

# COLNAGHI



*Luxor - Statue de Ramsès*

494

Anonymous Photographer,  
*Luxor – Statue de Ramsès II / Luxor – Statue of  
Ramesses II, ca. 1880*

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ANONYMOUS PHOTOGRAPHER

(ca. 1880)

*LUXOR – STATUE DE RAMSÈS II / LUXOR – STATUE OF RAMESSES II, CA. 1880*

Titled in pencil below print and numbered in pencil: '494';  
With two further images on the reverse.

Albumen print mounted on card  
36 x 25 cm; (14 x 10 in.)

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Provenance

Private Collection, England.

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The present photograph records one of the colossal representations of Ramesses II within the Great Court of Ramesses II at the Temple of Luxor, one of the most celebrated monuments of ancient Thebes. Dating to approximately 1880, the image belongs to the formative period of archaeological photography in Egypt, when the camera became an increasingly important means of documenting the country's monumental heritage. The photograph is particularly compelling in its concentration upon the colossal royal image, allowing the scale, physical presence and sculptural character of Ramesses II to be appreciated against the architectural setting of the temple.

The Temple of Luxor was constructed principally during the New Kingdom and developed over several centuries, with major contributions from Amenhotep III and Ramesses II. The sanctuary was dedicated to the Theban divine triad of Amun, Mut and Khonsu and was closely associated with the annual Opet Festival, during which the sacred images of the gods were ceremonially transported between Karnak and Luxor. Ramesses II subsequently transformed the approach to the temple, constructing the monumental First Pylon and the Great Court that bears his name. The resulting architecture deliberately integrated his own image into one of the principal sacred spaces of ancient Thebes.

The Great Court of Ramesses II was originally enclosed on all four sides by rows of papyrus-bundle columns surmounted by distinctive bud capitals. Between these architectural supports stood colossal statues of the king, creating an extraordinary synthesis of architecture and royal sculpture. The repetition of columns and royal figures established a highly ordered ceremonial environment in which the king appeared simultaneously as ruler, divine intermediary and eternal presence. The statue recorded here must therefore be understood not as an isolated portrait but as an integral element of a carefully conceived architectural and ideological programme.

The photograph's vertical composition reinforces the monumentality of the sculpture. The statue rises prominently within the frame, its massive proportions contrasting with the comparatively diminutive architectural and human elements surrounding it. Such contrasts were fundamental to nineteenth-century photographic representations of Egypt, where the inclusion of people frequently served as a visual measure of scale. Here, however, the principal effect is one of monumental isolation: the ancient king appears physically dominant, while the weathered surfaces of the sculpture bear visible evidence of its extraordinary antiquity.

The photograph also preserves an important record of the nineteenth-century appearance of Luxor. By this period the monuments of ancient Thebes had become central to European archaeological and touristic interest, and photographic views were increasingly produced for travellers and collectors. The numbered designation '494', together with the French title written beneath the print, indicates its participation in a systematic commercial corpus of Egyptian views. The two additional images mounted or recorded on the reverse further suggest that the photograph formed part of a larger series or album of related architectural subjects.



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The albumen process was particularly well suited to such monumental photography. Its capacity for fine detail enabled the photographer to register the sculptural modelling of the figure, the texture of weathered sandstone and the architectural recession of the surrounding court. The warm tonal character of the print contributes an atmospheric quality without diminishing its documentary precision. Mounted upon card, the photograph was also physically suited to circulation as a collectible view, allowing the monumental image to be handled, assembled into albums and disseminated far beyond Egypt.

Ramesses II himself was one of the most prolific builders and image-makers of ancient Egypt. His exceptionally long reign, traditionally dated to approximately 1279–1213 B.C., saw the construction and embellishment of monuments throughout the Nile Valley. His repeated colossal representations were central to the visual language of kingship, projecting permanence, authority and divine legitimacy across the landscape.

In this anonymous photograph, the combination of archaeological documentation and visual monumentality is particularly effective. The camera fixes a moment in the modern history of the Temple of Luxor, while simultaneously restoring to the viewer something of the overwhelming physical experience intended by its ancient architects. The photograph thus functions both as a record of one of Ramesses II's colossal images and as a nineteenth-century meditation upon the enduring presence of Pharaonic kingship within the monumental landscape of Thebes.

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## COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL  
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

[contact@colnaghi.com](mailto:contact@colnaghi.com)

## COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9  
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.  
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
BY APPOINTMENT

[spain@colnaghi.com](mailto:spain@colnaghi.com)

## COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065  
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

[newyork@colnaghi.com](mailto:newyork@colnaghi.com)

## COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30  
1000 BRUXELLES  
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

[brussels@colnaghi.com](mailto:brussels@colnaghi.com)