

Mostly Mammoths

but other things that fascinate me, too

ANCIENT EGYPT, ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, ARCHAEOLOGY,
BOSTON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE, INTERNATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAY, MUMMIES

Boston Archeology Fair – Spotlight: Dr. George Mutter, Egyptian Images in 3D

Date: November 6, 2013 Author: mostlymammoths © 1 Comment

I'd like to return, on this post, back to October 19th at the AIA-MOS Archaeology Fair.

One of the featured events was referred to as “3D Images of Egypt”, and it was held twice on that Saturday. I was able to catch the second presentation (held directly after the “Ask Dr. Dig” panel discussion), but I did so based on the mention of “Egypt” alone. I hadn't been able to read anything about it.

Each visitor was given 3D-glasses, and we were instructed to sit in the middle section of the theatre at the Museum. This, it was explained, was for optimum viewing.

The lights went down; **Dr. George Mutter** took the podium; the images began to populate the screen.

And I listened with rapt attention.

This was not simply “3D Images of Egypt”.

This was a fantastically unique slideshow narrated by Dr. Mutter, who peppered his descriptions with fascinating details of what it might have been like as a European traveler viewing Egypt and its archeological sites around 1870.

The images he displayed, largely in black-and-white, became that much more alive in 3D. Coupled with his narration, one could actually begin to feel as though they were traveling back in time and across continents.

Images of 19th-century Cairo, the people of Egypt, and archeological sites—some with debris scattered everywhere—sent my imagination reeling. What was it truly like? What were the sounds? The smells? How was the heat? What did the Egyptian people think of the European people?

As many know, Europe was generally introduced to Egypt (and ancient Egypt) after 1798 when Napoleon made his military conquest there. The images in this presentation were almost a century later. Howard Carter wouldn't discover Tutankhamun's tomb until 1922.

One of the initial images was of a houseboat, and Dr. Mutter explained that this was used on travels on the Nile, as there weren't any hotels along the way. Before each trip, the boat was sunk to "get rid of the bugs and vermin".

This was the kind of detail I absolutely loved throughout the presentation.

Dr. Mutter is an academic physician trained at Harvard and Columbia, and he very graciously responded to my questions below.

 1. When did you first become interested in 3D images?

I was captivated by the immersive experience of historic stereophotographs about 30 years ago, when I ran across some in a New York City flea market. It was the images, not taking pictures myself. A sense of discovery took over, never knowing what would turn up next.

2. Your website mentions that you and your colleague have "access to a unique collection of 26,000 original images of broad topical and geographic coverage from 1855 through modern times". From where does this collection originate?

They were produced in the 19th century by commercial studios in Europe and the United States, who sent photographers all over the world. Mounted on cards, the paired stereoviews (right and left were taken by separate lenses) were sold for education and entertainment. Piles of stereoviews collected in Victorian parlors but became gradually dispersed over time, and today are generally available through flea markets, auctions, and specialised dealers. Its hard to re-aggregate a large collection now, but easy to get a few. The 26,000 images at Photoarchive3D were collected by myself and collaborator Bernard Fishman through 60 years of combined experience combing through these sources. Bernard and I met at a photo show, and decided to create a virtual (digital) single "collection" derived from our separate holdings. Our goal is to share these treasures with others, getting them excited about history and learning something in the process.

3 . How did you select the images shown on Saturday? And have others been able to see these pictures through your organization before?

"19th Century Egypt in 3D: A Victorian Trip Up the Nile" was designed to simulate a real journey c.1870. The best available images from this period corresponding to a typical Nile tour were arranged geographically, from Alexandria to the second cataract. Only 50 or so were chosen from a total of several thousand Egypt views we had at hand. We are biased towards visually and technically superb images, both in what we acquire and what we showcase for display. The absolute best are rare stereophotographs printed on glass, as they retain microscopic detail and unparalleled tonal range. Some subjects, such as local people and mummies, we were careful to include because Egypt is not just monuments and they were part of the experience.

