

# Travelling | Exploration and research | Scientific expeditions

From the 19th century onwards, the Arab and Ottoman world attracted an increasing number of scientists, scholars, explorers ... and spies!

The fascinating new facts relayed back to Europe by French scholars in the wake of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt and Syria in 1798–99, led to an intensified European interest in the Middle East in general. In the decades that followed, and aided by increasing European penetration of the region, many scientists, scholars and explorers followed the French example of travelling within the Arab and Ottoman world to gain knowledge in a wide variety of fields. A lot of investigation was undertaken well before and – at least on the face of it – unrelated to the gradually unfolding imperialist ambitions of European powers in key areas of the Middle East and North Africa in the second half of the 19th century. Archaeology, for example, made some of its most important and pioneering strides during this period. Nevertheless, other aspects of scholarly and scientific investigation did help either directly or indirectly to facilitate the steady progress of imperialism by providing crucial strategic and logistic information about the region and its resources.



**Working Number:** FR 064

**Name:** Illustrations from Voyage en Nubie et en Abyssinie entrepris pour découvrir les sources du Nil

**Holding Museum:** National Library of France

**Date:** 1790

**Materials:**

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**Curator**

**Justification:** Geographic and geopolitical exploration was of great interest to European powers in their quest to effectively penetrate the region in search of raw materials and new markets for trade. Finding the source of the Nile held a fascination for many explorers, for whoever managed to discover it was guaranteed fame and fortune.



**Working Number:** FR 065

**Name:** The Victoria Nile - At Rionga's Island

**Holding Museum:** National Library of France

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** -

**Curator**

**Justification:** It is disputed as to whether it was British explorer John Hanning Speke or his commander Captain Richard Burton who discovered the source of the Nile in 1858. In any case, their quest combined the thirst for knowledge with the imperialist conviction and personal ambitions typical of many 19th-century European explorers.



**Working Number:** AT 039

**Name:** Map of the Network of Caravans

**Holding Museum:** Austrian State Archives

**Date:** 1856

**Materials:** -

**Curator**

**Justification:** The Austro-Hungarian Empire, like her European competitors, was keen to advance her economic and commercial interests in the Arab and Ottoman

world. Knowledge of established regional transport networks as well as intelligence concerning local industries was of vital importance in this endeavour.



**Working Number:** AT 012

**Name:** Coat of a bedouin collected during the Expedition of the Austrian Ship Pola under the command of Paul von Pott to explore the Red Sea

**Holding Museum:** Kunsthistorisches Museum, Weltmuseum

**Date:** 1839

**Materials:** Cotton

**Curator Justification:** In 1897/8, the Austrian Academy of Science dispatched a scientific expedition under Captain Paul Edler von Pott to explore the Red Sea and its shores. A lot of scientific data was gathered, but in addition ethnographically and artistically intriguing items such as this Bedouin coat were collected.



**Working Number:** SP 001

**Name:** Kaftan

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Anthropology

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** Silk, woven; brocade

**Curator Justification:** This kaftan belonged to the Spanish naturalist and zoologist Manuel Martínez de la Escalera (1867–1949), who undertook scientific expeditions throughout the Middle East in the 1890s. He subsequently established important collections of zoological and other natural specimens, antiquities and folkloric items.



**Working Number:** ET1 019

**Name:** Photo documenting the discovery of the Tutankhamun tomb

**Holding Museum:** Bibliotheca Alexandrina

**Date:** 1922

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many European scholars visited Egypt in search of an ancient past that was recounted in the Bible and through the Christian education system. The Tomb of Tutankhamun was discovered by the British Egyptologist Howard Carter in the Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt in 1922.



**Working Number:** ET1 020

**Name:** The objects found in the tomb of Tutankhamun

**Holding Museum:** Bibliotheca Alexandrina

**Date:** 1922

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The archaeology of ancient Egypt had fascinated Europeans ever since the French invasion in the late 18th century. Artists such as the Scottish painter David Roberts further popularised the topic with paintings and lithographs. The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 led to a global craze that was fed by the recent availability of mass media.



