

Rediscovering the Past

Cultural connections between Europe and the Arab and Ottoman world were nothing new. The Mediterranean had always served as a bridge and not a barrier between Europe, North Africa and Asia. But the intensity of the renewed interactions of the 19th century was unprecedented. The process would change everyone it touched significantly and irreversibly. As the 19th century opened, study of the past was in the hands of amateurs: diplomats, soldiers and travellers. Expert surveyors mapped the location of ancient sites and made plans of their ruins. At the turn of the 20th century, professional scholars deployed new tools and techniques in pursuit of newly defined fields; members of scholarly bodies, they published their findings in dedicated journals. Air force pilots, in the course of their duties and independently, took aerial photos of sites. Europeans marvelled at the pyramids, at the desert city of Petra and at the discovery of fabled Troy. They flocked to museums to see the mummies and other finds from ancient sites. Their fascination with the exotic “East” grew with each new discovery. The growing interest of foreign visitors stimulated awareness in the Arab and Ottoman world of the significance of their cultural heritage. This was seen as both a source of national pride as well as a valuable asset, as income from tourism. As a consequence of tourism, institutions were established to preserve and display the monuments and finds and ensure the sustainability of the heritage sites. Curation of the finds from archaeological explorations had been in European collections. Throughout the 19th and into the early 20th century, museums were founded in Turkey, North Africa and the Arab world, in a variety of circumstances. Museums were founded in Algiers (1838), Cairo (1861), Istanbul and Beirut (both 1868) and Tunis (1888). New regulations controlled excavations and directed the flow of finds to local institutions.

More:

The birth of archaeology

The formation of museums

Inspired by the past

Mapmaking



Osman Hamdi Bey (During the excavation of Mount Nemrut)

1883

Istanbul Archaeological Museums
Istanbul, Türkiye
Photograph



Portrait of Claudius Rich

1825

The British Museum
London, United Kingdom



Egyptianising plate

1804–5

The British Museum
London, United Kingdom



Valley of the Queens, Tomb of Prince Khaemwaset at the moment of discovery

1903

Soprintendenza Archeologia del Piemonte: Authority for the Archaeological Heritage of Piedmont
Turin, Italy
Francesco Ballerini (attributed)
Silver bromide negative impressed on glass plate



Archaeological and topographic map of the Carthaginian ruins

1907

National Library of France
Paris, France
Cartographer: Pierre Bordy