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MAX. DU CAMP

ÉGYPTE

NUBIE

PALESTINE ET SYRIE

Maxime du Camp,

*Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie: dessins photographiques
recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851, accompagnés
d'une texte explicative et précédés d'une introduction.*

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MAXIME DU CAMP

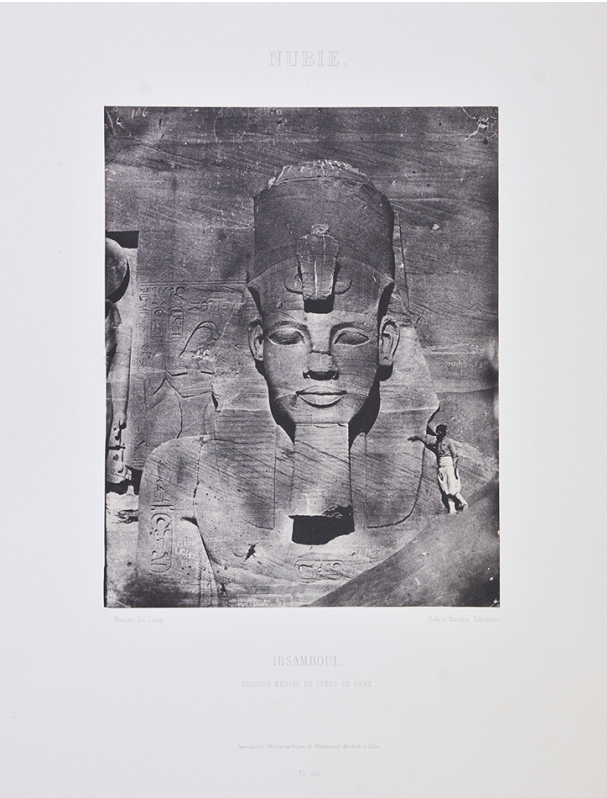
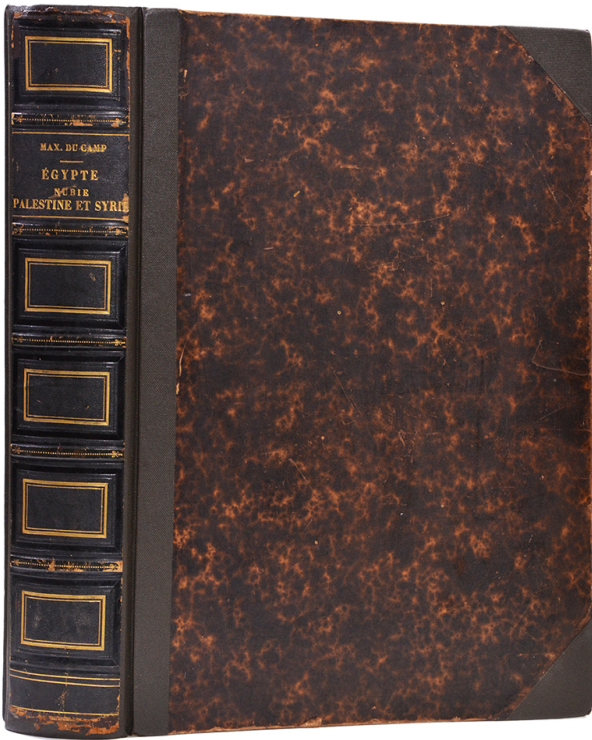
(Paris 1822 – 1894 Baden-Baden)

*DU CAMP, MAXIME, ÉGYPTÉ, NUBIE, PALESTINE ET SYRIE: DESSINS
PHOTOGRAPHIQUES RECUEILLIS PENDANT LES ANNÉES 1849, 1850 ET 1851,
ACCOMPAGNÉS D'UN TEXTE EXPLICATIF ET PRÉCÉDÉS D'UNE
INTRODUCTION.*

Paris, Gide & J. Baudry, 1852.

125 mounted original salt prints, letterpress captions to mounting leaves and tissue guards, 3 small engravings to the introductory text, double-page engraved plan of Karnak, single-page plans of Medinet-Habu and the island of Philae. Recent half brown cloth, marbled boards, original spine, brown hard-grained morocco laid down, title gilt direct, low flat bands with dotted roll gilt, double fillet panels to the compartments, new endpapers, original marbled free endpapers retained.
47 x 31.5 cm; 18 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.

