

Rediscovering the Past / The birth of archaeology

The 19th century saw the birth of systematic archaeology. Europeans searched for their cultural roots at home and abroad. New fields of study were created: classical archaeology, Egyptology, Assyriology, and biblical archaeology. Excavations in the Arab and Ottoman world were fundamental. A growing appreciation of pre-classical art broke the monopoly that Greek art had previously held on the public taste. Archaeology and colonialism were inescapably connected. French and Italian soldiers identified with their Roman imperial predecessors. They drew maps, published discoveries in scholarly papers, and used aeroplanes for a new type of archaeological survey. Germany advised the Ottomans on a new railway, opening new areas for archaeology. But were the archaeologists also spying? T. E. Lawrence “of Arabia”, recruited by British military intelligence, encouraged the Arab Revolt.



Working Number: DZ 086
Name: Ruins of Charchell
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1840–1849
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Scholars systematically made drawings and plans of ancient sites.



Working Number: SP 049
Name: Egyptian Landscape
Holding Museum: National Museum of Romanticism
Date: 1883
Materials: Oil on canvas
Curator Justification: Published drawings inspired artists to produce paintings blending archaeology with a taste for the exotic.



Working Number: UK 044
Name: Winged colossus
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: 7th century BC
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Rediscovered cities yielded amazing objects from lost civilisations.



Working Number: FR 008
Name: Egypt. Mummies found in the kings' tomb in Thebes
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1870
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Mummies would become emblematic of Egypt's pharaonic heritage.



Working Number: JO 003
Name: Petra
Holding Museum: -
Date: Prehistoric-Present; identified in 1812
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Forgotten Petra became world famous.



Working Number: IT1 002
Name: An example of Italian colonial propaganda: 'Italy takes up the sword of ancient Rome. To the Italian sailors who are fighting in Tripolitania'
Holding Museum:
Date: Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation (ICCD)
Materials: 1911–12
Curator Justification: -
Archaeology could be put to political as well as scholarly use.



Working Number: MO 001
Name: Photograph of archaeological excavations at Volubilis
Holding Museum: Conservation of the Archaeological Site of Volubilis
Date: 1915
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Arab and Ottoman world is full of UNESCO World Heritage sites.



Working Number: UA 002
Name: Head of the Great Sphinx, Pyramids of Gizeh July 17th, 1839
Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority
Date: Published 1846
Materials: Lithograph
Curator Justification: The pyramids would prove an irresistible attraction for generations of visitors.



Working Number: TN 091
Name: Amphitheatre at El Jem
Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date: 19th century
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: The Arab and Ottoman world is home to some of the best-preserved archaeological sites in the world.



Working Number: FR 012
Name: Ruins of Troy: general excavation plan by Mr Schliemann
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1876

Materials: -
Curator Justification: Cities known only from stories would reveal their secrets.



Working Number: DZ 100
Name: Library museum
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1863–1896
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Museums were established across the Arab and Ottoman world.



Working Number: AT 036
Name: Decoration of the Egyptian collection of Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna
Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection
Date: 1873
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The European public flocked to museums in ever-increasing numbers to see the latest discoveries.



Working Number: UK 097
Name: Showcasing architecture
Holding Museum: Private collection
Date: 1889
Materials: -
Curator Justification: In an ever-more international world, Europeans were as intrigued by the customs of past cultures as by those of foreign ones.



Working Number: TR2 003
Name: Pedestal of the Obelisk in the Ancient Byzantine Hippodrome
Holding Museum: Ömer M. Koç Collection
Date: 1854
Materials: -
Curator Justification: New technologies assisted archaeologists, and brought foreign and ancient cities into the homes of the curious.



Working Number: DE 003
Name: Façade of the Palace of Mushatta
Holding Museum: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums
Date: AD 743–744; given by the Ottoman sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II to Emperor Wilhelm II in 1903
Materials: -
Curator Justification: -

Encounters with Arab and Ottoman art changed European tastes.
