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PASSAGES THROUGH THE ORIENT: ARTHUR STREETON IN CAIRO

EMMA ROBYN KINDRED
PASSAGES THROUGH THE ORIENT:
ARTHUR STREETON IN CAIRO

EMMA ROBYN KINDRED

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Streeton produced a comprehensive body of Orientalist work in response to his two-month stopover in Cairo in 1897. While the artist is firmly associated with the establishment of an Australian landscape tradition and visual representations of Australian nationhood, his Orientalist work has not received the sustained scholarly attention it merits. In this thesis I redress this lacuna in the art historical literature and position Streeton’s Orientalism within the wider field of the Orientalist debate, asserting the significance of his journey and artistic output in the history and interpretation of regional Orientalisms.

This thesis establishes the range of Streeton’s responses to Cairo and their place within his oeuvre. Resolving inaccuracies in the scholarship to date, the study draws together for the first time all Streeton’s known works related to his journey to Cairo and examines them within the context of late nineteenth-century tourism, imperial histories of place, and Cairo as a modernising city. This thesis expands current understandings of Streeton’s Orientalism through detailed analysis of the artist’s stylistic approach to Orientalist subject matter, and evaluates the degree to which he engaged with the social, cultural and economic environment of the Egyptian capital. The artist’s travel writings and photographs also form a crucial component of his Orientalism, and this study affords them a greater role in the interpretation and production of his art than previously assigned by scholars and curators.

Streeton's stopover in Cairo is set between the provincialism the artist perceived in Australia and his arrival in London with the intention of establishing an international career. The impact of the visit was much more than the brevity of his stay suggests. Cairo signalled Streeton's first significant experience of a foreign environment, with a predominately urban landscape of monumental architecture and bustling bazaars, and the opportunity for engagement with the ethnographic figure as subject. He responded to this stimulus by creating a body of work that contributed the only Impressionist vision of Cairo within the field of Orientalism in Australia.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At 29, I complete my thesis at the very age Streeton was when he left the shores of Australia, embarking on what would be a very great adventure. My own adventures in Cairo, and journey towards the completion of my research, have been endlessly encouraged and supported by my supervisor, Associate Professor Mary Roberts. The many hours of reading and discussion Mary has dedicated to my study have been momentous, and without her knowledge and guidance I would not have achieved such a degree of understanding and engagement with my subject.

The artist’s grandson, Oliver Streeton, I count now as a dear friend. Since our very first dialogue on the topic in 2006, Oliver’s enthusiasm for his grandfather’s work has been extremely sustaining. He has been exceptionally generous with his time and resources, and without his contribution this thesis would not have been so comprehensive.

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## CONTENTS

List of Illustrations viii

**Introduction** 1

Streeton as Orientalist 2
The Lure of Travel 4
Streeton’s Place Within the Orientalist Debate 11
Telling the Tales of the Orient 17

**Chapter One: The Imagined Orient** 28

The *Arabian Nights* in Nineteenth Century Australia 29
Orientalist Art in Australian Galleries 36
The Figure of a Queen 43
Symbolism and Streeton’s Imagined Orient 45
On to Cairo 51

**Chapter Two: ‘My native land. Good night’** 54

A Journey On Board the *Polynesien* 56
Arrival in the City of *Arabian Nights* 62
A British Presence in Cairo 66
From Azbakiya to the Pyramids: Streeton’s Travel Narratives 70
A Visit to the Sphinx 85

**Chapter Three: A Cairo Street** 97

Souvenir and Source 100
‘Grand large design’: The Mosques of Cairo 106
‘Graceful towers’: Cairo’s Minarets 114
‘Innumerable trees’: A Street in the European Quarters 118
## Chapter Four: The Bazaars of Cairo

- Sharia al-Muski and Surrounds 133
- The Khan al-Khalili and Surrounds 139
- *Maydens* and the Bazaar as Social Space 150

## Chapter Five: The ‘many humours of street life’

- An Oriental Type 157
- A Porter and a Knife Grinder 162
- Egyptian Drink Sellers 167
- ‘Photographie Artistique’: Photography and the Type 178
- *Fatma Habiba*: ‘Lovely ladies of the harem may spy you at their ease’ 182
- Exhibiting the East 191

## Postscript: Recollections of the Orient—Experienced and Imagined

- Streeton’s Return to the Imagined Orient 199
- ‘Old Oman Khayyam’ 201
- The Tale’s End 213

## Bibliography

216

Maps and plates 235
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo* (*Bab Zuweila*) 1897, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 24.4 cm, private collection


Map 2: Wagner and Debes, *Le Caire (Masr el-Kahira)* 1908 [detail]

Plate 1.1: Arthur Streeton, *Scherazade* 1895, oil on cedar panel, 58.2 x 39.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, The Joseph Brown Collection

Plate 1.2: *Mayor’s fancy dress ball* published 3 September 1877, wood engraving: *The Illustrated Australian News*, Melbourne

Plate 1.3: Robert Dowling, *A Sheik and his son entering Cairo, on their return pilgrimage to Mecca* 1874, oil on canvas, 139.3 x 244.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, presented by a committee of gentlemen 1878

Plate 1.4: Robert Dowling, *Street scene, Cairo* c.1874, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 45.6 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1976

Plate 1.5: Etienne Dinet, *The snake charmer (Le charmeur de vipers)* 1889, oil on canvas, 175.6 x 180.4 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1890

Plate 1.6: Sir Edward John Poynter, *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* 1890, oil on canvas, 234.5 x 350.5 x 20.5 cm (framed), Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1892

Plate 1.7: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Odalisque, woman of Algiers* 1870, 122.6 x 69.2 cm, oil on canvas National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

Plate 1.8: Arthur Streeton, *Cupid* c.1890s, oil on wood panel, 91.4 x 24.4 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, bequest of John Robertson 2004

Plate 1.9: Charles Conder, *Hot wind* 1889, oil on board, 29.4 x 75.0 cm, National Gallery of Australia, acquired with the assistance of The Yulgilbar Foundation 2006

Plate 1.10: Arthur Loureiro, *The spirit of the Southern Cross* 1888, oil on canvas, 168.0 x 136.5 cm National Gallery of Victoria, purchased 2003

Plate 1.11: Arthur Loureiro, *The spirit of the new moon* 1888, oil on canvas, 168.1 x 136.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased 2003

Plate 1.12: J.W. Waterhouse, *Circe individiosa* 1892, oil on canvas, 180.7 x 87.4 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, purchased 1892

Plate 1.13: Arthur Streeton, ‘*What thou amongst the leaves hast never known*’ (or *A bush Idyll*) 1896, oil on wood, 54.3 x 31.5 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Dr Joseph Brown 1991

Plate 1.14: Arthur Streeton, *Sydney Harbour: a souvenir* c.1897, oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 64.9 x 40.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962

Plate 1.15: Arthur Streeton, *Ariadne* 1895, oil on wood panel, 12.7 x 35.4 cm, The Estate of the late Stuart Johnston, Sydney
Plate 1.16: Arthur Streeton, *Oblivion* 1895, oil on canvas, 56.2 x 11.5 cm, Sheila and Bill Hughes Collection, Perth

Plate 1.17: Tom Roberts, *Seated Arab* c.1883-84, oil on canvas, 45.9 x 30.9 cm, private collection

Plate 1.18: Tom Roberts, *An Eastern princess* c.1893, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 51.0 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1966

Figure 1.19: Tom Roberts, *A study of Jepthah's daughter* (1899), oil on canvas, 76.5 x 50.7 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1899

Figure 1.20: Tom Roberts, *The sleeper awakened* c.1905-13, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown

Plate 2.1: unknown creator, *Polynesiens* c.1900, postcard

Plate 2.2: Arthur Streeton, *The Sphinx* 1897, watercolour on paper, dimensions unknown, private collection

Plate 2.3: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: reclining girl* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.4: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: woman with scarf* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.5: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: ship scene with iron chains* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.6: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: ship scene with figures* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.7: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: funeral scene and attempted suicide* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.8: Richter and Co., Napoli, *Bristol Hotel – Cairo (Egypt.): Finest Situation in the Centre of the Town* c.1940s, colour postcard, 9 x 14 cm, Famous University of Regina Archives


Plate 2.10: unknown photographer, *[Arthur Streeton with fellow tourists in front of the Sphinx and Pyramids]* 1897, albumen photograph, 19.9 x 26.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 2.11: J. Dozay (attributed), *[Tourists and guides before the Sphinx and Pyramids]*, details unknown

Plate 2.12: unknown photographer, *[Tourist and guide before the Sphinx]*, details unknown

Plate 2.13: Arthur Streeton, *The Sphinx, Egypt* c.1897, pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 33.0 x 22.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel's, Melbourne, 4 November 1981

Plate 2.14: Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook B: Sphinx* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.15: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Bonaparte before the Sphinx (Oedipus)* c.1867-68, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 137.0 cm, Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument

ix
Plate 2.16: William Simpson, *The Emperor of Austria ascending the Great Pyramid* 1869, 22.1 x 28.0 cm, pencil and watercolour on paper, Victoria & Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Shell International and the Friends of the V&A

Plate 2.17: William Simpson, *Heliopolis, as it is* 1878, pencil, watercolour and body colour, 37.3 x 26.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Shell International and the Friends of the V&A

Plate 2.18: David Roberts, *The Valley of the Kings: entrance to the Tombs of the Kings*, 1838, watercolour on paper, 63 x 83 cm, Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Néerlandais, Paris

Plate 3.1: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo street* (previously *Street scene, Cairo and The Mosque of Imam el-Shafei*) 1897, oil on prepared canvas mounted on laminated paperboard, 33.4 x 17.1 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased through the National Gallery of Victoria Foundation with the assistance of The Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2005

Plate 3.2: Arthur Streeton, [*Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Blue Mosque and Bab Zouwaleh*] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 3.3: G. Lékégian, *[Bab Zuweila]* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.1 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.4: Arthur Streeton, *The Princess Theatre and Burke and Wills' statue* 1889, oil on wood panel, 21.5 x 16.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased through the National Gallery of Victoria Foundation with the assistance of The Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2005

Plate 3.5: Arthur Streeton, *The railway station, Redfern* 1893, oil on canvas, 40.8 x 61.0 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Lady Denison 1942

Plate 3.6: Arthur Streeton, *Circular Quay* c.1893, oil on wood panel, 13.9 x 63.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979

Plate 3.7: Schroeder and Cie, *Une danseuse Arabe* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.5 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.8: Arthur Streeton, *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae* 1898, watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 41.6 cm, private collection

Plate 3.9: G. Lékégian, *Phylae (Temple du Hathor Aphrodite)*, albumen photograph, 21.3 x 27.7 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.10: Bonfils, *Village Arabe au bord du Nil* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.11: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo [Arab village]* c.1898, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm, location unknown, auctioned Sotheby's, Melbourne, 24 November 2003

