

Rediscovering the Past / Inspired by the past

The rediscovery of ancient civilisations – Egyptian, Assyrian, Hittite and Phoenician – captured the public imagination. Visitors flocked to see the newly excavated monuments. Books describing the discoveries sold in huge quantities. Public lectures were unfailingly popular. Everyone wanted to show off his or her knowledge of archaeology and appreciation of the new artistic styles. “Egyptomania” took hold repeatedly: first after Napoleon’s expedition, revived when the Suez Canal was built in 1869, and again in 1920s, with the discovery of Tut-ankh-amun’s tomb. Archaeological discoveries combined with oriental fantasies, stories from the Bible, tales from the Greeks and translations of the One Thousand and One Nights, to make the Arab World, ancient and modern, an irresistible source of inspiration for art, music, theatre, decorative arts and architecture. An enthused populace funded exploration, excavation and survey work.



Working Number: FR 137
Name: Exposition Universelle - Their Royal Imperial Majesties and the Viceroy of Egypt visit the Temple of Edfu
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1867
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Shared appreciation of past cultures was a way to build closer relations between modern nations.



Working Number: UK 049
Name: Assyrianising pendant
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: 1865–1870
Materials: Gold, glass, mosaic
Curator Justification: Motifs from ancient objects became fashionable in Europe.



Working Number: TN 090
Name: Chateaubriand at the ruins of Carthage
Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d’Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date: 19th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The 19th-century view of the past was a romanticising one.



Working Number: UK 096
Name: Recreating Assyria
Holding Museum: Private collection
Date: 1850’s?
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The European public delighted in exploring ancient monuments for themselves, through elaborate reconstructions at exhibitions.



Working Number: IT2 006
Name: The Virgin at the Nile
Holding Museum: National Gallery of Modern Art (GNAM)

Date: 1865
Materials: Oil on canvas
Curator Justification: Artists blended careful research of antiquity with elements of fantasy.