We have shown the Egypt images at a convention of Egyptologists, to college students as part of their coursework, and to a groups of photohistorians. Our website (www.Photoarchive3D.org) has a few Egypt images, but we prefer to do it live. In addition

to Egypt, we have done presentations on the Ottoman World, 19th century 3D education, and historical preservation.

4. I was absolutely fascinated (and horrified) to learn that, prior to each journey down the Nile, the houseboats were sunk in order to get rid of the bugs and vermin. How was this fact discovered?

There are plenty of vintage guidebooks and travelogues which have these everyday details. There were no group tours before about 1870, so the guidebooks are very explicit about how to plan and execute a successful trip. My favorite is “1000 Miles up the Nile” by Amelia Edwards who traveled in 1873 and later founded the Egypt Exploration Society. Just so your readers do not think boats were disposable, I should clarify that they were sunk temporarily in shallow water, and then bailed out, nicely cleaned up, before the voyage.

5. Have you, yourself, been to Egypt? And if so, what are your favorite archeological sites? **I personally have been to Egypt twice, and Mr. Fishman is a trained Egyptologist who worked at Luxor. All the sites are special in their own way, and that is the beauty of it. Alexandria evokes the past without showing much on the surface, Giza impresses with scale, at Amarna you feel like the only person around, and Luxor exceeds all expectations.**

6. Your presentation focused on images of Egypt, but do you have a favorite time-period and set of pictures in your organization’s collection? Why is it your favorite?

The biggest appeal is a sense of being able to freely journey anywhere, going back 150 years, and seeing something that would not be encountered today. I like ephemeral showcases like the Crystal Palace in Victorian London, or worlds fairs such as the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Classic archaeological sites such as Rome and Pompeii are beautifully captured before they crumbled further. For atmosphere there is no better place than Ottoman Constantinople (Istanbul). Natural history museums are a favorite, as the displays remind me of my childhood boiling skeletons in the basement.

7. Were it not for photoarchive3d.org, would these images be lost?

No one knows what fraction of original production remains, but most views were “published” as many identical copies which have been preserved by virtue of being scattered about. This means there is a lot out there still to be discovered, but 25-30% of our inventory is potentially unique, as I have not seen other examples in all the years of searching. Although many individual images do exist outside of Photoarchive3D, there is added value to reassembly of groups of images which create a thematic virtual experience for the viewer. This is our strength.

8. What do you hope people will learn from your organization?

It would be wonderful if our audience could see a bit of themselves in the people and places of the past. We do that by putting them in unfamiliar environments, and letting them react with their own sensibilities. Wouldn’t you sink your boat to kill the rats and fleas if you had to live on it for several months?

An enormous thank you to Dr. George Mutter for his generosity, his insight and his fascinating responses!

Please be sure to visit the **website of Dr. Mutter and Mr. Fishman**: <http://photoarchive3d.org/>

And **check back to see their events; I cannot recommend them highly enough!**

<http://photoarchive3d.org/DOCS/Events.htm>

◀ 1000 MILES UP THE NILE ▶ AMARNA ▶ AMELIA EDWARDS ▶ ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA ▶
 ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES ▶ BERNARD P. FISHMAN ▶ BOSTON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE ▶ COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY ▶
 CRYSTAL PALACE ▶ DR. GEORGE MUTTER ▶ EGYPT ▶ EGYPTOLOGY ▶ GIZA ▶ HARVARD ▶ HISTORY ▶
 LUXOR ▶ MUMMIES ▶ OTTOMAN WORLD ▶ PHILADELPHIA CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION ▶
 PHOTOARCHIVE3D.ORG ▶ POMPEII ▶ STEREOGRAPHY ▶ STEREOVIEWS ▶ VICTORIAN LONDON



Published by [mostlymammoths](#)

[View all posts by mostlymammoths](#)

One thought on “Boston Archeology Fair – Spotlight: Dr. George Mutter, Egyptian Images in 3D”

Add Comment

1. Pingback: Dr. Ben Thomas: (Part 1) International Archaeology Day – Mostly Mammoths, Mummies and Museums

© 2024 MOSTLY MAMMOTHS

CREATE A FREE WEBSITE OR BLOG AT [WORDPRESS.COM](https://wordpress.com).