Plate 3.12: Arthur Streeton, *[Colonnades, Philae]* c.1898, pencil on paper, 18 x 29 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel's, Melbourne, 7 November 1973

Plate 3.13: Arthur Streeton, *[Colonnades, Philae]* c.1898, oil canvas on panel, 28.5 x 44.1 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.14: Schroeder and Cie, *Phylae, les Colonnes du Côté du nord et le Nil* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 21.0 x 26.9 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.15: Arthur Streeton, *Sultan Hassan Mosque* 1897, watercolour over pencil on paper, 37.8 x 21.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962
Plate 3.16: John Frederick Lewis, *Exterior of the Mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo* c.1841/1851, watercolour over pencil on paper, 84.5 x 56.5 cm (framed), National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Plate 3.17: Arthur Streeton, *(Mosque doorway)* c.1897, oil on board, 55 x 31 cm, location unknown, auctioned Sotheby's, Melbourne, 6 April 1987

Plate 3.18: W.C. Horsley, *Theological students in the university mosque, el Azhar, Cairo* 1895, oil on canvas, 127 x 102 cm, private collection

Plate 3.19: Arthur Streeton, *(The Citadel, Cairo)*, Indian ink and bodycolour on paper, 21 x 13.6 cm (sight), private collection

Plate 3.20: Arthur Streeton, *(The Citadel, Muhammad Ali) [Panoramic view of Cairo, Fatimid walls in foreground]* c.1897, details unknown, offered to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1970 by Mrs H.M. Dean

Plate 3.21: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo [Bab Zuweila] 1897*, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 24.4 cm, private collection

Plate 3.22: Arthur Streeton, *Street scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila] c.1897*, watercolour on paper, 63.5 x 32 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel's, Melbourne, 11 August 1992

Plate 3.23: Arthur Streeton, *Grand Cairo, c.1897*, pencil on paper, 34.7 x 24 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of the artist 1943

Plate 3.24: Arthur Streeton, *[Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Bab Zouwaleh]*, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 3.25: David Roberts, *The Gate of Cairo, called Bab-el-Mutawelle [The Gate of Metawalea]* 1843, oil on panel, 76.1 cm x 62.8 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, given by John Sheepshanks 1857

Plate 3.26: Arthur Streeton, *Cairo, 1897*, watercolour on paper, 35.8 x 26.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Christies, Melbourne, 29 April 1997

Plate 3.27: Arthur Streeton, *Arab house builders (House builders, Cairo)* c.1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 24.2 x 13.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board 1971

Plate 3.28: Arthur Streeton, *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo, c.1897*, oil on canvas board, 46 x 21.5 cm, private collection

Plate 3.29: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *[Street scene, Azbakiya]*, 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.5 x 12.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.30: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *[Street scene with camel, Azbakiya]* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.6 x 11.7, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.31: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *[Street scene, Azbakiya]* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.5 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.32: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *[Street scene, Bab Zuweila]* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 10.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.33: Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *[Street scene, Bab Zuweila]* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.8 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 5.2: Tom Roberts, *Ceremonial dance on Murray Island, Torres Strait* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 33.1 x 48.4 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.3: Tom Roberts, *Torres Strait Islander* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.4 x 18.0 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.4: Tom Roberts, *Torres Strait Islander* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.3 x 17.7 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.5: Tom Roberts, *Torres Strait Islander* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.3 x 17.8 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.6: Arthur Streeton, *Pastoral* 1894, oil on wood, 30.3 x 60/7 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1970

Plate 5.7: Arthur Streeton, *Decoration* c.1890s, oil on cedar panel, 41.5 x 26.5 cm, private collection

Plate 5.8: Arthur Streeton, *Belinda (Lady of the period)* 1894, oil on wood panel, 66.6 x 27.8 cm, Newcastle Art Gallery, gift of Roland Pope 1945

Plate 5.9: Arthur Streeton, *'Hassan' the porter (Hassan)* 1898, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown, offered to the Art Gallery of New South Wales by Mrs H.M. Dean in 1970

Plate 5.10: James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir* (or *Arrangement in flesh colour and black: portrait of Theodore Duret*) 1883, oil on canvas, 193.4 x 90.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1913

Plate 5.11: Arthur Streeton, *The knife grinder, Cairo* c.1897, oil on canvas on panel, 29.5 x 22.5 cm, private collection, auctioned Du Plessis Galleries, Adelaide, 21 May 2000

Plate 5.12: G. Lékégian, *Laveuses au bord du Nil* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 19.4 x 27.4 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.13: G. Lékégian, *Cairo* [water carriers] c.1890s, albumen photograph, 10.0 x 13.8 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.14: G. Lékégian, *Caravane en repos* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 19.0 x 26.8 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.15: J.P. Sebah, *Khan-el Khalili portes* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.2 x 20.9 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.16: G. Lékégian, *Mère et enfants* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.17: Robert Dowling, *An Egyptian fellah in a sugarcane field, winter of 1872-73* 1876, watercolour on paper, 54.0 x 33.1 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 2010

Plate 5.18: Arthur Streeton, *(Egyptian drink vendor)* 1897, watercolour and pencil on paper, 42.6 x 16.6 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962

Plate 5.19: Arthur Streeton, *A seller of drinks, Cairo* c.1897, oil on canvas on wood panel, 42.2 x 21.0 cm, private collection

Plate 5.20: Arthur Streeton, *(Egyptian drink vendor (The water seller))* 1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 33.2 x 18.3cm, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and Richard Paul in honour of his father, Dr Oscar Paul 1965
Plate 5.21: Charles Conder, *Flowers in a vase against a background of the coastline of Mustapha, Algiers (The Hot Sands, Mustapha, Algiers)* 1891, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased with assistance from Katies 1982


Plate 5.23: Arthur Streeton, *Fatma Habiba* 1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 29.0 x 27.4 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, gift of Mr and Mrs Douglas Mullins 1997

Plate 5.24: Arthur Streeton, *[Page from Cairo sketchbook B: mosque and Arabic script]*, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail below]

Plate 5.25: unknown creator, *Egypt, the Giza market water seller* c.1910, postcard

Plate 5.26: unknown creator, *A water seller* c.1910, mailed 1912, postcard

Plate 5.27: Robert Dowling, *Egyptian banana seller* 1878, watercolour with body colour over pencil on board, 71.7 x 50.7 cm, private collection

Plate 5.28: Arthur Streeton, *[Page from Cairo sketchbook B: figure studies]*, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 5.29: Princesse Laetitia Mathilde Bonaparte, *A fellah* 1861, oil and tempera on paper, 92 x 63 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes

Plate 6.1: Arthur Streeton, *Allegory from ‘Omar’ (A page from Omar)* 1905, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm, Mildura Arts Centre

Plate 6.2: Arthur Streeton, *Sixtieth quatrain of Omar Khayyam* c.1905, watercolour on board, 50.6 x 30.5 cm, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Plate 6.3: Arthur Streeton, *In memoriam—old friends* 1941, pencil on paper, 34 x 25 cm, location unknown, slide in Streeton Archive

Plate 6.4: Arthur Streeton, *The blue Orient fan (Venetian fan)*, c.1921, watercolour on silk on paper, 31.0 x 62.4 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1973

Plate: 6.5: Charles Conder, *Fruit trees in blossom, Algiers (Almond trees in Blossom)*, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 80.7cm, Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 1963

Plate: 6.6: Charles Conder, *Moonlight at Mustapha (Moonlight in Algiers)* 1892, oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm, private collection
INTRODUCTION

The mind of man resembles in some ways the shop of the Arab merchant, for a man may also sit within the centre of his mind, and direct his attention to any of the innumerable drawers or secret compartments of his Knowledge, which surround his mental core. These compartments are not labelled, but he knows their contents much as a librarian is familiar with his library. The brain during childhood is like an insatiable sponge absorbing consciously and unconsciously all images within reach, and being fresh & pliable retains firm impressions for a life-time: as the Poet observes ‘wax to receive, and marble to retain’, and these receptacles of personal experience may upon review revive sensations of Sympathy, Ambition, strife, affection etc. and I propose opening a few of my compartments, which though secret ones, may perhaps revive half-forgotten records of happenings which are common knowledge among many friends.¹

By evoking the exotic environs of a Cairo bazaar in the first paragraphs of his memoirs, known as the ‘Personal narrative’, Arthur Streeton signalled the impact of his journey to Egypt. The shop of the Arab merchant summons the artist’s recollections of a distant land, visited as a young man on his way to London—the great artistic hub of the late nineteenth century. The significance of the journey as a framing agent for Streeton’s biography is conveyed through the contextual richness of his allusion to the merchant’s shop as a library of memories that have been stored away over many years. The extract above draws the reader back to the very end of the winter tourist season in Cairo, 1897, when the Australian artist traversed the narrow passageways that wind through the North African city’s teeming marketplaces. Streeton encountered the perfume seller while walking with fellow artist, Walter Brookes Spong, in the popular Muski bazaar, which he romantically described as ‘embowered in dark canopies [resembling] a shadowy fragrant lane’.²

Before penning his ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton had already recorded his reminiscences of this bazaar in a letter published in the Melbourne daily newspaper, The Argus, in 1899. In this article, he enthusiastically described the rich assortment of markets in the Egyptian capital, including the ‘perfume bazaar, and the wily merchants who sit in their booths two

² A. Streeton, ‘Introduction’
yards square', trading small phials of 'the rarest attar of roses from Persia'. Surrounded by
the many different compartments in which they kept their treasures, these merchants
recalled precisely where each bottle was located, and opened the ambrosial vessels one by
one. For the artist recalling the years of his youth, when composing his memoirs sometime
between 1919 and the 1930s, this was an apt metaphor for the process of remembering.
Each compartment held the essence of a tale—'sensations' of 'half-forgotten records of
happenings'. Streeton's use of his experiences in Egypt as a framing agent for his life's
story, indicates the sustained poetic resonance the Orient had for him, and its role in
fashioning his identity as a bohemian artist and traveller.

Streeton as Orientalist

Streeton produced the paintings, watercolours, drawings and photographs that form the
focus of this thesis in response to both his imagined and real visions of the East. They are
the embodiment of his longing for the exotic 'Orient', which was awakened by such
popular Orientalist texts as the Arabian Nights and The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, and
were a visual response to his physical presence within the city of Cairo.

Streeton's Orientalism was an extension of the non-narrative paintings he completed during
the 1880s and 1890s in Australia. Working in and around Sydney and Melbourne, he
developed a sense of the eternal experience of the landscape, demonstrating an awareness
of light and the visual power of the nostalgic image. While filled with the picturesque
lightness that Streeton had employed in Melbourne, Sydney and regional New South
Wales, the paintings, watercolours and sketches reveal the consciousness of an artist who
sought an international career. In Egypt, Streeton found subjects that appealed to his
aesthetic sensibility, and that he believed would prove marketable in London and Australia.

