

Horace Vernet's 'Orient': photography and the Eastern Mediterranean in 1839, part II: the daguerreotypes and their texts

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AS A PAINTER Horace Vernet was less interested in the 'reality' of the Near East than in what it could offer for the representation of biblical subjects. He developed a theory of the continuity between the dress and customs of the ancient Hebrews and those of modern-day Arabs, which he elaborated in lectures delivered to the Académie in 1848 and later published: in this work he calls upon his experiences from his 1839–40 journey to Egypt and the Levant and reproduces many of his letters from it.¹ Such a theory, meant to steer painters towards a more authentic representation of biblical scenes and to free the Orient from the dominance of a classicising view, was itself based on a stereotype of the East as an unchangeable place outside history: 'This land has no age. You can be transported back a few thousand years, it still looks the same. [. . .] Pharaoh mounted on his chariot and pursuing the Hebrews raised the same dust in the desert as the artillery of Mehmet Ali. The Arabs have not changed'.² This view was expressed by many travellers and manifested in the picturesque conventions of much Orientalist art, such as the work of David Wilkie, David Roberts and William Holman Hunt – its ideal landscapes with ancient monuments and native figures lounging in the foreground, its broad horizons, its use of local colour as an authentic rendition of the past, its eschewal of signs of modernity, all giving a sense of timelessness (Figs. 15, 18, 20 and 26).³

Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet's account in the *Voyage d'Horace Vernet en Orient* of their attitudes and behaviour often reflects these clichés. Despite their native dress, the travellers associated mainly with local grandees – Mehmet Ali himself, or Soliman Pasha – or with European consuls or churchmen; pesky locals were fended off with gentle lashes of Vernet's whip.⁴ They bemoan



15. *Pyramids of Geezeh*, by David Roberts. 1839. Lithograph by Louis Haghe from *Egypt & Nubia*, from drawings made on the spot by David Roberts, with historical descriptions by William Brockedon. London 1846–49, II, pl.24. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC).

the 'Arab miasmas which infect the bazaars with an unbearable smell of wild beasts';⁵ they express their 'disgust at the sight of so many horrible infirmities and open wounds, which time and the enlightened tenets of a new civilisation and religion could alone heal'.⁶ They are strong supporters of the civilising mission: 'We are glad to think that, under the growing influence of French civilisation, the region's slumbering reason will be awakened'.⁷ The Arabs are bad-faith rascals, liars and deceivers who take pride in fleecing Christians.⁸ Degradation is the chief characteristic of the sites, all shadows of their former splendour.⁹

¹ First published in *L'Illustration* (12th February 1848), Vernet's lectures were reprinted as *Opinion sur certains rapports qui existent entre le costume des anciens hébreux et celui des arabes modernes*, Paris 1856. They were given on 29th January and 5th February 1848; see J.M. Leniand and S. Bellany-Brown, eds.: *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie des beaux-arts*, vol. 8: 1845–1849, Paris 2008, pp.292–93.

² '... ce pays-ci n'a pas d'époque. Transportez-vous de quelques milliers d'années en arrière, n'importe, c'est toujours la même physionomie que vous avez devant les yeux. [. . .] Pharaon poursuivant les Hébreux, monté sur son chariot, soulevait la même poussière dans le désert que l'artillerie de Méhémet-Ali. Les Arabes n'ont pas changé'; letter from Horace Vernet to Antoine Montfort, n.d. [20th January 1840], Paris, Archives des Musées nationaux, (hereafter cited as AMN) P30; see *L'Illustration* (12th April 1856) and A. Durande: *Joseph, Carle et Horace Vernet. Correspondances et biographies*, Paris 1863 (hereafter cited as Durande), pp.142–43.

³ See M. Warner: 'The Question of Faith. Orientalism, Christianity and Islam', in M.A. Stevens, ed.: exh. cat.: *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East*, London (Royal Academy of Arts) 1984, pp.32–39; see also *idem*: 'Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798–1814', in *ibid.*, pp.15–23, esp. p.19; and R. Kabbani: 'Regarding Orientalist Painting Today', in N. Tromans, ed.: exh. cat. *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, New Haven (Yale Center for British Art) and London (Tate Britain) 2008, p.41.

⁴ See F. Goupil-Fesquet: *Voyage d'Horace Vernet en Orient*, Paris 1843, p.161 (hereafter cited as *Voyage*).

⁵ '... les miasmes arabes qui infectent les bazars d'une insupportable odeur de bête fauve'; *Voyage*, p.19.

⁶ '... dégoût à la vue de tant d'infirmités et de plaies affreuses, que le temps et les lumières d'une civilisation et d'une religion nouvelles pourraient seules fermer'; *Voyage*, p.20.

⁷ 'Il nous est doux de penser que, sous l'influence croissante de la civilisation française, la raison du pays, endormie, se réveillera'; *Voyage*, p.21.

⁸ 'Les Arabes sont fripons, menteurs, ou de mauvaise foi, et se font gloire de tromper les chrétiens, action très-méritoire à leurs yeux'; *Voyage*, p.138; 'les Arabes sont un peuple de fourbes et de menteurs dont on ne peut jamais obtenir ce qu'on voudrait'; *Voyage*, p.160.

⁹ 'Alexandrie, jadis si magnifique, séjour délicieux de Cléopâtre, qui, sous le calife Omar, contenait quatre mille palais, autant de bains publics, quatre cents marchés, quarante mille juifs tributaires, n'est plus aujourd'hui qu'une ombre vague de sa splendeur passée'; *Voyage*, p.46.

¹⁰ 'Pourtant nous, Européens, qui appelons ces peuples barbares [. . .] nous trouvons chez nous des tableaux presque aussi hideux [. . .] et nous osons nous croire civilisés'; *Voyage*, p.36.

¹¹ 'quand l'artiste est parvenu à balbutier, sans science, un sentiment parti du cœur, n'en éprouve-t-on pas une émotion plus vive que devant une œuvre de science pure?'; *Voyage*, p.214.

¹² *Voyage*, p.94.

¹³ '... les Orientaux [. . .] inventent et font honte à nos industries [. . .] Ce peuple, sans avoir puisé dans des écoles spéciales le sentiment de ce qui est beau, est cependant notre maître en création [. . .]. L'ouvrier est artiste, il couvre l'Orient de ses inventions merveilleuses; sans compas, sans équerre, sa main sait tracer la belle forme; il est subtil dans sa recherche à embellir



16. *Pyramid of Cheops*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet and Horace Vernet. 22nd November 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

Yet a different, more nuanced and complex view frequently pierces through the Orientalist commonplaces in both text and image. The text of the *Voyage* bears witness to a certain self-reflection which the experience of these cultures and peoples inspires: 'And yet we Europeans, who call these people barbarians [. . .], we find in our own societies scenes which are almost as hideous [. . .] and we dare to consider ourselves civilised'.¹⁰ The travellers note the exquisite artistry of the craftsmen, and the beauty of the jewellery despite the crude handiwork: 'When the artist has managed to babble a feeling naively from the heart, do we not feel a more intense emotion than with a work of professional skill?'.¹¹ They admire the enormous variety of forms, the 'poetry', the 'delightful sensations', the elegance, richness and delicacy of the local art.¹² They acknowledge a native artistic superiority: 'They are our masters when it comes to creativity. [. . .] The simplest worker is an artist, he covers the Orient with his wonderful inventions; without a compass, without a set-square, his hand can trace a beautiful form; he is subtle in his effort to embellish any object, knowing where to put richness or simplicity'.¹³ Rugs, pipes and slippers have a beauty with as much to teach the European, Goupil-Fesquet asserts, as the ancient monuments which are so regularly sought out.¹⁴ Among the

usual statements about Oriental despotism there is an occasional recognition of a pluralism lacking in France, as the dizzying variety of languages, religions and cultures makes him reflect on the restricted nature of his own country: 'So why is it that in France, where we have proclaimed freedom of speech and of religion, we do not have in any of our cities a mosque where Muslims can practise their religion?'.¹⁵

In the daguerreotypes, too, we can glimpse a different Orient from the one transmitted through the paintings. As Julia Ballerini remarked, they have a surprisingly inconsequential quality which is at odds with the conventions of Orientalist representation: the emphasis on grand but decaying monuments which marks the early period, or on ethnic and social types or local colour, which characterises later photography.¹⁶ To judge from *Excursions daguerriennes*, the *Voyage*, Goupil-Fesquet's notes and Vernet's letters, the pair took at least thirty daguerreotypes, of which eight were reproduced in the *Excursions* (see Part 1 of this article in the April issue of the Magazine, pp.264–71, notes 6 and 38). In these views, we find the banality of everyday life, not an idyllic or idealised picture of ruins; the mixing of present and past, not a unified scene; and discreet reminders of war. Moreover, if photography was later to be associated with containing and mastering the Orient,

un objet quelconque, connaissant où il faut mettre de la richesse et de la simplicité'; *Voyage*, pp.95–96.

¹⁴ 'Un beau tapis, une belle pipe, de belles pantoufles, en un mot tout ce qui s'offre à l'artiste en tout lieu, n'est-il pas pour lui aussi intéressant et aussi digne de son attention que le monument antique le plus somptueux?'; *Voyage*, p.97.