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Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, published in Paris in 1852, occupies a seminal position in the histories of photography, archaeology and nineteenth-century travel. Illustrated with 125 mounted photographic prints recording the monuments and landscapes encountered during Du Camp's journey through Egypt and the Near East between 1849 and 1851, the publication was among the earliest large-scale attempts to employ the still relatively new medium of photography as a systematic instrument of archaeological documentation. Appearing little more than a decade after the public announcement of photography in 1839, it offered European audiences something fundamentally different from the engravings and lithographs through which Egypt had previously been encountered: images produced through the direct action of light upon a sensitised surface.

Born in Paris in 1822, Du Camp was a writer, traveller and, for a remarkably brief period, pioneering photographer. Before undertaking his expedition, he studied photographic techniques with Gustave Le Gray, one of the most technically accomplished photographers working in France. Du Camp subsequently secured an archaeological mission from the French Ministry of Public Instruction, giving his journey an explicitly documentary purpose. He travelled with his close friend Gustave Flaubert, and after reaching Egypt the pair proceeded from Cairo southwards along the Nile as far as the Second Cataract, subsequently returning downstream to examine the great archaeological sites of Upper Egypt. In July 1850 they left Egypt for Palestine and continued through the eastern Mediterranean, eventually separating in Italy in 1851.

Photography under such conditions remained a demanding undertaking. Cameras, chemicals, sensitised papers and processing equipment had to be transported through environments far removed from the controlled conditions of a European studio. Du Camp nevertheless returned with more than two hundred photographic negatives, of which 125 images were selected for publication. His subjects included some of the defining monuments of ancient Egypt: Karnak, Medinet Habu, Philae and the colossal rock-cut temples at Abu Simbel, as well as Islamic architecture and the landscapes through which these monuments were approached. The publication itself reinforces its archaeological character through a double-page engraved plan of Karnak and further plans of Medinet Habu and Philae.

Du Camp's photographs possess an austerity markedly different from the romanticised imagery of earlier artists. The camera generally confronts the monument directly. Architectural masses, hieroglyphic surfaces, pylons, columns and colossal statues are allowed to dominate the composition, while human figures occasionally provide a measure of scale. At Abu Simbel or among the monumental remains of Thebes, this juxtaposition could communicate the extraordinary physical magnitude of pharaonic architecture with a new immediacy. Yet these photographs are not devoid of aesthetic calculation. Their carefully balanced masses, long tonal passages and play between brilliant light and deep architectural shadow demonstrate the extent to which documentary precision and pictorial sensibility could coexist within early photography.

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The physical production of the book was itself technologically ambitious. The Bibliothèque nationale de France records 125 photographic prints, predominantly made from Du Camp's paper negatives, printed at Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard's photographic establishment in Lille. Blanquart-Evrard had developed methods for producing photographic prints in sufficient quantity to make photographically illustrated books commercially viable. Each photograph was mounted individually and accompanied by printed captions, with tissue guards protecting the delicate photographic surfaces. The result was not simply a book illustrated through reproductive engraving, but a volume containing actual photographic objects.

Its significance becomes especially apparent when considered alongside the great, illustrated publications of Egypt produced earlier in the century. Napoleon's *Description de l'Égypte* and, subsequently, David Roberts's magnificent lithographs had shaped European conceptions of Egyptian antiquity through the interpretative hand of the artist and printmaker. Du Camp's photographs introduced a different claim to authority. However carefully positioned and composed, the photographic image appeared to provide direct visual testimony: an apparently unmediated encounter with monuments whose archaeology and inscriptions were then becoming the subject of increasingly systematic scholarly investigation. Du Camp himself understood his photographs principally as documentary records, in accordance with the archaeological objectives of his government-sponsored mission.

The present copy is complete with its 125 mounted salt prints, letterpress captions and tissue guards, together with three small engravings and the engraved archaeological plans. Its substantial folio format and carefully preserved binding, with recent half brown cloth and marbled boards incorporating the original brown morocco spine, reflect the monumental ambition of the publication itself. Published to considerable contemporary acclaim, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* established Du Camp's reputation almost immediately. The Metropolitan Museum of Art notes that the volume brought its author instant fame, while the Bibliothèque nationale de France records its considerable success despite its high original price. Today, it stands as one of the foundational monuments of archaeological photography: an extraordinary document of Egypt and the Near East at a formative moment when photography began to transform permanently the manner in which antiquity could be recorded, studied and imagined.

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