His Orientalist output not only reveals an adherence to Australia's particular brand of

3 A. Streeton, 'Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo', The Bulletin, 21 October 1899, 'Red page'
4 A. Streeton, 'Introduction'. Streeton's unpublished memories, known as the 'Personal narrative', were
composed of a series of unordered, short chapter entries assembled over a period sometime between 1919 and
the 1930s. While more developed chapters have been given titles, others have not. There are also pages of
notes, some with lists of dates and events.
5 A. Streeton, 'Introduction'
Impressionism—which valued the immediacy of the artistic experience gained through the study of nature and the effects of the sun—but also embodies an Aestheticist use of colour, form and ornament. Although the artist was likely to have been aware of the Orientalist works that had been acquired by Australia’s national collecting institutions by the 1890s, he did not cast his works in the mould set by the French and British academic Orientalists before him. Instead, he continued the aesthetic investigations that had led him towards decorative compositions and Symbolist subjects by the mid-1890s.

This study begins by situating Streeton’s first foray into Orientalism completed before his travels—a nude figure study whose title takes the name of the narrator of the Arabian Nights—in relation to the exoticism of the Orient that was present in Australia’s late nineteenth century gallery and exhibition spaces, playhouses and homes. As well as examining the works of art that Streeton produced in response to this imagined Orient, and, later, in response to his experience of Cairo, this thesis analyses Streeton’s travel narratives and photography. His written accounts of interactions with fellow tourists and the local inhabitants of the Egyptian city form a crucial component of Streeton’s Orientalism, and this thesis gives them greater significance in the interpretation of his art than has previously been assigned by scholars and curators. Through his travel writing, in the form of his letters and ‘Personal narrative’, I map the artist’s movements around the city and, for the first time, precisely locate many of the sites and subjects depicted in his work. The previously unexplored role of photography in the development of Streeton’s Orientalist paintings is also addressed. Analysis of both the amateur photographs taken in Cairo that have been attributed to Streeton, and those he purchased from commercial vendors, reveals the effect these images had on Streeton’s art making, and their importance to his conception of Cairo and its inhabitants.

This thesis establishes the influence of Egypt and its people on Streeton’s sense of identity during the age of Empire, both as artist and tourist, through an examination of the urban streetscapes and figure studies that Streeton produced in Cairo and London. While the group of works associated with Cairo tend towards the superficiality of a tourist’s experiences, the scenes and subjects within Streeton’s output are not limited to picturesque
depictions of the bazaar or costumed ‘types’. In at least one work, the portrayal of a female tourist confronts established modes of Orientalist imagery that generally excluded such Western intrusions. This divergence within Streeton’s oeuvre offers an insight into the complexities of colonial identity and the painter-traveller’s awareness of different cultures.

The aim of this thesis is to revise current understandings of the range and significance of Streeton’s Orientalism by extending its scope beyond the limited works previously included in catalogues and monographs of the artist, and by analysing the full extent of Streeton’s visual Orientalism in relation to his travel writings and photographs. Streeton’s Cairo works have not previously been examined in such a way as to draw out his awareness of, or appreciation for, the social and cultural space in which he worked. Nor has there been sufficient critical assessment of his experiences and interpretations of the city. This thesis will interpret these works in light of debates around Orientalism in the visual arts. Such an approach will demonstrate the degree to which Streeton engaged with realism and Aestheticism in his renderings of the Cairene streetscape and local people, and will present a comprehensive reading of Streeton’s journey to North Africa.

The Lure of Travel

Streeton was 29 when he left Sydney for London with the aim of establishing himself as an artist in the capital of the British Empire. A decade earlier, Streeton had met English-born Tom Roberts while sketching at Mentone—a coastal town southeast of Melbourne.6

Impressed by Streeton’s aptitude for arresting light and atmosphere within his works, the older, more established painter introduced him to a group of artists who regularly enjoyed weekends of sketching and painting at Port Philip Bay and Box Hill.7 Streeton became firm
friends with this group, who were joined by another English émigré, the young Charles Conder, in 1888. These artists pursued a fashionably bohemian lifestyle of artists’ camps and sketching tours in and around Melbourne. Their aim was to engage the purity of the bush and pastoral districts. By working within landscapes untainted by the encroaching modernity of developing cities, they shunned the perceived ills of industry and commerce. This escape from the modernising world was a key characteristic shared by European artists who painted the Orient. The second half of the nineteenth century elicited artistic responses that revealed a common desire to reach an unaffected vision of the past by journeying to sites beyond the industrialised Western city.

Roberts was a role model and mentor for Streeton, and it is likely that he instilled in the younger artist a desire to travel. Upon returning to England, from 1881 to 1885, Roberts not only undertook study at the Royal Academy Schools in London and travelled through parts of Europe, but also enjoyed the brilliant sun and Moorish architecture of Andalusia for three months in 1883. This trip to southern Spain was taken in the company of fellow artist, John Peter Russell; his brother, Percy Russell; and the medical student, William Maloney. The Moorish Islamic heritage of this region, and, particularly, a visit to Granada in September, stimulated the creation of a small series of light-filled works, and a later studio-based study of a seated Arab. These were the earliest Orientalist paintings to be completed by any of the artists associated with the Heidelberg School and Impressionism in Australia. During his journey, Roberts also encountered two students of the celebrated Orientalist, Jean-Léon Gérôme: Ramon Casas and Laureano Barraau. It is likely that Gérôme’s precept that artists should draw directly from life contributed to Roberts’s desire to paint en plein air on his return to Australia.

Conder had also returned to Europe, living in both London and Paris, and, by the winter of 1891, had sought refuge from ill health in the warmer climes of Algiers. Streeton received a letter from Conder during this period of respite, and, though its contents were weighed down by talk of Conder's malady, news from his friend may have fuelled Streeton's yearning for his own adventure in North Africa. In a letter to another friend, William Rothenstein, Conder's writing was inflected with an appealing exoticism. Conder related that the Mustafa estate near Algiers in which he convalesced 'was once the abode of a Pasha and his thousand wives even in my room there is the inevitable chamber of the thousand and one nights where the favourite sleeps'.

Two years prior to Conder's journey to Algeria, he and a 22-year-old Streeton were among the principal artists who exhibited in 1889 as part of the '9 by 5 impression exhibition' at Buxton's Art Gallery in Melbourne. Within the exhibition space were 'decorations', including Japanese silks and vases, umbrellas and screens. Such ornamental textures create a visual link to the exhibitions of those artists associated with the Aestheticist movement in England. The stylistic approach of the Australian Impressionists was not derived strictly from French Impressionism, though both schools valued the importance of working outdoors in order to capture truth in nature. Such values were also celebrated in William Morris Hunt's book, *Talks about art*, which was first published in 1877. Streeton acquired Hunt's book in 1886, and was likely influenced by the American writer's insistence on an independent motivation and artistic style attained through direct observations of the natural world.

The '9 by 5' catalogue included a quote from Gérôme that stated, 'When you draw, form is the important thing: but in painting the first thing to look for is the general impression of

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12 The 9 by 5 impression exhibition, 1889, p.1
The manifesto-like address ‘to the public’ that was penned by members of the Australian Impressionist group, further stated:

An effect is only momentary: so an impressionist tries to find his place. Two half hours are never alike, and he who tries to paint a sunset on two successive evenings must be more or less painting from memory. So, in these works, it has been the object of the artists to render faithfully, and thus obtain first records of effects widely differing, and often very fleeting character.

Across the 40 paintings Streeton exhibited, many of which were landscapes, the artist conveyed this concern for expressing the ‘fleeting character’ and mood of the subject, thus establishing an approach that would continue through to his Cairo oeuvre. At the time of his departure to London, Hobart’s Mercury newspaper wrote, ‘Mr. Streeton is an impressionist of a type rather more pronounced, perhaps, than we have been accustomed to’. In 1910, Lionel Lindsay noted that Streeton was ‘the first of his fellows to paint Australian light characteristically’. When the late artist’s work was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1958, Lindsay wrote in the catalogue:

Streeton had long accustomed himself to painting with a blaze of light on his picture that would blind most people, yet he never failed to hit a true tonal note. He never painted under an umbrella or used an easel, for he maintained that the shade falsified the general lighting.

It is likely that this manner of working in situ without an umbrella or easel was the modus operandi Streeton employed in Cairo, moving around the city with a strong oak sketching stool and his Horden sketchbooks, capturing the local colour and intense light of the crowded streets. Streeton spent little time on individual paintings. He worked quickly and often in the open air, where he could respond to light and form with immediacy. Roberts influenced Streeton’s early palette, with paintings from the 1880s to the late 1890s

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14 The 9 by 5 impression exhibition, 1889, p.2
15 The 9 by 5 impression exhibition, 1889, p.2
16 'Art Society of Tasmania: notes on the annual exhibition', The Mercury, 12 February 1897, p.4
17 L. Lindsay, Exhibition of pictures and drawings by Arthur Streeton, George Lambert, W. Hardy Wilson: and a selection of 18th century fans, textiles, needlework and embroideries of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries from the collection of W. Hardy Wilson, Troedel and Co., Melbourne, 1910
19 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’, ‘Personal narrative’
frequently employing quiet colour harmonies. As in the scenes that depicted Cairo's mosques, streets and bazaars, Streeton's previous works were unified by the scattered use of limited colour throughout the composition. A number of early landscapes included a high horizon line that was later seen in the Cairo paintings and watercolours—a technique employed by the British Aestheticists, whose work Roberts saw exhibited in London in the mid-1880s. Streeton's urban scenes also incorporated cropped compositions that stretched vertically or horizontally in the fashion of the Japanese prints that were so admired by James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Such devices recall the elongated panels Streeton completed in the 1890s, which articulated the decorative arc of Sydney Harbour's shoreline.

Three years after first visiting Sydney in 1890, Streeton joined Roberts at the artists' camp at Little Sirius Cove on Sydney's North Shore near Mosman. This carefree existence allowed the artists to entertain the joys of youthful bohemianism. It remained, like his journey to Cairo, an important marker in Streeton's life. Though many of the artists at Curlew Camp, including Roberts and Streeton, survived on a minor stipend, they did not neglect the luxuries of late Victorian middle-class life. Housed in extensively furnished tents complete with Oriental rugs, a 'dancing floor and a small piano', they enjoyed the company of an itinerant Italian seaman as manservant, and 'Old Jules' as cook. During his four and a half years living on and off at Curlew, Roberts became one of Sydney's most fashionable portrait painters. Meanwhile, Streeton moved between Sydney and Melbourne, while also undertaking sketching tours to the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains. Both artists had come to Sydney optimistic about their prospects in the city, and, despite a deepening economic Depression, Roberts sold two portraits to the Art Gallery of New

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20 T. Roberts, letter to R. Anning Bell, 5 October 1885, ML MS A2840/69; H. McQueen, 'A golden age: Tom Roberts and the arts of Spain', 2007, p.22
21 In 1940, at his house 'Longacres' in Olinda, above the mantle piece hung a photograph of a 'slim young man on his haunches before a tiny panel, which has been set upon a rock on a bit of sandy beach and steadied by a long branch which rests on top of it. The young man has paint brushes and a palette in his hand. The slim young man, clad only in pants and hat, was, of course Arthur Streeton, and that picture, taken at Sirius Cove in Sydney back in the early nineties, sent Sir Arthur's mind roving back over the years'. B. Burdett, 'An artist's mountain retreat: how Arthur Streeton rose', 1940, p.7
22 B. Burdett, 'An artist's mountain retreat: how Arthur Streeton rose', 1940, p.7; See also A. Thoms, *Bohemians in the bush, the artists' camps of Mosman*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1991
South Wales, and, by 1893, the gallery had purchased Streeton’s ‘Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide’ 1890 and Fire’s On 1891.

For artists of Streeton’s generation, the Royal Academy and Paris Salon remained the most significant markers of success. In 1892, Streeton’s Golden summer, Eaglemont 1889 received a ‘mention honourable’ at the Paris Salon. The painting, now in the National Gallery of Australia collection, sold on the first day of its exhibition, to Englishman Charles Mitchell.24 When describing a canvas at the Art Society of New South Wales’s exhibition, during September of the following year, a writer for the Illustrated Sydney News noted that Streeton was ‘an artist who can now claim a European reputation, as his works have been exhibited in the Paris Salon, and on which highly flattering comments have been passed’.25 This achievement contributed to the artist’s restlessness, and, from the early 1890s, he began to communicate to close friends, including Roberts, a desire to travel.26 Streeton viewed the ‘mention honourable’ as an indication that, in Europe, he would be able to achieve that which he had been unable to achieve in Australia, where the national institutions in Melbourne and Sydney did not allocate sufficient funding to support the local art establishment, and remained focused on acquiring works by British and European artists.27

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25 Illustrated Sydney News, 2 September 1893, p.3
26 ‘I love Australia (& yet have seen so little) & shall be beastly sorry to go away. (when I do go away Lord knows when or how) But I cant sit here thinking tis [a] waste of time. I want to hurry up & move somehow - So first opportunity & I [am] off ... Of course my troubles are no doubt small—we hear of good artists who starve all their lives & so on. I dont grumble a bit, but its unfortunate. This country is full of wealth but somehow cant afford Artists yet. Why dammit. Bricklayers Sceneshifters office boys all get their work recognised & are able & go on.—& if I were recognised more I could paint more. perhaps I'd have the same trouble in Europe but I must risk it’. A Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, first half of 1891, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, pp.30-31; ‘and perhaps to see England—oh—the first sight of great London—O the first jumping & singing through an English green meadow—the cider-houses—the dear complexions in the birth place of Mrs Mackennal’, A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, late May 1892, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, p.48
27 ‘The voyage from Australia to England was crucially different from travel undertaken at will to a chosen itinerary of destinations, and while it bore some of the cultural valences of tourism (the group experience of already-known tourist sites), in its relatively fixed route and the powerful historical and cultural significance of the ultimate destination, it resembled a secular pilgrimage.’ A. Woollacott, ‘“All that is the Empire, I told myself”: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness’, The American Historical Review, vol. 102, no. 4, October 1997, p.1004; See also M. Pearson, ‘Pilgrims, travellers, tourists: the meanings of journeys’, Travellers, journeys, tourists, Australian cultural history series, no. 10, School of History, University of New South Wales, Kensington, 1991, pp.125-134
London was the largest city in the world at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Australians continued to be drawn ‘home’ to the centre of the Empire. Those working in the arts believed that success would be measured in Europe, and the mere embarkation on this journey was often seen as a marker of success. Following a similar path taken by artists before and after him, Streeton travelled with ambitions to advance his skills and absorb the latest styles, fashions and techniques. The voyage was something of a cultural ritual, facilitated by industrialisation and urban expansion, as well as developments in the technologies of transportation and communication—particularly the technology of steamship travel and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

Cairo was initially only intended to be a stopover on Streeton’s secular pilgrimage to London in search of international artistic standing. However, this stopover was not to be as brief as first planned—Streeton extended his period of stay upon discovering the aesthetic opportunities afforded by the Egyptian city. In his ‘Personal narrative’ he effused, ‘I bowed before the beauty of Grand Cairo in 1898, and intending to enjoy one week in the city, I became a worshipper for five months’. While Streeton incorrectly recorded the year of his arrival and exaggerated the time he would eventually stay, which was closer to two months, his declaration indicates his impassioned response to Cairo. Identifying a range of subjects in which he could invest his artistic energies, he found the light and vitality of Cairo arresting, changing his initial travel plans and seeking out longer-term accommodation.

On arrival in London, the artist was enthusiastic about his Cairo subjects, and hoped to establish his career through an exhibition of ‘decorations’. Although plans for the show were hampered by his limited reputation in England, Streeton’s Egyptian output and the works he produced in his Chelsea studio from photographs and drawings compiled during his journey to North Africa, indicate the effect of the Orient on the young artist. The figure studies and bazaar scenes facilitated Aesthetic investigations into colour and line, and

28 A. Streeton, ‘Introduction’
29 A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett letters, in W.H. Gill papers, MS 285, 14, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. The use of the term ‘decorations’ by Australian artists is related to the French term, ‘décoration’. The decorative aesthetic in France took hold in the 1890s, and was most closely associated with the artists of the Nabis, including Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis. Streeton’s use of the term is indicative of its broadening popularity in Britain, most likely via Whistlerian Aestheticism.
signalled a decorative strain within Streeton’s oeuvre that would remain as a counterpoint to his later landscapes in the manner of Thomas Gainsborough; J.M.W. Turner; John Constable; and his contemporary, the British Impressionist, Philip Wilson Steer. The journey became a vehicle for fashioning his identity as a bohemian adventurer, with the artist referring to his experiences in Cairo in private correspondence and articles published in The Argus well into the 1930s.

Streeton’s Place Within the Orientalist Debate

Streeton is recognised in art historical literature as one of Australia’s great painters. Much has been written on his life and artistic output, including catalogues published for exhibitions and collections, two biographies and two compilations of letters. While early Impressionist works from the 1880s and 1890s and the later paintings that exemplify his contribution to the Australian nationalist landscape tradition have received sustained analysis, the paintings, drawings, photographs and travel narratives associated with his journey to Cairo and his engagement with Orientalist literary sources have been largely sidelined. Focus exhibitions on his work as a war artist in France, and his later garden and flower paintings, have highlighted significant themes within his oeuvre, with travel receiving only limited consideration to date. Anne Galbally, Mary Eagle and Geoffrey Smith have each incorporated Streeton’s Cairo work within readings of the artist’s oeuvre, though accounts of the journey and Streeton’s subsequent output were restricted by the scope of each scholar’s project. Galbally’s 1971 monograph included information on the Cairo journey; however, certain aspects of the working painter-traveller’s process were

31 For examples see J. Clark and B. Whitelaw, Golden summers: Heidelberg and beyond, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1985; T. Lane (ed.), Australian Impressionism, 2007. For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘travel narratives’ is used to describe the letters and chapters from Streeton’s ‘Personal narrative’ that relate to his travel from Sydney to London, via Cairo, in 1897.
32 See A. Gray, Streeton in France 1918, exh. cat., Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1982; G. Smith and O. Streeton, Arthur Streeton, the passionate gardener, exh. cat. Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Mornington, 2001
overly simplified. Galbally's assumption that all the works were completed in Cairo was revised in Eagle's 1994 publication. Drawing together previously unpublished travel narratives and Streeton's Cairo sketchbooks, Eagle's major contribution provided the groundwork for consideration of the paintings and watercolours of Cairo within the context of Streeton's life, and his social and financial affairs. However, the parameters of Eagle's study were limited to the three oil paintings held by the National Gallery of Australia.

Streeton was one of only a handful of Australian artists to visit Cairo up until the mid-twentieth century, and the first Australian-born professional painter to work in Egypt. Considered as a body of work, the number of oil and watercolour paintings relating to the Orient and to Streeton's experience of Cairo has previously been underestimated, and, as a result, the group has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

While a small number of paintings, watercolours and a photograph attributed to the artist have been reproduced and discussed in the aforementioned publications, the artist's journey and his response to the city, both visually and through his writing, has never been assessed in depth. By focusing on key texts and related primary material, including letters, Streeton's 'Personal narrative', and photographs (both attributed to the artist and collected by him), this thesis will delineate Streeton's movements around the city, and identify the influences that affected his aesthetic response to the Orient.

The term 'Orient', as used to describe and evoke the geographical region that is today referred to as the Middle East and North Africa, was in general use by the late nineteenth century. Its meaning was profoundly changed by the publication of Edward Said's

35 While other drawings were illustrated, at least one has subsequently been reattributed to an unknown artist. Eagle also incorrectly identified the mosque in Cairo street 1897 (Plate 3.1) as that of El-Shafei, and the Egyptian drink vendor 1897 (Plate 5.15) as one of three sent back to Australia in 1898. Such inaccuracies were repeated in Geoffrey Smith's exhibition catalogue. See G. Smith, Arthur Streeton 1867-1943, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, 1995, pp.134-136
36 All attempts have been made to locate and view works related to this study, though not all have been made available.
Orientalism in 1978. Said, a Palestinian-American literary theorist, employed the term ‘Orientalism’ to describe the political, academic, artistic and cultural constructions of a vast geographical area that stretched from North Africa through the Middle East to China. For Said, the ‘Orient’ was a discursive construct, providing a way for Western scholars, politicians and writers to generalise and homogenise cultures. He argued that such a construct enabled the West to know and exercise power over the ‘Orient’ and ‘Orientals’ through understanding and repeating stereotypes that contributed to conceptions of Western superiority, and supported and justified Western imperialism. Many of the studies of Orientalism in art history that were developed over the last three decades have responded to Said’s seminal text. In particular, as is the case in this study of Streeton’s Orientalism, Said’s definition of Orientalism is used to critically analyse the gaze of the artist, the structure of the artwork, and the position of the Western viewer, as they replicate binaries that differentiated the Occident from the Orient.

Linda Nochlin’s essay, ‘The Imaginary Orient’, which was published in 1983, explored the Saidian paradigm, and argued that the political and social context of an Orientalist painting’s production was vital to readings of the reality it professed to portray. Her analysis of the visual language of Orientalist aesthetics rendered realist imagery a vehicle for advancing stereotypes as truth. She argued that European artists replicated the imperialist agenda of the Western powers by painting the Orient as submissive and backward.