**Working Number:** GR 047

**Name:** Kusejr Amra

**Holding Museum:** Benaki Museum

**Date:** 1907

**Materials:** Printed paper

**Curator Justification:** It was not only ancient Egypt that fascinated European scholars. Qusayr 'Amra, an early Islamic desert palace in present-day Jordan with a bathhouse complex, was first published by Alois Musil (1868–1944), an Austro-Hungarian polymath – Catholic theologian, explorer, writer and spy.



**Working Number:** SP 035

**Name:** Ali Bey (Domingo Badia y Leblich), Traveller

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Romanticism

**Date:** c. 1816

**Materials:** Paper; ink; stipple engraving; pencil-manner engraving

**Curator Justification:** Many scientists, scholars and explorers also secretly gathered information for their governments while in the East. 'Ali Bey (a pseudonym for Domingo Badia; 1767–1818), was a Spanish explorer and spy who travelled across the Ottoman Empire and North Africa disguised as a Syrian prince.



**Working Number:** AT 006

**Name:** Lamp from a mosque

**Holding Museum:** Kunsthistorisches Museum, Weltmuseum

**Date:** 1896

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** Karl Alexander Anselm Freiherr von Hügel, the owner of this lamp, was an Austrian naturalist and botanist as well as being a diplomat who gathered information for his government. He visited Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine in 1831 and, like many of his contemporaries collected information outside his field of expertise.



**Working Number:** SP 102

**Name:** Waistcoat (Yelek)

**Holding Museum:** Cerralbo Museum

**Date:** 19th century  
**Materials:** Hand-embroidered velvet  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** This waistcoat was collected by Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa (1845–1922), 17th Marquis of Cerralbo. A Spanish aristocrat, Cerralbo was a highly respected archaeologist and historian, who built up important collections during his travels in the East.

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**Working Number:** GR 016

**Name:** The Dinner held at Delphi in Honour of the Painter by the Elder of the Village at Chryso  
**Holding Museum:** Benaki Museum  
**Date:** Early 19th century  
**Materials:** Watercolour  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** Artists conveyed a large amount of valuable scholarly information back to Europe too. The dinner seen here was held in honour of the Irish artist and archaeological writer Edward Dodwell (1767–1832) to mark his return from a journey across Ottoman Greece in search of its ancient roots. Dodwell's influential books on Ottoman Greece include A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece (1819) and Views in Greece (1821).



**Working Number:** GR 004

**Name:** Portrait of a Greek Wearing a Fustanela  
**Holding Museum:** Benaki Museum  
**Date:** c. 1830  
**Materials:** Oil on canvas  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** Louis Dupré (1798–1837) was famous in France for his philhellene and Orientalist artworks that, at the time, were perceived to convey accurate ethnographic detail. Travelling in Greece and the Ottoman Empire in the early 1820s, like many, he had set out in search of antiquity but merely by chance had discovered instead the “living” Orient.



**Working Number:** GR 015

**Name:** Athenian Bride  
**Holding Museum:** Benaki Museum  
**Date:** 1825  
**Materials:** Lithograph  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** In this scene, the French painter Louis Dupré conveys fascinating details about the traditional rituals at an Athenian wedding: the bride is waiting while the groom is ritually shaved. Dupré, like many of his contemporaries contributed to increasing “knowledge” about the Orient in Europe,

but unfortunately not all of this contribution was accurate.



**Working Number:** PT 097

**Name:** Aegilops ovata L.

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Natural History and Science (MUHNAC) /  
Museums of the University of Lisbon

**Date:**

1840

**Materials:**

Pressed and dried plant, glued on paper

**Curator**

**Justification:**

Many European scientists focused on the flora and fauna of the region. This sheet, a Herbarium, shows three fruiting specimens of Aegilops ovate, collected in Algeria in May 1840 by the Scientific Commission of Argelia (Algeria) under the supervision of the French naturalist M. Durieu.



**Working Number:** PT 100

**Name:** Azurite

**Holding Museum:** National Museum of Natural History and Science (MUHNAC) /  
Museums of the University of Lisbon

**Date:**

c. 1920

**Materials:**

Azurite crystals

**Curator**

**Justification:**

European research into the flora and fauna of the Arab and Ottoman world was often aimed at establishing where the more desirable raw materials could be secured most easily. This sample of Azurite, a mineral traditionally used as blue pigment, was collected from the Touissit Mine, near Oudja in Morocco, in around 1920.