¹⁵ 'Pourquoi donc en France, où nous avons proclamé la liberté des opinions et des cultes,

n'avons-nous, dans aucune de nos villes, aucune mosquée où le musulman puisse exercer sa religion?'; *Voyage*, p.47.

¹⁶ J. Ballerini: 'Photography Conscripted: Horace Vernet, Gérard de Nerval and Maxime du Camp in Egypt', unpublished Ph.D. diss. (City University of New York, 1987), p.94. She concludes, however, that the daguerreotypes betray an underlying imperialist vision that the text brings to the surface (p.108).



17. Pompey's Pillar, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet. 8th November 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).



18. Pompey's Pillar, Alexandria, by David Roberts. 1839. Lithograph by Louis Haghe from *Egypt & Nubia*, from drawings made on the spot by David Roberts, with historical descriptions by William Brockedon, London 1846–49, I, pl.5. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC).

photographers in 1839 were all too aware of the unpredictability of their art, which was dependent on temperature, weather and lighting, on the contrast between colour and light in the objects, on the sensitivity of the lenses and the degree of iodisation of the plate. This unpredictability is a recurring theme in the early publications on photography. Henry Fox Talbot emphasised that uniformity in paper photography was unattainable due to light conditions and the quality of the paper.¹⁷ Eugène Hubert insisted that it was impossible to provide definitive rules and to produce the same image twice, because of the infinite number of circumstances and variations which occur at any moment: 'success in producing a fine print is very chancy'.¹⁸ He cites Goupil-Fesquet's view of a snow-capped Mount Lebanon against a clear blue sky, which was washed out in the photograph, and contrasts it with a view of Naples with an equally snow-capped Vesuvius, which was very clear.¹⁹ Goupil-Fesquet himself acknowledged this element of chance, of the photographer's lack of control over the image: 'It often happens, especially with the camera obscura, that you

take a view which seems very fine in reality only to get a really bad result, as a composition'.²⁰ Early photographic practice was a struggle between an infinitely variable, unstable reality – the object depicted, the conditions under which it was taken, the materials of the process – and the photographer's limited ability to manipulate these so as to produce a 'fine image'. Always retaining something beyond the control of the artist, the daguerreotype harboured no pretensions of mastery over its subject.

Any analysis of the Goupil-Fesquet/Vernet images must begin with a series of caveats: we do not have the original daguerreotypes, but only the engravings from them; we have only a fraction of the total number taken, and those that we have were published in a travel album, for which a certain type of view would have been selected in preference to others; the limitations of the medium at this early stage, and the particular conditions of the journey, made figure daguerreotypes a rarity.²¹ In these images, figures were added later for publication in the *Excursions*, allegedly for scale but also to make the pictures conform

¹⁷ W.H. Fox Talbot: *The Pencil of Nature*, London 1844, pp.12–13.

¹⁸ 'Les opérations photographiques sont tellement délicates et compliquées d'incidents imprévus, qu'il nous a paru impossible de faire de suite deux dessins exactement pareils. [...] [L]a réussite d'une très belle épreuve est toujours chanceuse'; E. Hubert: *Le Daguerreotype considéré sous un point de vue artistique, mécanique et pittoresque*, Paris 1840, p.32, esp. p.16: fixed rules for exposure times are impossible because of 'le nombre de circonstances qui viennent se combiner avec les variations de température et de saisons [...], la sensibilité des objectifs, les

retards résultant d'une planche fortement iodée, du passage d'un nuage'.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

²⁰ 'Il est très fréquent surtout avec la chambre obscure de prendre une vue qui semble très-belle en réalité et d'en obtenir un fort mauvais résultat, comme composition'; *Voyage*, p.180.

²¹ Goupil-Fesquet mentions one daguerreotype with figures, taken on board the boat from Smyrna to Malta during the return journey; see the Appendix to part I of this article in the April issue, p.271, note 65.



19. *View of Luxor*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet (and Horace Vernet?). November 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

more closely to standard engravings of Oriental scenes from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²² Nevertheless, these views consistently elude pure convention. Even the added figures create an incongruity which brings out all the more the 'unartistic' quality of the daguerreotype. In the example of the *Pyramid of Cheops* (Fig.16), the local 'natives' with their camels in the foreground, similar to those found in the contemporary prints of David Roberts (Fig.18), contrast starkly with the kind of gritty, textured quality of the rest, as do the soldiers and horseman in the image of *Pompey's Pillar* (Fig.17), a view also painted by Roberts shortly before (Fig.18). Goupil-Fesquet's text about the pyramid of Cheops waxed lyrical on the sublimity of 'those silent phantoms of past centuries [which] give birth to feelings of boundless time, along with an insurmountable impression of immobility' and 'the astonishment, terror, humiliation and respect [that] grip the spectator all at once', only to lapse into a searing criticism of the despotism and exploitation of the pharaohs that gave rise to these 'vain sepulchres in which each stone is a letter of the words pride, vanity, servitude';²³ but the image contains no hint of this. Unlike the Roberts print, which, with its grand sweep and long perspective, gives a sense of the sublime, it is taken from

a point where the pyramid appears neither very large, nor very small, and thus does not convey an impression of the silence and solitude of the desert, much less of the despotism of the pharaohs or their passing. Banal elements punctuate the scene: reminders of the modern excavations such as the tent on the left, the mast to the right of it which sticks up and breaks the symmetry of the composition, and the wooden fence along the front; across the middle, at the foot of the pyramid, a rough and disordered landscape of boulders that contained the caves let out as rooms by the Englishman Howard Vyse who was in charge of the site, and which Goupil-Fesquet more sensationally described as resembling a pile of skulls or petrified sponges.²⁴

Similarly, the image of Luxor (Fig.19) has nothing to do with its famous monuments, but rather is an unexotic view of boats on the Nile and modern houses on the shore. The text acknowledges explicitly this lack of visual stereotypes, thus debunking the pictorial conventions of the *voyage en Orient*: 'the reader will look in vain [. . .] for some propylaeum, sphinx, obelisk or other gigantic fragment which is indispensable to every Egyptian site. However, it is Luxor, nothing can be truer [. . .] the daguerreotype [. . .] invents nothing and never embellishes its model.'²⁵ In Roberts's

²² 'Les vues gravées seront animées de figures. Lorsque les épreuves faites sur les lieux n'en auront pas, on y suppléera par quelques groupes pris dans des croquis tracés d'après nature dans les mêmes localités'; 'Avis de l'Éditeur', N.-P. Lerebours: *Excursions daguerriennes. Vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe*, Paris 1841–42 (hereafter cited as *Excursions daguerriennes*), I.

²³ 'Ces fantômes silencieux des siècles passés [. . .] font naître le sentiment d'une durée sans borne, jointe à une impression insurmontable d'immobilité [. . .] l'étonnement, la terreur, l'humiliation et le respect saisissent à la fois le spectateur [. . .] vains sépulchres, où chaque pierre

est une lettre des mots orgueil, vanité, servitude'; *ibid.*, 'Pyramide de Cheops'; see also *Voyage*, pp.119–20.

²⁴ 'Pyramide de Cheops', *Excursions daguerriennes*; see also *Voyage*, p.118. The tent was that of J.R. Hill, an engineer who was assisting in the excavations.

²⁵ 'Le lecteur cherchera vainement sur la gravure quelque propylée, sphinx, obélisque ou autre fragment gigantesque, indispensable à tout site égyptien. C'est Louqsor cependant, rien n'est plus vrai; [. . .] le daguerreotype [. . .] n'invente rien et n'embellit jamais son modèle'; 'Louqsor', *Excursions daguerriennes*.



20. *View of the Ruins of Luxor from the Nile*, by David Roberts. 1838. Lithograph by Louis Haghe from *Egypt & Nubia, from drawings made on the spot by David Roberts, with historical descriptions by William Brockedon*, London 1846–49, I, pl.16. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC).



21. *Harem of Mehmet-Ali*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet and Horace Vernet. 7th November 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

image of Luxor, the boats on the Nile are set against a broad background of precisely such monuments (Fig.20). Goupil-Fesquet describes the famous statues half-buried in the sand that face the obelisks 'well known to everyone', but these are not in his image. Instead we find modern houses in the centre, a minaret on the right and boats under repair in the foreground, their reflections projected in the water. To the right of these have been added

²⁶ 'On est à la merci de leur caprice, car aucune menace ne les émeut et jamais ils ne sont pressés d'arriver'; *ibid.*; see also *Voyage*, p.61.

²⁷ 'On fit voir l'image de la nature dans la chambre obscure à l'ébahissement de tous; ce qui intrigua le plus les spectateurs fut de voir marcher le factionnaire la tête en bas sans tomber. [...] Les volets furent ouverts et la plaque sortit de son bain mystérieux de mercure. [...] C'est l'ouvrage du diable, s'écria-t-il!'; 'Harem de Méhémet-Ali', *Excursions daguerriennes*; see also *Voyage*, pp.33–34. This type of wonder is a cliché applied to others, not just 'Orientals': Hubert gives a similar example of Parisians bewildered to find the

two small figures of bathers, their stylisation contrasting markedly with the rest. The text expresses the boredom of the passengers as they make their way slowly up the Nile, and the Europeans' commonplace complaint about the laissez-faire attitude of the local boatmen – 'you are at the mercy of their whims, for no threat bothers them and they are never in a hurry to get anywhere';²⁶ but the image gives no sign of this, and one can only think, on the contrary, that any enforced leisure on the journey had the benefit of allowing, during one of those moments of tedium, the taking of such a visually striking image.

Even an episode in which Vernet demonstrates the daguerreotype process to Mehmet Ali, replete as it is with suggestions of the technical superiority of France, takes on a different character in the accompanying daguerreotype (Fig.21). Having already heard about Daguerre's invention, Mehmet Ali had asked Vernet for a demonstration and had invited his generals to observe it. The view they took was of the harem, the wing of the palace containing the women's apartments. 'We showed them the image in the camera obscura, to the amazement of all; what intrigued them the most was seeing the guard walk upside down without falling. [...] The shutters were opened and the plate emerged from its mysterious mercury bath. "It's the work of the devil, he cried!"²⁷ Back in France, independently of the travellers, the episode spawned a ludicrous feuilleton entitled 'Le Daguerreotype au harem' that appeared in *La Presse* on 10th March 1840, during the trip itself: a tale of mistaken identity, mysterious love tokens and an *odalisque* in which Vernet, having taught the pasha to take daguerreotypes, allegedly gains access to the harem. Goupil-Fesquet alludes to this 'fantasy' in the *Excursions* and relates the more prosaic, truer version of events.²⁸ Nothing in the image is suggestive of any European superiority, nor is there any suggestion of eroticism apart from the word 'harem'; the need to invent a tale of illicit romance and entry into the forbidden space emphasises all the more the prosaic quality of the image. The austere view could be of any important administrative complex.

The other images are similarly unremarkable in terms of narrative. Several are panoramic views of towns, such as Beirut, Jerusalem, Acre and Nazareth. Far from conveying a sense of containment, closure and intelligibility, however, these panoramas include evidently haphazard elements which were not edited out by the engravers. *A View of Beirut* (Fig.22) taken from the terrace of the French consulate, looking towards Mount Lebanon over the rooftops and with the Palace Mosque in the centre, retains the laundry hanging on the lines and between the crenellations on the walls (in the middle left, in the centre foreground and in the middle right); the views of Nazareth and Acre do likewise (Figs.23 and 24). Some lack a clear sense of order: in the *View of Beirut*, modern villas in the light, airy countryside of the background contrast with the dense, strongly shadowed jumble of buildings in the old city, cut off at the bottom, in the front.

The *View of Jerusalem* (Fig.25) depicts one of the most common panoramas of the city, taken from the Mount of Olives and looking over the Temple Mount or Noble Sanctuary on the

Tuileries on the Left Bank and the Quatre Nations on the Right; see Hubert, *op. cit.* (note 18), p.23.

²⁸ 'Le public se rappellera sans doute un feuilleton de journal, intitulé: "le Daguerreotype au harem", dont le héros était censé notre grand peintre H.V., qu'on s'était même plu à couvrir de bouquets et de fleurs lancées par des mains féminines. L'image photographique soumise au lecteur est l'origine de ce conte bleu. Voici le récit beaucoup plus prosaïque du fait tel qu'il s'est passé'; 'Harem de Méhémet-Ali', *Excursions daguerriennes*. The tale was by Pitre-Chevalier.

22. *View of Beirut*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet (and Horace Vernet?). 31st January–1st February 1840. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).



23. *View of Nazareth*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet (and Horace Vernet?). 23rd December 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).





24. *View of Acre*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet (and Horace Vernet?). 25th–28th December 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).



25. *View of Jerusalem*, by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet (and Horace Vernet?). c.18th December 1839. Print after a lost daguerreotype from *Excursions daguerriennes*, I, 1840. (Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

26. *View of Jerusalem from the road leading to Bethany*, by David Roberts. 8th April 1839. Lithograph by Louis Haghe from *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia from drawings made on the spot by David Roberts, with historical descriptions by William Brockedon*, London 1842–45, I, pl.1. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC).



right, the church of the Holy Sepulchre in the middle distance and the Tower of David in the far distance on the left.²⁹ If we remember that the figures in the foreground were added for the *Excursions daguerriennes*, the photograph would have been a sweeping panorama of the city and not much more. Roberts's version, in contrast, is almost biblical in its grandeur, the distant city surrounded by a vast landscape of billowing hills, deep gorges and jutting plateaux (Fig.26). In the text accompanying his own image, Goupil-Fesquet draws attention to the multiplicity of peoples, religions and languages without turning it into a narrative of origins: the Dome of the Rock (which he, like most European travellers, incorrectly calls the 'mosque of Omar')³⁰ is on the site of the Temple of Solomon and dates to the seventh century; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a mixture of Moorish and Gothic architecture, its new dome, replacing one destroyed by fire in 1807, is by a Muslim architect, and the church is shared by several Christian sects. Between the landmarks are strewn those 'prosaic buildings', which, as he puts it ironically in the *Voyage*, hide the sacred ground from the 'investigatory gaze of those amateurs most passionate about the scent of the ages'.³¹ The irony indicates the author/photographer's knowledge, and rejection, of the tropes of Orientalist travel.

In the *View of Acre* (Fig.24), signs of the recent war are evident in the holes created by the cannonballs that pierced the walls and by the half-ruined houses on the right below the White, or Jezzar Pasha Mosque. The Siege of Acre was one of the most significant campaigns of the first Egyptian–Turkish war, and the city's surrender, on 27th May 1832, virtually guaranteed an Egyptian victory. In the text, Goupil-Fesquet alludes briefly to the conflict: 'Its fortifications, freshly repaired by our able compatriot Soliman Pasha, would be enough to attest that even recently, an

attack no less ferocious than that of the Crusaders or Napoleon was launched against [the city], if the cannonballs and the bombs half-buried in the plain left any doubt in that regard'.³² It was soon to be the site of one of the most ferocious battles of the second Egyptian–Turkish War, when it was bombarded by the British navy, allied with the Ottoman sultan against Mehmet Ali, on 3rd November 1840. In the *Voyage*, Goupil-Fesquet notes that Acre's convent and fortress were inhabited by detachments of Egyptian infantry; he describes a scene in which a soldier was punished, and another in which Turkish, Jewish and Christian draft-dodgers (*réfractaires*) were tortured.³³

In comparison to the daguerreotypes and their related texts, Vernet's Oriental genre paintings such as *The Arab tale-teller*, *Rebecca at the well*, *Hagar banished by Abraham*, *Judah and Tamar*, and *Arabs travelling in the desert* (see part 1 of this article in the April issue of the Magazine, pp. 264–71, Figs.39, 40, 42 and 44) are clearly composed with a view to audience expectations. Their brilliant colouring, abundance of ethnographic detail and high degree of finish would become hallmarks of later Orientalist painting.³⁴ The preparatory drawings, too, reveal significant differences in this regard. *Judah and Tamar*, executed in Malta on the return journey, is a good example. The eroticism inherent in this biblical subject, in which the widowed Tamar tricks her father-in-law, Judah, into fulfilling his duty of providing her with a new husband by posing as a prostitute and successfully propositioning him, lent itself perfectly to Vernet's desire to merge the Oriental and the biblical. Describing the subject and its commercial appeal, he wrote to his wife: 'you will scold me, because it is racy. It is widow Tamar getting pledges from Mr Juda like a young lady from the Palais Royal harassing a peasant. [. . .] It suits that old joker Pourtalès, and I want him to give me 10,000 francs for it'.³⁵ Critics at the

²⁹ On the representation of Jerusalem in Orientalist painting, and its relation to British evangelical activity, the beginnings of biblical archaeology, the founding of the Palestine Exploration Fund and the later Balfour declaration, see N. Tromans: 'The Holy City', in *idem*, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.162–72, esp. p.167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.163.

³¹ '... de prosaïques édifices jonchent obscurément le sol et le cachent aux regards investigateurs des amateurs les plus passionnés du parfum des siècles'; *Voyage*, p.176.

³² 'Ses fortifications, fraîchement relevées par notre habile compatriote Soliman-Pacha, attesteraient au besoin que naguère encore un assaut non moins terrible que celui des croisés et de Napoléon a dû lui être livré, si les boulets et les bombes à demi enterrés dans la plaine laissaient

quelque doute à cet égard'; 'Saint-Jean-d'Acre', *Excursions daguerriennes*.

³³ *Voyage*, pp.202–03.

³⁴ See Stevens, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.20–21.

³⁵ '... tu vas me gronder, car c'est graveleux. C'est madame veuve Tamar qui se fait donner par Mr Juda des gages comme qui dirait une demoiselle du Palais Royal qui embête un paysan. [. . .] Il va juste à ce vieux farceur de Pourtalès et je veux qu'il m'en donne 10,000 ff', Vernet to Montfort, 15th March 1840; AMN P30, quoted by C. Renaudeau in 'Horace Vernet 1789–1863', unpublished Ph.D. diss. (University of Paris IV, 2000), p.429, and partially in Durande, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.154.



27. *Study of Oriental dancers*, by Horace Vernet. 1839. Pencil on paper, 23.5 by 32.5 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

1843 Salon were certainly sensitive to the 'libidinous' aspect of the picture, which Léon Curmer judged would be 'downright pornographic' without its biblical gloss, and Heine, with a pun on Tamar's character, described as 'perfectly fit for the new Parisian church of Notre-Dame de Lorette'.³⁶ A study for Tamar, which was probably done on the journey, however, has none of the provocatively uncovered leg or breast of the finished painting, and instead concentrates on her elaborate dress (Fig.28).

A drawing of dancers (Fig.27) likewise shows no concern for the enormous erotic possibilities of the subject, exploited so sensationally by later artists including Vernet's nephew Emile Vernet-Lecomte (Fig.29).³⁷ Vernet's drawing seems to be based on an episode that took place on board their boat from Alexandria to Cairo on 12th November 1839.³⁸ At a stop in the village of Kafr Zaiat, about halfway up the Nile, they hired two *almehs* for a day's entertainment.³⁹ Originally professional poetesses and singers, by this period *almehs* had become equated with more banal public dancers, or *ghawazi*. They had been banned from most of the country by Mehmet Ali in 1834 and confined to Upper Egypt;⁴⁰ one could only see them surreptitiously or with official permission.⁴¹ In chapter 8 of the *Voyage*, Goupil-Fesquet described these dancers, their costume and the erotic nature of their performance. They wore a blue wool chemise with long sleeves and Oriental trousers, a short jacket tightly buttoned under their breasts which the chemise barely covers, a striped kerchief tied behind the head from which their hair flowed down in tresses dotted with little metal baubles and a belt knotted below their hips and moulding their thighs 'like the drapery of the Venus of Milo'. They lifted their arms above their heads, holding in

their hands little copper castanets, threw their heads voluptuously back and leaned to one side or the other, shaking their hips and thighs in a kind of simmering movement. He concludes: 'The dance ends with frenetic contortions of such a brutal frankness that I would not dare describe them here'.⁴² Describing the same episode, Joly remarks: 'In my opinion, nothing equals the brazenness, shamelessness and avidity of these women'.⁴³ Once again, Vernet's drawing concentrates on details of costume and on the highly graceful, more than lascivious, movement of the dancers. Interestingly, he never executed this subject in a painting, despite its potential appeal.

In contrast to the highly contrived paintings, the other evidence from Vernet's 1839–40 trip betrays a more nuanced and complex 'Orient', one in which traces of the East as a historical space are clearly discernible amid the clichés. Vernet's prejudices did not prevent him from being an astute observer of internal and international politics. As photographers, he and Goupil-Fesquet were well aware of the preconceptions of Orientalist travel, the conventions of Orientalist representation and photography's ability, or propensity, to undermine these. Goupil-Fesquet explicitly acknowledged the uncontrollability of the photographic image by which they sought to capture what they saw. The daguerreotypes themselves retain the marks of this, elements of the banal and prosaic, of war, of the haphazard and contingent, of an order outside pictorial convention, of historicity – not to mention the uncapturable: those sites for which attempts to photograph failed altogether, a point that Goupil-Fesquet draws to the reader's attention, in direct contrast to the pretention to encyclopedic exhaustivity of the format of the travel album.⁴⁴ In this experimental phase, at least, photography may have aspired to

³⁶ Quoted in Renaudeau, *op. cit.* (note 35), pp.429–30.

³⁷ See, for example, *The dance of the almeh*, by Jean-Léon Gérôme. 1863. Panel, 50.2 by 81.3 cm. (Dayton Art Institute).

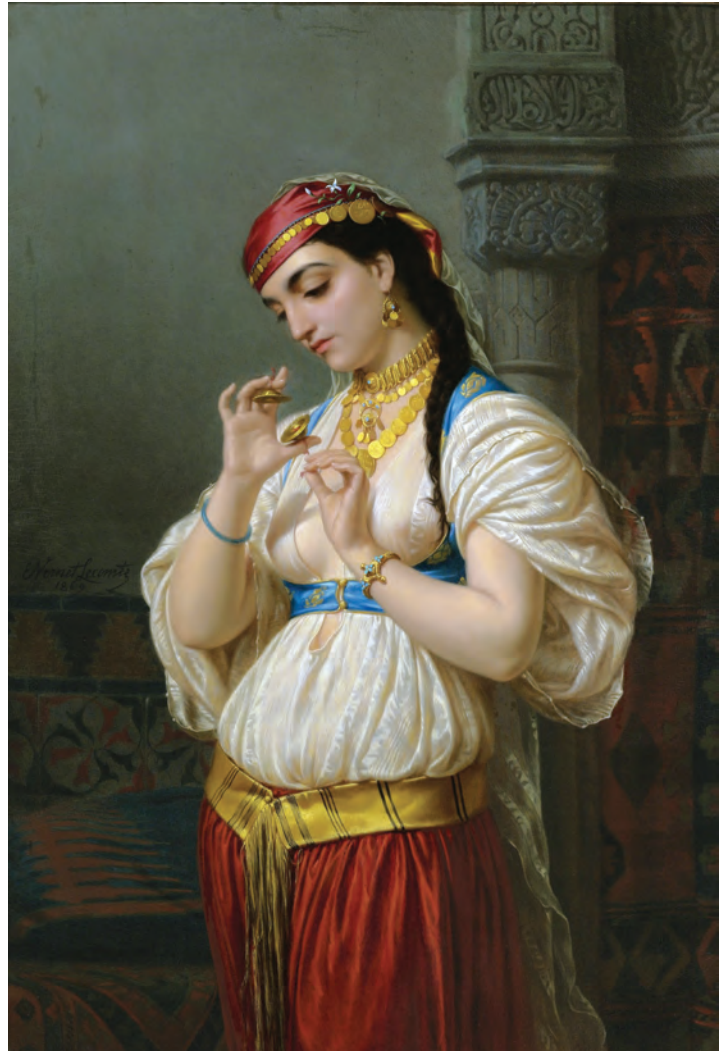
³⁸ Later, in Damascus, Goupil-Fesquet reports that 'On the 20th [January 1840], M. Vernet, who dines alone at the colonel's of the artillery division, sees some *almehs*

dance' (*Voyage*, p.216), but Vernet states in a letter that he arrived too late to see them; Vernet to Montfort, n.d. [20th January 1840], AMN P30; see also *L'illustration* (12th April 1856); and Durande, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.145).

³⁹ The village is named Caffr Raiak in *Voyage*, pp.69–70, but this is surely a misprint, since no such village exists. Pierre-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière in J. Desautels, G.



28. *Study for Tamar*, by Horace Vernet. 1840. Pencil on paper, 28.1 by 17.7 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).



29. *Almée*, by Emile Vernet-Lecomte. 1869. Canvas, 130.5 by 88 cm. (Courtesy Sotheby's, New York, sale 4th November 2010, lot 5).

the picturesque, but it stubbornly rendered something of the real. While some may have sought to temper this reality with cultural 'filters' from literary and pictorial models,⁴⁵ Goupil-Fesquet seemed more interested in exploring, by design or necessity, the different possibilities that the camera offers.

In this sense, Vernet's case may provide a useful direction for future research on the relationship between the photographic and the pictorial 'Orient'. The scholarly narrative of the place of photography in the European construction of the 'Orient' has largely followed that of painting. As has been shown, however, there may be subtle or significant differences, elements of the haphazard, the momentary, the everyday or the historical that persist in even the most calculated photographic image. Some

photographers, like Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet, were well aware of the conventions of Orientalist representation and believed that photography could – or would by necessity – provide a more truthful view. If, as Stevens observes, almost all the Orientalist painters after Vernet used photography,⁴⁶ a fuller investigation of its relation to Orientalist painting, beyond the obvious recourse to familiar critical formulas, seems compelling. Vernet's and Goupil-Fesquet's trip of 1839–40 may thus have been path-breaking beyond being the first in which two European painters photographed the Near East, leading to a reconsideration of how the camera, in its earliest use, not only constructed but also deconstructed the 'Orient', infusing the realm of the imaginary with the historical and the real.

Aubin and R. Blanchet, eds.: *Voyage en Orient (1839–1840)*, Quebec 2010, p.151, states that the village was about halfway up the Nile to Cairo, which corresponds to Kafr Zaiat on maps of the period.

⁴⁰ On the *almeh*, see Stevens, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.139. Goupil-Fesquet indeed equates 'almées' with 'gaouasys' or 'gaouazis' (singular *ghaziya*); see *Voyage*, pp.72–75. They were later described by other travellers, such as Gustave Flaubert and Gérard de Nerval.

⁴¹ Vernet describes the circuitous route by which he was led to the house in Damascus where the dancers were to perform; Vernet to Montfort, 20th January 1840; AMN P30; see also *L'Illustration* (12th April 1856); and Durande, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.144. Joly notes that in Keneh, in Upper Egypt, permission from the provincial governor

was required for the performance; see Desautels, Aubin and Blanchet, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.181.

⁴² *Voyage*, p.74.

⁴³ Desautels, Aubin and Blanchet, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.151.

⁴⁴ He signals it once in the 'Pyramide de Chéops', *Excursions daguerriennes: 'les trois premiers jours de notre séjour aux pieds des Pyramides, il nous a été impossible d'obtenir aucune épreuve visible'*; and repeatedly in *Voyage*. On the travel album, see D. Meaux: 'Représentations de l'Orient: Projets photographiques et médiations culturelles', *Romantisme* (1999), p.110, nos.105 and 107–18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁴⁶ Stevens, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.21–22.