The study of Orientalism in the field of art history has been profoundly influenced by Nochlin’s critique. However, recent scholarship has presented a more nuanced approach that recognises the complexities of cross-cultural exchange and the heterogeneity of

38 In using terminology such as the ‘Orient’, ‘Orientals’ and the ‘East’ throughout this dissertation, I acknowledge a tendency within Western literature, identified in Edward Said’s Orientalism, to employ language that generalises the region under broad categories—and the limitations and problems this incurs. In discussion of the ‘Orient’, I refer broadly to the regions of the Middle East and North Africa, though they encompass heterogeneous social and cultural structures based around a number of different racial, religious and national groups.
Orientalist discourse. In the volume, *Orientalism's interlocutors*, Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts highlighted an area that questioned the binary model represented by Nochlin’s Saidean analysis. They noted that two key exhibitions had explored the distinctive forms of regional Orientalism: Roger Benjamin’s 1997 exhibition, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*; and Holly Edward’s 2000 exhibition, *Noble dreams, wicked pleasures: Orientalism in America 1870–1930*. As Beaulieu and Roberts pointed out, in the nineteenth century neither region was directly involved with the East, and understandings of the Orient were necessarily received via a European lens. For example, when examining Australian Orientalism, it is necessary to consider the complex position of colonial subjects as Orientalists. For a travelling Australian artist, such as Streeton, identity was inflected by the artist’s status as a British colonial subject, as well as being constructed in relation to concepts of the Oriental ‘Other’.

This complex issue of travel and identity for Australian artists who engaged with Orientalist subject matter was first addressed in Ursula Prunster’s essay, ‘From Empire’s end: Australians as Orientalists’, in the catalogue for *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*. Her formative study situated Australian Orientalism as part of a more general trend of following European aesthetics, particularly among those artists associated with Australian Impressionism. The strength of her study lies in the identification of the significance of Streeton’s Orientalist output, and Prunster gauged the level of the artist’s interaction with the culture and society of Cairo. By positioning Streeton’s Orientalism within a broader survey of Australian Orientalism, Prunster’s essay became an important catalyst for this thesis. Building on Eagle’s research, she highlighted many of the key themes in Streeton’s Cairo paintings, including street and bazaar scenes, and figure studies or ‘types’, which she described as ‘symbols for the eastern milieu in which he encountered them—rather than portraits of individuals’. However, while she maintained that ‘Streeton did not depict the British presence in his Cairo pictures’, there is no acknowledgement of Streeton’s inclusion

43 U. Prunster, ‘From Empire’s end: Australians as Orientalists’, 1997, p.47
of the tourist within his Cairo works or his discussion of the British Army in the *Bulletin*
letter and ‘Personal narrative’. Prunster presented an important initial assessment of
British and French Orientalist paintings in Australian collections, and related their
acquisition and reception to the work of artists that she associated under the banner of
‘Australian Orientalism’, including Tom Roberts, Ethel Carrick, E. Philips Fox, Rupert
Bunny.

In the catalogue for *Noble dreams, wicked pleasures*, Edwards introduced an important
comparison of the art of American Orientalists and those primarily from Britain and France.
Edwards’s discussion of American Orientalism in relation to its French counter-part
established a significant analogy of Australia’s relationship with Britain via its colonial
identity, despite the evident differences in political contexts. Through her examination of
French Orientalism, with which American Orientalism most closely resonates, Edwards
demonstrated the different social, cultural and political contexts of painters working in
North Africa and the Middle East. Both Prunster and Edwards asserted the heterogeneity of
Orientalism, establishing the argument that the perspective of the artist was dependent on
the historical period in which they were working and their country of origin. Such
progressive work was extremely important to the formation of my approach in this thesis.

Roger Benjamin’s 2003 exhibition, *Renoir and Algeria*, provided a model for reassessing
the marginalised Orientalist output of an iconic Impressionist artist. Benjamin situated
Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s Orientalism within the context of French nationalism, colonialism
and Orientalist discourse. In the accompanying catalogue, he argued that, while Renoir
was a typical Orientalist who followed the Saidian model in his selection of subject matter
and political antipathy, he was the only artist working in the latter part of the nineteenth
century to explore Algerian subjects with a ‘modern pictorial treatment’. Benjamin’s

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44 U. Prunster, ‘From Empire’s end: Australians as Orientalists’, 1997, p.47
45 See also A. Galbally, *Charles Conder: the last bohemian*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002;
J. Pigot, *Capturing the Orient: Hilda Rix Nicholas and Ethel Carrick in the East*, exh. cat. Waverly City
Council, Waverly, 1993
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000
48 R. Benjamin, *Renoir and Algeria*, 2003, p.4
Orientalist aesthetics extended this project by positioning his study of Renoir’s modernist Orientalism in relation to Henri Matisse’s work in Morocco. Benjamin revealed the complexities of artistic interactions across cultures, and offered a revision of these well-known and much-discussed artists by integrating understandings of their Orientalism in relation to cultural systems and infrastructure. His approach also contested the often static and specific roles assigned to the East and West by offering the work of North African artists, Azououau Mammeri and Mohammed Racim, as a counterpoint to Said’s binary oppositions within Orientalism.

Zeynep Çelik similarly maintained that Orientalist discourse was neither completely hegemonic nor uncontested, and contributed to the field by addressing the heterogeneity of Orientalist articulations through her examination of the response of indigenous artists. Çelik interpreted the manner in which the French and Ottoman Empires interacted with the people and spaces encompassed by their imperial reach through interpretations of architecture and urban planning within North African and Ottoman cities. Following on from this, The poetics and politics of place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism tracked recent debates around British Orientalism, with a focus on imperial geographies and cultural exchange. This compilation of essays evolved from a symposium held as part of the programmes associated with the landmark travelling exhibition, The lure of the East: British Orientalist painting (2008–2009).

With its focus on British Orientalism in nineteenth century Istanbul, The poetics and politics of place provided an important model for my analysis of Streeton’s engagement with Cairo as a context for his Orientalism. While this thesis acknowledges the political differences between the imperial Ottoman capitals, Istanbul and Cairo, as they existed

50 See also R. Benjamin, ‘Colonial tutelage to nationalist affirmation: Mammeri and Racim, painters of the Maghreb’, in J. Beaulieu and M. Roberts (eds.), Orientalism’s interlocutors, pp.43-78
under British administration, the cities are analogous in terms of their engagement with modernisation during the nineteenth century. My examination of Cairo and its transformation is inflected by studies such as this that acknowledge North African and Middle Eastern cities as urban sites undergoing significant social change in the nineteenth century. In following, this thesis analyses Streeton’s representations of the city in the context of the complexities of Egyptian society and culture under British colonial influence.

The role of my thesis is to position this research within the wider field of Orientalism, and assert the significance of Streeton’s Cairo journey and subsequent artistic output in the history and interpretation of regional Orientalism. It expands the current scholarship to incorporate all known works associated with the artist’s journey to Cairo and his engagement with Orientalist texts. In order to resolve inaccuracies relating to the Cairo group in previous writings, this study extends beyond the narrow focus on Streeton’s paintings and watercolours to incorporate an in-depth analysis of the photographs and writings that he produced both during and after his journey to North Africa. By considering Streeton’s Orientalist oeuvre within the context of late nineteenth century tourism, imperial histories of place, and the social and cultural structures of a modernising Cairo, I will address both Streeton’s personal and artistic responses to the people and urban landscapes of the North African city.

Telling the Tales of the Orient

In the introduction to Benjamin’s *Orientalist aesthetics*, he asked, ‘what was Orientalist art in the time of its historical emergence?’\(^3\) The first chapter of this thesis responds to this question by establishing the presence of the Orient in late nineteenth century Australia, and by investigating the layered influences that affected Streeton’s decision to travel to London via Cairo. By the 1890s, Orientalist literature, such as the *Arabian Nights*, had become a lively part of popular culture, known to many through accessible media, such as newspaper articles, plays, pantomimes and children’s books. Streeton was captivated by the poetic appeal of these tales, and, later, by the Persian poet, Omar Khayyám. Nora Clench, whom

\(^3\) R. Benjamin, *Orientalist aesthetics*, 2003, p.3
Streeton married in 1908, was also a great admirer of the fashionable *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* and owned a copy reprinted in 1897 after Edward FitzGerald's 1889 fifth edition. Chapter One considers Streeton's first foray into Orientalist imagery through the painting, *Scheherazade* 1895, and its relation to the Symbolist imagery produced in Australia in the 1880s and 1890s. The somewhat cursory engagement with a literary East represented by this work was part of a more general artistic trend in Australia. Establishing a background to Streeton's early Orientalist gesture, the chapter will also provide an assessment of the Eastern scenes produced by both European and Australian painters that had, by 1897, been acquired by the national galleries in Melbourne and Sydney.

In Australia, Streeton had almost certainly come into contact with Orientalist paintings in major collections, and had been influenced by the travels of fellow artists, including those with whom he had developed close friendships. In 1883, Tom Roberts had gone on a sketching tour through Moorish Spain, returning to Australia with new understandings of light and atmospheric effect; in 1891, Charles Conder had sought refuge from illness and the unhealthy nightlife of Paris by visiting a friend in Algiers; and Walter Brookes Spong had travelled to Cairo on his way to Australia. Spong, with whom Streeton would later paint in the streets and bazaars of Cairo in 1897, had exhibited *Street scene, Cairo* c.1889 in the winter exhibition of the Victorian Artists' Society in 1890. The National Art Gallery of New South Wales acquired the work from the exhibition, together with Streeton's 'Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide' 1890.

From the 1870s to the 1890s, the purchase of Orientalist paintings by Australia's national galleries reflected acquisition policies that focused primarily on British and European artists, including Sir Edward Poynter and Etienne Dinet. However, by the 1890s, changes were slowly taking place. In 1896, Streeton sold 'The purple noon's transparent might' to the National Gallery of Victoria, which enabled him to secure the funds to travel. In his interview with Basil Burdett in 1940, Streeton remembered, 'when I got the Gallery's cheque I didn't know what to do with it. I had no banking account. The late E la T

54 The book is held in the collection of L. Astbury, who informed E. Kindred of its existence after reviewing her thesis in November 2012.
Armstrong came with me to the bank and arranged for circular cheques to be used on my trip abroad’. Burdett continued:

Streeton finally left by the French ship by way of Suez, got off and went up to Cairo, and was so fascinated by it that a projected stay of a week lengthened into five months. ‘I couldn’t get away from it’, Sir Arthur told me. ‘Cairo was a good place in those days and as safe as houses except for the part known as the Fishmarket, behind the Bristol—where Thackeray stayed. In that quarter they’d put you down a well for sixpence’.  

By the mid-nineteenth century, Cairo had become a standard destination for tourists seeking out warmer climes, while still being highly fashionable with travellers in search of adventure. Though Egypt arguably remained a site of the exotic, its position on the North African coast of the Mediterranean meant that it was easily reached. Regular steamships departed from England and major Mediterranean ports, with passengers heading for hotels in Alexandria and Cairo, as well as further away in Jerusalem, Beirut and Constantinople. Following the opening of the Suez Canal to ships in November 1869, travel changed completely. There was now a sea route from Asia to Europe, and Australians who travelled this way were able to include Egypt as part of their itinerary. The Egyptian season ran from Christmas to early spring, with tourist trade encouraged by the recent discoveries of archaeologists, exhilarating accounts relayed by travel writers, and grand Orientalist works held by public collections throughout Europe and Australia, and hung in the Paris Salon and Royal Academy.

Streeton’s engagement with aspects of the growing tourist industry is examined in Chapter Two, with sketches and writings explored as indicators of his experience of this mode of cultural contact. This chapter presents primary material, including letters, the ‘Personal narrative’, and sketchbooks, which are used to chart the artist’s journey on board the French steamer, Polynesien, and his movements through the city of Cairo and its immediate surrounds. By investigating this material in relation to the social, cultural and political environment of the Egyptian capital, this thesis argues that Streeton fashioned a dual identity of casual tourist and bohemian artist. Streeton’s letter, published in the Bulletin's

‘Red page’ in 1899, is part of the vast corpus of writings created by Australian, American and European authors, artists, journalists and travellers who shared their experiences with audiences at home.57

During the nineteenth century, there was an increase in the publication of travel literature, which promoted an interest in Egypt, while also generating expectations of a timeless land populated by picturesque ‘types’.58 The first specific travel guides on Egypt were published in the 1830s, and, by 1897, some of the most popular and influential guides in English were those published by Bradshaw, John Murray and Baedeker.59 Derek Gregory noted that such texts ‘mapped a double geography’. Tourists such as Streeton wanted to experience ancient sites with the comfort and security of familiar, modern amenities, while also needing to be reassured that this modernity had not damaged or altered the exotic Orient they had come to see.60 In Streeton’s letters and ‘Personal narrative’, the artist did not distance himself from the identity of the tourist, as did many artists and writers who travelled and worked in the Orient. Rather, he presented himself as a participant in the tourist experience.

Travel writing domesticated the subject of travel by making it known and by bringing it into the realm of common experience. In a similar way, Streeton’s travel narratives outlined the city as a legible space. Around his hotel, in the bazaars and in the region known as the Fishmarkets, and at tourist sites such as the pyramids, Streeton experienced the multifaceted, fluctuating relationships that existed between the Eastern and Western sides

57 What knowledge we have of late nineteenth century tourism in Egypt is drawn primarily from Western accounts, a result of the dearth of available contemporary Egyptian sources. This is in part due to the fact that many Egyptians who worked in the tourism industry were illiterate, and those that worked in administration and government did not experience tourism as a profession first-hand. Many Egyptians themselves relied on Western guidebooks. See D.M. Reid, Whose pharaohs? Archaeology, museums, and Egyptian national identity from Napoleon to World War I, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2002, pp.72-73


59 See D.M. Reid, Whose pharaohs?, 2002, p.70; ‘Murray’s distinctive handbook was part of a standard outfit of the British tourist, and... dominated the market in Egypt until the 1890s; but once Baedeker had combined its separate handbooks on Lower and Upper Egypt in 1898, its German, French and English editions soon led the field.’ D. Gregory, ‘Scripting Egypt’, in J. Duncan and D. Gregory (eds.), Writes of passage: reading travel writing, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, p.118

of Cairo. While his paintings of mosques, bazaars and Egyptian ‘types’ conformed to the Orientalist mode of repressing Europeanisation and modernity in the ancient city, his writings focused on and described such familiar aspects as the presence of the British army, tourists and their guides, and fellow travellers sharing a meal at a well-known hotel near the pyramids.

His writings are both an inscription and an appropriation, with the artist referencing the Arabian Nights as a device to enhance the magic of a city that was now so popular with tourists. There is also ambivalence in this response to the Egyptian capital. Streeton engaged a colonial language of ownership and superiority to create a sense of his own knowledge of the city, while his social and cultural understandings were often disjointed and superficially conveyed. As the nature of late nineteenth century travel heightened Streeton’s awareness of his place within the Empire, his writings reveal a British sensibility that was conveyed through a set language of recognition and experience.

The second part of Chapter Two considers a souvenir photograph from the Streeton Archive, which captures the artist mounted on a donkey, alongside his travelling companions, before the Sphinx. A comparable scene of a woman posed atop a camel appears in the artist’s watercolour, Sphinx 1897. In this work, the dream of the Orient—as first imagined by Streeton via the figure of Scheherazade—is challenged by the image of an Egypt commodified by tourism. Streeton’s depiction of the Western tourist being hassled by touts dispels the illusion of the exotic that he creates in his paintings and watercolours of Cairene streets populated only by ‘Orientals’.61 An examination of Sphinx points to the availability and unavailability of the Orientalist fantasy explored in later chapters, and the discursive split in the experience of the late nineteenth century tourist who was restricted to the exterior spaces of the Eastern city.

Streeton’s choice of subject matter was largely conventional, with the exception of Sphinx. This watercolour does not fall neatly into the Orientalist mould—particularly that mould established by the artists Streeton had likely viewed at the National Art Gallery of New

61 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
South Wales in Sydney before his travels. Many artists avoided depicting the tourist presence in order to highlight the importance and distinction of their own journey into an isolated, unknown Orient. Streeton’s singular inclusion of the tourist as protagonist connects his work to a contemporary Cairo. In Nochlin’s seminal essay, ‘The Imaginary Orient’, she maintained that one of the primary features of Orientalist art was the absence of the West. Thus, by featuring such a tableau, Streeton diverged from other key Orientalist exponents, such as Gérôme, John Frederick Lewis, Eugene Delacroix, and the Australian artist, Robert Dowling.62

Chapter Three examines the artist’s fascination with both religious and secular monuments in Cairo, as evidenced through his portrayals of grand architecture and the picturesque urban landscape. While Sphinx illustrates a common tourist event, Streeton’s oil paintings and watercolours of archaeological sites, mosques and bustling street scenes do not include representations of the Western traveller. Removing the figure of the tourist from such locations, Streeton instead established his presence within the city through his employment of Impressionist compositions that captured light and atmosphere. Streets punctuated by minarets, calligraphic trees stretching up against whitewashed houses, and the life and vibrancy of the bazaars presented ideal subjects, inflected by an Aestheticist approach. Read alongside the travel narratives and photographs taken by the artist, the works provide a reference to the artist’s movements, revealing the limits of his excursions to those popular sites within the confines of Cairo and the nearby Giza Plateau.

Britain’s official occupation of Egypt commenced in 1882, and continued through to 1936. At the time of Streeton’s visit, the consul general of Britain’s ‘veiled protectorate’, Sir Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, administered Egypt. Though it was not technically considered a colony, the country’s finances, government personnel and armed forces were controlled by Britain.63 However, many of the first movements towards modernisation and Europeanisation in Cairo throughout the nineteenth century were initiated by Muhammad

62 ‘There are never any Europeans in “picturesque” views of the Orient like these [Gérôme’s Snake Charmer]. Indeed, it might be said that one of the defining features of Orientalist painting is its dependence for its very existence on a presence that is always an absence: the Western colonial or touristic presence.’ L. Nochlin, ‘The imaginary Orient’, 1983, p.120
Ali Pasha, Khedive Ismail Pasha and their successors. Europeanisation was not something imposed on a passive Cairene population by the British.

Orientalist artists, such as Streeton, who disregarded or remained ignorant of the movements the city had made towards modernisation, and its active participation in contemporary commerce, contributed to understandings of the Orient as backwards and timeless. An exception to this came in the form of a small group of photographs that are attributed to Streeton, in which the modernising regions of the city were captured alongside more commonly portrayed tourist sites, such as the Bab Zuweila. Through an examination of these photographs alongside the commercially-produced albumen prints collected by Streeton in Cairo, Chapter Three will consider the roles that both amateur and studio photography played in the development and representation of colonial tourism.

Whether they are made for personal or commercial purposes, photographs are complex objects that possess diverse meanings for different audiences. Commercial photographers working in North Africa and the Middle East produced a broad selection of views and subjects to appeal to a wide audience, though generally aimed at the tourist trade. As he would later do in Naples, in Egypt Streeton collected photographs as both artistic and personal records. An assessment of these photographs highlights the significant diversity of their subject matter, while also demonstrating the comparatively limited number of sexualised images within the collection. A number of photographs depict temples and details of carved hieroglyphics. While Streeton did not travel elsewhere in Egypt—which limited his experience of the landscape, culture and society to the principal city and its immediate surrounds—he later completed Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae c.1897 and Ruins at Karnak, Egypt c.1897 from commercial photographs of these popular sites. Such works present an adjunct to my study of Streeton’s presence as an Impressionist painter-traveller in Cairo. This acknowledgement of the photographic sources employed by the artist reveals a superficial engagement with Egypt’s archaeological sites; they are visual signifiers of travel Streeton had not in fact undertaken.

64 See N. Micklewright, ‘Orientalism and photography’, in Z. ‘Inankur, R. Lewis and M. Roberts (eds.), The poetics and politics of place, pp.99-110
The developing relationship between archaeology and tourism was significant throughout the nineteenth century, with visual and written documentations creating and shaping the receiver’s knowledge of places, people and objects. The Sphinx, the Pyramids of Giza and the many temples along the Nile were well known and easily recognised monuments that appeared in books, newspapers and journals published throughout Europe, Australia and America. Orientalist painters from Britain and France established and maintained a growing interest in archaeology, and reflected the Imperial ambition to have ownership of Egypt’s cultural heritage. This interest extended to the grand architecture of the city of Cairo itself, with artists similarly positioning the city as timeless and untarnished by modernisation.

The oil paintings, watercolours and drawings examined in Chapter Three reveal a study of the decorative nature of façades, with Streeton’s compositions favouring pattern and ornament over narrative detail. He engaged only superficially with the religious and cultural significance of these city spaces, with his interest instead focused on the built environment. This was a continuation of the non-narrative picturesque scenes for which he was known in Australia. The humanity of the Australian landscapes, and Streeton’s participation in those spaces—staying at camps in Sirius Cove and spending nights at Mount Eagle—is echoed in his Cairo street scenes. However, as with his Australian work, the role of local figures within the scenes is decorative, rather than informative. Little is shown of the social and economic roles people played in the teeming city.

In Chapter Four, the discussion moves through different bazaar spaces, including traditional suks and khans, and open-air maydens. For centuries, these market regions have been potent signifiers of the Orient, understood by the West as a distinctly Eastern expression of social interaction and commerce. Streeton responded to the sensual appeal of the bazaar, writing in his ‘Personal narrative’ of the ‘unusual brilliance in the morning air of Cairo and a distinctive pleasant fragrance, perhaps resulting from mignonette, clover piled on camels’ backs, coffee, incense and other flavours of the Orient’. Like Streeton, artists and writers, such as R. Talbot Kelly, Walter Tyndale and Stanley Lane-Poole, emphasised the exotic and unfamiliar aspects of the bazaar, often excluding details that betrayed anything of the

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65 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
West or the onset of modernity. William Makepeace Thackeray described the ‘interminable vast bazaars with their barbaric splendour!’, while Douglas Sladen employed motifs of a timeless exotic in his descriptions of the bazaar districts.

For Streeton, as with other Western travellers, the bazaars represented the mysterious Orient of the Arabian Nights, while also possessing the innocuous quality of a known, ‘conquered’ space. Tourists were guided by their trusty Baedekers, and read in earnest the detailed description of the bazaars they encountered. Chapter Four locates many of Streeton’s works around the central sites of Sharia al-Muski, Khan al-Khalili, Bab Zuweila and Sultan Hasan. An investigation of the politics of these spaces reveals the degree to which the artist represented the bazaar as a site of contemporary economic and social interaction. While occasionally including recognisable geographic markers, the paintings and watercolours largely present a generalised vision.

The bazaar was a stock motif that often formed a decorative backdrop to studies of Eastern street life or grand historical scenes. As recognised by Prunster and Edwards, Australian and American artists painting in North Africa developed interpretations of the bazaar space that differed significantly from the majority of British and French Orientalists. They did not engage narratives of domination, nor were they concerned with the dramatisation of North African and Middle Eastern history and biblical themes. For Streeton, as with the Australian artists that would later journey to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria in the first decades of the twentieth century, an Impressionist sensibility heralded an engagement with the light, colour and pattern of the urban landscape. There was a focus on atmospheric

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69 B. T. Allen ‘“The garments of instruction from the wardrobe of pleasure”: American Orientalist painting in the 1870s and 1880s’, in H. Edwards, Noble dreams and wicked pleasures, 2000, p.63
effect and the qualities of the picturesque.\textsuperscript{70} Bazaars were an accessible and appealing subject, and the vibrant oil paintings, watercolours and drawings often included generalised ethnic types and architectural studies. Significantly, Streeton’s presence in the bazaars of Cairo was uncommon among Australian artists. Of the established painters working in Australia in the nineteenth century, only Dowling and Spong had travelled there before, and, by the early twentieth century, only Will Ashton had followed.

Bazaar scenes communicated nostalgia for the country town environment that was fast being enveloped by cities in the West, harking back to the rural ideal valorised by the Heidelberg artists in Australia. A similar nostalgia was harnessed in depictions of local Cairenes of the lower classes, from which Streeton’s paintings of a porter, knife grinder, drink sellers and veiled women emerged as a catalogue of ‘types’ in the Orientalist manner. As with the majority of representations of Cairenes during the late nineteenth century by Western painter-travellers, tourists and colonial expatriates, Streeton’s figures do not necessarily reflect the perspective of the subject or express anything of their character. Rather than being portraits of individuals, these often-static figures reveal the artist’s desire to capture the decorative possibilities of costume. Through simplified compositions that employ a limited palette, the group of figures painted by Streeton may be read as an exercise in addressing Aestheticist pictorial values and Orientalist subject matter, with no overarching narrative subject.

Chapter Five explores the development of Streeton’s ‘types’ against the background of Australian Impressionist portraiture, and the way these ‘typical’ images presented a legible vision of the East to a Western audience. Drawing upon the recent work of Tim Barringer on the relationship between Aestheticism and Orientalism, this chapter connects Streeton’s types to portraits by Whistler, via the influence of Roberts.\textsuperscript{71} Roberts had become familiar

\textsuperscript{70} In her discussion of American artists, Edwards observed that ‘[t]raveling artists tended to produce pictures that emphasized the most commonly experienced or salient features of particular places that a tourist might encounter along the beaten path’, and that there was ‘a striking absence of the bath scenes, decapitations, and explicit eroticism that so dominated French imagery of the area, and architectural ruins and monuments were generally eschewed in favor of landscape.’ H. Edwards, ‘A million and one nights: Orientalism in America. 1870-1930’, in H. Edwards, Noble dreams and wicked pleasures, 2000, p.25

with Whistler’s work while living in London, and had witnessed the prevalent influence of Aestheticism in portraiture at the time. Streeton’s inclination towards the decorative and poetic found fertile ground in his friend’s portraits from the 1890s, and this chapter will establish distinct similarities in the handling and placement of the figure in the work of these three artists.

The influence of Aestheticism’s call for ‘art for art’s sake’ and late nineteenth century notions of ‘decoration’ in art are further explored in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Drawing together the themes prevalent in Streeton’s Orientalist oeuvre, the Postscript examines Streeton’s return to the exoticism and mystery of the imagined Orient while living and working in London. Likely influenced by Conder and wife, Nora Clench, Streeton produced at least two works inspired by FitzGerald’s translation of the narrative poem, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*. These later works have never been assessed as part of Streeton’s Orientalism, which emulates the detached readings of Streeton’s earliest engagement with the literary East, *Scheherazade*.

In addressing the diversity of Streeton’s responses to the Orient, this revisionary investigation forms a clear argument for Streeton as an Orientalist. In an extensive assessment of a previously marginalised period within Streeton’s biography, this study employs multifarious sources, including letters, memoirs and photographs, to identify the social, cultural and political context of each work’s production. By mapping the geography of Streeton’s Cairo, I argue that, while Streeton’s experiences were very much those of the tourist of Empire, his writings and artistic output signal a sustained fascination with the Orient, and an engagement with the city as a vehicle for fashioning his identity as a bohemian peregrine. However, Streeton’s stopover in Cairo not only represented a young artist’s adventure. It marked a transition between the provincialism Streeton had perceived in Australia before his departure, and his arrival in London with the intention of establishing his artistic career on an international scale.
Arthur Streeton’s *Scheherazade* 1895 (Plate 1.1), painted two years before his excursion to the East, followed a pattern of studio Orientalism inspired by the proliferation of Eastern tales during the nineteenth century. Isolated from any narrative context, the figure of the Persian Queen stands draped in sheer folds of muslin before a golden orb. Imaged as a sensual icon of the Orientalist imagination, her delicately modelled form floats upon the natural grain of a varnished cedar panel. The *Sun* critic who reviewed the ‘Sydney sunshine’ exhibition in Melbourne in 1896, rather lyrically reported that Streeton’s subject ‘fully conveys the impression of the beautiful, clever and rather cunning woman who successfully held the attention of the brutal Caliph and saved her own and others’ lives’. While this first foray into Orientalism was restrained in terms of characterisation and Eastern ornamentation, the critic’s reading reveals the ability of the late Victorian viewer to draw out meanings associated with the figure of Scheherazade as understood via the recognisable, well-loved tales of the *Arabian Nights* in arts, theatre and literature.

The first part of this chapter will consider Streeton’s engagement with the imaginary Orient through an assessment of the versions of the *Arabian Nights* available in Australia, and the presence of other iterations of the tales in various forms, including illustrated children’s books, plays, pantomimes, and the popular press. Streeton’s interest in this literary East was part of a more general artistic trend in Australia, with galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong and Adelaide acquiring Orientalist paintings produced by both European and Australian painters. Unlike a number of these works, Streeton’s Cairo paintings were not

1 The work was previously titled ‘Standing female figure’. See J. Clark and B. Whitelaw, *Golden summers*, 1985, p.169; The work has since been re-titled by the National Gallery of Victoria. ‘Scheherazade’ was the title given to the work when it was first exhibited at Streeton’s ‘Sydney sunshine’ exhibition in Melbourne, 1896 (cat. 6). It was also listed in *The Arthur Streeton catalogue* as: ‘1898 – # 194 Scharazadi, oil, 23 x 16 (Mr Shakespeare)’, though, as on other occasions, the date had been recorded inaccurately. A. Streeton (ed.), *The Arthur Streeton catalogue*, 1935, p.118

2 ‘According to a previous owner, Streeton painted this decorative panel for a wardrobe belonging to Dame Nellie Melba.’ J. Clark and B. Whitelaw, *Golden summers*, 1985, p.169

3 *The Sun*, 11 December 1896, p.14
embellished with exotic costumed subjects, nor did they enact stories of barbarism and intrigue. Instead, they continued an aesthetic approach that had been favoured by the artist in the 1880s and 1890s.

The second part of the chapter will examine *Scheherazade*—the only painting by Streeton to directly reference the *Arabian Nights* and employ Orientalist subject matter prior to his journey to Cairo in 1897. *Scheherazade* represents a significant divergence from the manner in which Streeton would paint the Orient during the months he stayed in Cairo, and demonstrates that the artist’s perceptions were transformed by his subsequent experience of the city. This first gesture towards the East will be situated within the group of Symbolist works produced by the artist in the 1890s. The chapter will also consider the influence of fellow painters, Walter Brookes Spong, Charles Conder and Tom Roberts, on Streeton’s engagement with the fashionable exotic.

**The Arabian Nights in Nineteenth Century Australia**

The *Arabian Nights*, which were written or presented verbally by storytellers as tales embedded within tales, represent a timeless, exotic land of clever merchants and barbarous pashas whose harems are inhabited by beautiful slaves, scheming wives and cunning eunuchs. In many Middle Eastern cities, professional storytellers, known as *hakawati*, conveyed these tales through oral recitation, often in coffee shops, where they earned tips and, in some cases, a small wage from the café owner. While in Cairo, Streeton experienced what he saw as an authentic, unabridged and unrestricted narration of these stories. His recollection suggests that he was conscious of the differing versions of the tales available to the reader, and that these were the ‘real ones’:

> Returning home one evening I looked in at a [sic] Egyptian theatre, the audience seated on strong wooden benches, were listening to a recitation of the ‘Thousand & one nights Entertainment’, this performance is in progress every evening of the year, & judging by

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4 The tales were also performed at weddings or in the homes of the wealthy. R. Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, 1994, p.111
the applause of the Arabs, one concluded that the stories were the real ones with no expurgation.\textsuperscript{5}

In another version of this anecdote, Streeton encountered a ‘small native theatre ... filled with a laughing audience’ and found ‘an Arab on a high seat ... reciting the “Arabian Nights Entertainments” in Arabic’.\textsuperscript{6} Streeton’s observation that the theatre was ‘native’, and that the tales were told in Arabic, indicates the event he had witnessed was a traditional recitation for a local audience. As Robert Irwin has noted, these stories were told ‘for the most part by people in the cities about people in the cities for people in the cities’.\textsuperscript{7}

Streeton’s experience signals the continued strength of the tales within late nineteenth century Cairo as markers of social and cultural identity—a present-day incarnation completely distanced from the Arabian Nights experienced in Streeton’s studio, a Melbourne playhouse, or a Sydney home library.

In the framing narrative of the Arabian Nights, the reader is introduced to Sultan Shahryar, who discovers his wife’s affair with a kitchen servant and orders that she be put to death.\textsuperscript{8} Believing all women to be of the same weak disposition, in revenge, the Persian sultan resolves to take a new wife each night and have her beheaded the following morning. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, Scheherazade, the daughter of the vizier, offers herself as the sultan’s new bride. She cleverly avoids the fate of the other young wives by telling a story each night without reaching its end before the light of dawn. By maintaining her husband’s appetite for these tales, she secures another day of life, and only reaches the conclusion the following night, so that she can then begin the cycle once again. The sultan postpones Scheherazade’s death each day, until, after 1,001 tales, he revokes the decree.

As the storyteller, Scheherazade represents the creative force of the Arabian Nights, providing a passage between the reality of the Cairo street and its inhabitants, and the alluring world of harems and malevolent sultans. A standard addition in the Victorian home library, these tales were read as both fact and fiction. They were enjoyed as stories, while

\textsuperscript{5} A Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’  
\textsuperscript{6} A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’  
\textsuperscript{7} R. Irwin, The Arabian nights, 1994, p.121  
\textsuperscript{8} This name has a number of alternate spellings, including Shahriyar, Sheharyar, Shaheryar, Shahrayar and Shaharyar.
also becoming a foundation upon which Victorian understandings of the people and customs of the East were built through characters and narrative. Though many Orientalist painters replaced imagined versions of an exotic East with direct experience, by 1895 Streeton had not yet travelled to the East, and thus relied upon literary and artistic sources for inspiration. When he began work on Scheherazade, there were numerous translations of Alī layla wa-layla—also known as The thousand and one nights or the Arabian Nights—published in Arabic and French. The multi-volume editions by Edward William Lane (1838–1841), John Payne (1882–1884) and Richard Burton (1885–1888), were the most notable of the English versions. The tales also became common stories for children, though these adaptations were generally edited for a family audience and published in serial form, often without reference to the source or author. Each writer had different motivations in the production of the text, and subsequently developed certain themes, while eschewing others.

Although there were regional variations of the Arabian Nights, Lane’s edition was primarily based on an Egyptian two-volume manuscript that was published by Muhammad Ali Pasha’s state printing press at Bulaq in 1835, and provided a specifically Cairene version. Lane’s edition emphasised the English writer’s seemingly reliable knowledge as translator, partly due to his extended visits to Egypt. A notice in The Queenslander about the general background of the tales opined that ‘the best English translation from the Arabic is that of E.W. Lane’, who was ‘the best Arabic and Syriac scholar of the day’. With the aim of reaching a mass readership, Lane included in his translation a vast number of detailed illustrative notes, many of which were drawn from empirical observations he had made for his 1839 publication, An account of the manners and customs of the modern

9 R. Benjamin, Renoir and Algeria, 2003, p.8
12 Lane wrote, ‘I consider myself possessed of the chief qualifications for the proper accomplishment of my present undertaking, from my having lived several years in Cairo, associating almost exclusively with Arabs, speaking their language, conforming to their general habits with the most scrupulous exactitude, and [being] received into their society on terms of perfect equality.’ E.S. Poole (ed.), The thousand and one nights: the Arabian nights’ entertainments, trans. E.W. Lane, Chatto and Windus, London, 1883, pp.ix-x
13 ‘Notices to correspondents’, The Queenslander, 7 November 1896, p.875
The notes were viewed as a valuable means of gaining information about Arab life, and, by extension, the tales were similarly understood as such by the nineteenth century reader. This commonly resulted in a slippage between the real and imagined Orients. In an article published in *The Brisbane Courier* in 1883, the author seamlessly moved from discussion of Lane’s edition of the *Arabian Nights* and its accompanying notes, to the lifestyle and customs of medieval Arabs, using the tales to illustrate particular cultural practices.15

The notes also embedded the tales firmly within contemporary nineteenth century Egypt, giving them ethnographic weight. The connections made between notes, tales and contemporary Egyptian society, were conveyed by an article in *The Mercury* in 1865. The author described Arabs who were observing a gas lamplighter, stating that they ‘insist that the marvelous blaze ... must be provoked by the will of the genie, or “djinn”, as Mr Lane would have us spell the familiar word of the Arabian nights’.16 In addition to the notes, William Harvey’s engravings of contemporaneous scenes and figures accompanied Lane’s text. Lane was particularly concerned with the accuracy of Harvey’s renderings, believing these visual sources were important to his reader’s comprehension of the subject.17 In the process of adding what he believed to be a sense of social and cultural veracity to the *Arabian Nights*, Lane minimised the significance of the framing story of Scheherazade. He took on the role of storyteller via an authorial ‘voice’ through which the reader was to interpret the translated text.

By erasing the more vulgar and carnivalesque aspects of the tales and by omitting whole sections of text, Lane domesticated the *Arabian Nights* for his British audience. In contrast, Burton’s edition was highly sexualised, and may have been more true to local

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14 See E.W. Lane, *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860
15 ‘Mediaeval Arabs: Saturday review’, *The Brisbane Courier*, 5 March 1883, p.2
16 ‘Scientific and useful’, *The Mercury*, 20 April 1865, p.3
17 ‘to insure their accuracy, to the utmost of my ability, I have supplied the artist with modern dresses, and with other requisite materials. Thus he has been enabled to make his designs agree more nearly with the costumes &c. of the times which the tales generally illustrate.’ E.S. Poole (ed.), *The thousand and one nights*, 1883, vol. I, p.xxi

32
interpretations. Burton aligned the geographies of the *Arabian Nights* with his own travels, forming a close association between his identity as a traveller and the exoticism and adventure related in the narratives. Following the death of Streeton’s son, Charles Ludwig Oliver Streeton, the artist’s library was sold by his daughter-in-law, Margaret Streeton. This sale through Peter Arnold of Melbourne in the early 1980s has thwarted any later attempt to confirm which version of the *Arabian Nights* Streeton had read. However, it is unlikely that the artist would have owned Burton’s 1885 to 1886 translation, whose readership was ‘restricted to those who could afford the high cost of subscribing’. Payne’s earlier 1882 to 1884 version was similarly only available through private subscription. Streeton’s grandson, Oliver Streeton, has noted that the artist was often lent books of poetry and fashionable literature; thus, while Streeton may not have had such volumes in his long-term possession, they certainly could have been accessible.

While all three translations would have been available in Australia, the presence of certain stories or episodes within the versions is telling. It is unlikely, for example, that Streeton would have relied solely on Lane’s edition, given the artist’s reference to the popular story of ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’ in his letter from Cairo, which was published in the *Bulletin* in 1899. Lane omitted this story, along with the narrative of Aladdin and his lamp. Stanley Lane-Poole included both stories in the appendix of his revised edition of Lane’s translation in 1909. They were not part of the ‘Bulaq version’ that Lane based his edition on, although the French writer and scholar, Antoine Galland, had integrated them into the tales in the eighteenth century. Galland’s 12-volume, *Les mille et une nuits, contes Arabes traduits en Français*, was well-regarded and widely read throughout Europe since the time of its publication from 1707 to 1714.

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20 O. Streeton in discussion with E. Kindred, Canberra, 25 January 2012
21 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
22 C.W. Eliot (ed.), *Stories from the thousand and one nights (the Arabian nights’ entertainments)*, trans. E.W. Lane, revised by S. Lane-Poole, vol. 16, P.F. Collier and Son, New York, 1909
References to the characters and narratives of the *Arabian Nights* became conventional practice in travel literature, travelogues, newspaper articles and letters written home during the second half of the nineteenth century. The presence of these tales in middle-class nurseries meant that many travellers recalled their imagery from childhood—a fact that may have contributed to the infantilisation of Egyptians that often characterised Victorian travel writing. Those preparing for travel to the East also turned to the tales as essential reading. In 1858, George W. Curtis named the local Cairenes he encountered on the street after Abon Hassan, Haroun Alrashid, Sinbad the porter and Sinbad the sailor. They came alive in his memory as characters who he had already met through stories he had become acquainted with before embarking on his journey to Egypt: ‘I could not but wink at Abon for I knew him so long ago in the Arabian Nights’. By the end of the century, reference to these fashionable tales had become clichéd, though their power to evoke an atmosphere of the exotic was not entirely diminished. Lane-Poole, in *A story of Cairo*, first published in 1902, repeatedly described the city as possessing the qualities of the infamous Eastern narrative. He wrote that Cairo was still ‘the city of Arabian nights’:

> a few streets away from the European quarters it is easy to dream that we are acting a part in the moving histories of the Thousand and One Nights, which do in fact describe Cairo and its people as they were in the Middle Ages, and as they are in a great measure still.

The *Arabian Nights* and the myth of the Orient became general currency in Australia’s popular culture during the late nineteenth century, with plays, pantomimes, masque balls, children’s books, and newspaper and journal articles drawing on this version of the imaginative East. Pantomimes telling stories taken from the tales, such as *Aladdin, The forty thieves* and *Sinbad the sailor*, were frequently performed, often over the summer holiday season. Of *Aladdin*, performed at the Theatre Royal in Adelaide in 1893, the *South Australian Register* critic wrote that ‘the story is told charmingly ... the dressing is

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23 ‘With scholars propagating the idea of an Orient frozen in time, it was a rare tourist who could write home of contemporary Cairo without invoking the *Arabian Nights*.’ D.M. Reid, *Whose pharaohs?*, 2002, p.219
25 S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1918, pp.4-5
26 See ‘The Forty Thieves’, *The South Australian Advertiser*, 25 April 1887, p.7; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1899, p.3
splendid’. He enthused, ‘the days when “Arabian Nights” and a Bible comprised the juvenile’s library are relived’. In the same year, The forty thieves was performed at the Princess Theatre, telling the story of Ali Baba’s adventures. It had lavish scenery that was described as ‘gorgeous and effective’; with costumes ‘emblematic of different nations’; and backdrops of the Grand Bazaar of Bagdad, Banyon Forrest, Mount Olympus and the Temple of Terpsichore. Alongside the more traditional theatrical performances based around the tales, there was also a comedy in three acts, Arabian nights, which told the story of a modern man, Mr Hummingtop, whose ambition was to imitate the grand caliph, Haroun al-Rashid. During the early 1890s, Streeton frequented the theatre, often noting in letters to his close friend, Roberts, the plays he had seen and theatres he had visited, such as the Criterion Theatre in Sydney, and the Theatre Royal and Bijou Theatre in Melbourne.

From the 1840s to the 1920s, Australia’s major cities witnessed the theatricality and excitement of fancy dress and masquerade balls, to which people often went dressed as characters from the Arabian Nights. A wood engraving of the Mayor’s fancy dress ball in Melbourne, published in 1877 (Plate 1.2), shows the interior of the Town Hall, with people in richly decorated costumes, including that of a fairy, court jester, magician and geisha. A turbaned head rises above the crowd at the centre of the image, suggesting the presence of an Oriental sultan, while a veiled woman stands further towards the front. Anita Callaway noted that the fancy dress ball allowed ‘supposedly virtuous women’ to ‘appear with impunity in the seductive dress of an Oriental slave girl (sometimes with the added fillip of gauzy harem pants), as a temptress, or practitioner of the black arts’. Artists were often to

27 ‘Theatre Royal’, South Australian Register, 3 January 1893, p.6
28 ‘The Princess Theatre’, Mercury and Weekly Courier, 5 January 1893, p.3
29 ‘St George’s Hall: “The Arabian nights”’, The Argus, 6 January 1890, p.6. The play was also performed on other occasions and locations, see ