tutankhamun objects shadowed the excavation until 1930, when Egyptian authorities settled a sum on Lord Carnarvon's widow to compensate her for the excavation expenses, in lieu of any division.

Questions over the ultimate destination of the finds subtly inflect the presentation of certain finds from the tomb, which aligned them with a Western canon of art and, by extension, Western museums. In Burton's photographs of objects that are – or can be considered to be – sculptural, his camera position and lighting emphasize their aesthetic qualities: fine carving, sensuous lines, luxurious materials. It is these qualities that help make many of the tomb's 'treasures' convincing as works of art, as the newspaper and Carter took pains to describe such objects as gilded wooden figures of the king and gods, or chariots and boxes replete with figurative decoration. Burton's luminous, appealing photographs underscored the value of these objects too, and over the years of work on site, he sought to improve the effects he could achieve when photographing sculpture, for instance devising a curved paper backdrop that followed the contour of a round table and helped capture the reflected sunlight he used in the object photography. This backdrop was ready in time for the 1925-26 field season, when work resumed after a gap of more than a year, following a breakdown in relations between Carter and antiquities service. Only after tempers had cooled down and a more pro-British political party had been elected in Egypt, was Carter allowed to return to work.[45] He and Burton both knew that the first task facing them that year was opening the royal coffins and unwrapping the mummy. The inaugural use of Burton's new backdrop was for photographing the famous mummy mask of Tutankhamun, in December 1925 (Fig. 8).

[fig 8 around here]

Throughout much of the work Carter and Burton undertook on the tomb of Tutankhamun, the objects they laboured overwere in a certain limbo, still 'in the field' at the time they were photographed but suspended legally, politically, and intellectually between the one-time colonial museum in Cairo and the museums and private collections of the metropole. The only certainty was the fate of the royal mummy, which would stay in the tomb, 'reverently rewrapped' as if to make up for all the violations otherwise enacted on the burial.[46] However much Burton's photographs purported to be 'records' of the find (and are still, themselves, revered as such in Egyptology), they were also part of the act of interpreting the finds, from which objects deserved to be photographed and how, to what objects might be overlooked or photographed in a more banal or routine manner. The calibre of the photographs and of Burton – who was always prominently credited in the press and Carter's books – matched the calibre of the unprecedented discovery and spoke to who would 'own' these objects, if not in reality, then at least on the printed page and in the archive. Tellingly, what was never in question was where the photographic negatives, prints, albums, and record cards would remain: with Carter, who set aside around half of the negatives for the Metropolitan Museum in recognition of Burton's contribution. It was the only compensation either Burton or the Museum would receive. Carter's personal archive was donated to the Griffith Institute at Oxford University after his death in 1939. Hence Oxford and New York do house objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun – but photographic objects, standing in for 'pretty things' and 'real knowledge' once again.

Conclusion

Arguably, archaeology could not have existed without the camera and its ways of seeing the presence of the past. Differences and similarities in how archaeologists wrote about photography in the early 20th century – indeed, that they wrote about it at all – reveal how much of a disturbance,

in the Barthesian sense, camerawork created wherever digging up the past served the priorities of the present.[47] Colonialism, in all its forms, permeated the relationships on which both archaeology and photography relied, between individuals and institutions, between field and museum, and between the spaces of the colony and the metropole. Ideas, antiquities, and people moved between the two, but so too did the archival apparatus of archaeology – its plans and record cards, its diaries and correspondence, and its photographic negatives, prints, albums, and lantern slides. It was as a social and material practice that photography enabled archaeology to develop and express the 'methods and aims' that it did, both among its practitioners and with its publics.

By 1922, when Petrie's one-time assistant Howard Carter was preparing to open the tomb of Tutankhamun, photography had been indispensable on archaeological sites for almost forty years, not only for photographing site features but also for photographing objects *in situ* and after processing. The handful of object photographs that I have discussed here do little more than scrape the surface of a vast body of archival photographic material awaiting considered and critical analysis. They do, though, suggest the range of practices and effects that existed in a genre of photography museums and field archaeologists alike relied on in their daily work. In general, they are photographs of isolated objects, positioned against a 'neutral' backdrop – decontextualized in archaeological terms, but recontextualized for other purposes. They return us to the point I made at the start of this paper: there are no neutral images, especially in a discipline like Egyptology, whose very existence in both field and museum depended on the politically imbricated act of imagining an Other, whether through vessel 'types' or glittering works of 'art'.

If photographs seem to level hand-made, three-dimensional objects along the smooth, monotone surface of the photographic print, there are nonetheless differences to be observed on those surfaces, and especially in the practices that surround the creation and use of object photographs. The Théodule Devéria photograph (Fig. 1) with which this paper opened points to one important use of photography in Egyptology, which requires further study: the recording of hieroglyphic inscriptions and painted or relief decoration on the flat surfaces of walls. Epigraphic

work – ‘surveys’, in the vocabulary of an ongoing project of the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute and its museum – raises its own issues in the overlap between field and museum photography, yet exemplifies many of the same concerns I have drawn attention to here, about the evidential value assigned to photography within archaeology and the ways in which photography helped create and sustain institutional and professional identities. It was not only the conventions of object photography or an image’s subject matter that helped determine the banality, ubiquity, or ‘superficial stylistic coherence’ that characterizes such photographs in archaeology and other fields: it was the entirety of the ‘photographic performance’, as Elizabeth Edwards has argued.[48]

For all that clarity and neutrality were the purported aims of the record photograph in archaeology, camerawork offered a certain latitude in terms of how archaeology made photography work on the object – and how the object itself worked on photography. As a result, while there is something we can study as ‘object photography’, there is not one kind or mode of object photography. The aesthetic and technical differences amongst photographs; the contingencies of scheduling, lighting, and supplies; the priorities of different practitioners; and the influences of other visual practices, all of these are factors I have suggested need to be taken into account. So too does the afterlife of the photograph, for the title of this paper – ‘objects in the photographic archive’ – refers to photographic objects (negatives, positives, digital scans) as well as archaeological artefacts. As the division of finds was curtailed in former colonial territories, the presence of photographic archives in museums, universities, and research institutes took on particular significance. It allowed Western institutions to keep the upper hand in the discipline and encouraged archaeologists to focus on the ‘record’ value of photographs to the exclusion of all other considerations. As this paper has argued, colonial-era formations of knowledge about the object thus endure in the archive, obscuring the social and material practices through which photography operated between the field and the museum. Whether as rough-shod as Petrie’s photographs or as serenely posed as Burton’s, the object photograph in archaeology points us towards much larger questions about the object habit that archaeology cannot yet break.

Funding details

Research for this article was supported by British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship MD140004 and Leverhulme Research Fellowship RF-2015-365.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Alice Stevenson and Emma Libonati for the invitation to participate in *The Object Habit* conference and in this special issue of *Museum History Journal.* Their own comments, and those of two anonymous reviewers, helped focus my thoughts for this paper. I also thank Alice, Emma, and Ivor Pridden at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology for assistance with Figures 3 to 5, and Cat Warsi at the Griffith Institute, Oxford University, for Figures 7 and 8.

[1] See James F. Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) for an overview across the Middle East, and Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums and the Struggle for Identities from World War 1 to Nasser* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2015), pp. 82-101, for the situation in Egypt.

[2] A selection: J. A. Baird, 'Photographing Dura-Europos, 1928-1937: An Archaeology of the Archive', *American Journal of Archaeology* 115.3 (2011), 427-46; Frederick N. Bohrer, *Photography and Archaeology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Mirjam Brusius, *Fotografie und museales Wissen: William Henry Fox Talbot, das Altertum, und die Absenz der Fotografie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Mirjam Brusius and Theodor Dunkelgrün, eds, 'Photography, Antiquity, Scholarship', special issue of *History of Photography* 40.3 (2016); Sudeshna Guha, 'The Visual in Archaeology: Photographic Representation of Archaeological Practice in British India', *Antiquity* 76 (2002), 93-100; Christina Riggs, 'Shouldering the Past: Photography, Archaeology, and Collective Effort at the Tomb of Tutankhamun', *History of Science* online first (2016), DOI:10.1177/0073275316676282; Nick Shepherd, '"When the Hand That Holds the Trowel Is Black…": Disciplinary Practices of Self-Representation and the Issue of "Native" Labour in Archaeology', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3.3 (2003), 334-52; Duncan Shields, 'Multiple Collections and Fluid Meanings: Alfred Maudslay's Archaeological Photographs at the British Museum', in *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 27-46.

[3] For Beato, e.g. Antonio Ferri, ed., *Il fotografo dei faraoni: Antonio Beato in Egitto 1860-1905* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2008). Individual Egyptologists and archives: Michel Azim and Gérard Réveillac, *Karnak dans l'objectif de Georges Legrain: Catalogue raisonné des archives photographiques du premier directeur des travaux de Karnak de 1895 à 1917*, 2 vols. (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004); Horst Beinlich, *Die Photos der Preussischen Expedition 1908-1910 nach Nubien, Teil I: Photos 1-199* (Dettelbach: J. H. Röll, 2010); Peter Der Manuelian and George Andrew Reisner, 'George Andrew Reisner on Archaeological Photography', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 29 (1992), 1-34; John A. Larson, 'The Oriental Institute Photographic Archives', in *Picturing the Past: Imaging and Imagining the Ancient Middle East*, ed. by Jack Green, Emily Teeter and John A. Larson (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 51-6; Patrizia Piacentini, ed. *Egypt and the Pharaohs: Pharaonic Egypt in the Archives and Libraries of the Università degli Studi di Milano*, 2 vols. (Milan: Università degli Studi de Milano/Skira, 2010); Janet Picton and Ivor Pridden, eds., *Unseen Images: Archive Photographs in the Petrie Museum, Volume Q: Gurob, Sedment and Tarkhan* (London: Golden House Publications, 2008); Piero Racanicchi, ed. *Fotografi in terra d'Egitto: Immagini dall'archivio storico della soprintendenza al Museo delle Antichità Egizie di Torino* (Turin: Pas Informazione, 1991).

[4] On the photography of objects, see also Baird, 'Dura-Europos', 440-3; Frederick N. Bohrer, 'Photography and Archaeology: The Image as Object', in *Envisioning the Past: Archaeology and the Image*, ed. by Sam Smiles and Stephanie Moser (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 180-91; Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology, and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 51-79.

[5] Discussed in Christina Riggs, *Photographing Tutankhamun* (London: Bloomsbury), forthcoming.
[6] Robert E. Kohler, *Landscapes and Labscapes: Exploring the Lab-Field Border in Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[7] Tony Bennett, 'Museum, Field, Colony: Colonial Governmentality and the Circulation of Reference', *Journal of Cultural Economy* 2.1-2 (2009), 99-116.
[8] On the interrelationship of photography and science, see (among others) Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Kelley Wilder, *Photography and Science* (London: Reaktion, 2009).
[9] Nadia Abu el-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[10] Abu el-Haj, *Facts on the Ground*, 6.
[11] Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), 132.
[12] On Devéria, see Azim and Révillac, *Karnak*, 67, with further references in n. 48.
[13] Kathleen Stewart Howe, *Excursions Along the Nile: The Photographic Discovery of Ancient Egypt* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1994), 36, 159, plates 80-82; Michel Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography* (Cologne: Koeneman, 1998), 376, 380-2.
[14] On Fenton, see John Hannavy, 'Roger Fenton and the British Museum', *History of Photography* 12.3 (1988), 193-204 and, on the early use (and non-use) of photography in the museum, Mirjam Brusius, 'From Photographic Science to Scientific Photography: Talbot and Decipherment at the British Museum around 1850', in *William Henry Fox Talbot: Beyond Photography*, ed. by Mirjam Brusius, Katrina Dean and Chitra Ramalingam (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 219-44.
[15] The *Album* has been digitized by the Bibliothèque nationale de France at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8626090c (accessed 3 January 2017).
[16] *Album du Musée de Boulaq*, pl. 20.
[17] E.g. small works of sculpture in the 'panthéon' section, *Album du Musée de Boulaq*, pls. 4 to 9.
[18] *Album du Musée de Boulaq*, pl. 31.
[19] From the *Album* frontispiece: 'avec une netteté qui les met en présence des monuments eux-mêmes'.
[20] See Alice Stevenson, 'Artefacts of Excavation: The British Collection and Distribution of Egyptian Finds to Museums, 1880-1915', *Journal of the History of Collections* 26.1 (2014), 89-102.
[21] Melissa Banta and Curtis M. Hinsley, *From Site to Sight: Anthropology, Photography, and the Power of Imagery* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, 1986), 72-99 offers a useful overview, together with Bohrer, *Photography and Archaeology*, esp. 105-40.
[22] W. M. F. Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (London: Methuen, 1904), vii.
[23] See also Bohrer, *Photography and Archaeology*, 82-4.
[24] John A. Hodges, *Photographic Lenses: How to Choose, and How to Use* (Bradford: Percy Lund & Co., 1895), 31-3.
[25] *The Art of Ancient Egypt: A Series of Photographic Plates Representing Objects from the Exhibition of the Art of Ancient Egypt at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in the Summer of 1895* (London, 1895).
[26] *Art of Ancient Egypt*, description of the plates (unpaginated). The contents of the cases be gleaned from the more widely printed, 178-page catalogue targeted at visitors: *Exhibition of the Art of Ancient Egypt* (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1895).
[27] Petrie, *Methods and Aims*, 81.
[28] J. P. Droop. *Archaeological Excavation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915).
[29] Droop, *Archaeological Excavation*, 75.
[30] Droop, *Archaeological Excavation*, 36.
[31] For a painting of Brugsch taking a photograph in the Giza Palace museum, see discussion in Christina Riggs, 'Colonial Visions: Egyptian Antiquities and Contested Histories in the Cairo Museum', *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 1 (2013), 65-84.
[32] Droop, *Archaeological Excavation*, 48.
[33] Droop, *Archaeological Excavation*, 46.
[34] Peter Der Manuelian and George Andrew Reisner, 'George Andrew Reisner on Archaeological Photography', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 29 (1992), 1-34.
[35] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology, and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 51-4.
[36] Bohrer, *Photography and Archaeology*, 135.

[37] Howard Carter and A. C. Mace. *The Tomb of Tut.Ankh.Amen, Volume I* (London: Cassell and Company, 1923), 127.
[38] See T. G. H. James' standard biography *Howard Carter: The Path to Tutankhamun* (London and New York: Tauris Parke, 2001 [1992]), as well as C. N. Reeves and John H. Taylor, *Howard Carter before Tutankhamun* (London: British Museum Press, 1992).
[39] Riggs, *Photographing Tutankhamun*, forthcoming.
[40] E.g. Susan J. Allen, *Tutankhamun's Tomb: The Thrill of Discovery* (New York; New Haven and London: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2006); George B. Johnson, 'Painting with Light: The Work of Archaeology Photographer Harry Burton', *KMT* 8.2 (1997), 58-77; Ronald T. Ridley, 'The Dean of Archaeological Photographers: Harry Burton', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 99 (2013), 117-30.
[41] In the first year of the work, the *Times* preferred the word 'craftsmanship', but by the start of the second season, 'art' became a consistent theme (e.g. the heading for a page of photographs, 'Ancient Egyptian Art', 21 September 1923).
[42] James, *Howard Carter*, 277-82, 480-5.
[43] Based on the list of objects (and indications of which were not photographed) in Helen Murray and Mary Nuttall, *A Handlist to Howard Carter's Catalogue of Objects in Tutankhamun's Tomb* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1963).
[44] Droop, *Archaeological Excavation*, 47-8.
[45] See Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), which includes Arabic-language sources, unlike the account in James, *Howard Carter*, 316-84.
[46] The phrase is Carter's, from his account of the examination of the mummy: http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/4mummy.html (accessed 8 January 2017).
[47] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* transl. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1981 [2000]), 12: 'Odd that no one has thought of the *disturbance* (to civilization) which this new action causes'. See also Christopher Pinney, 'Camerawork as Technical Practice in Colonial India', in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History, and the Material Turn*, ed. by Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 145-70.
[48] Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 52.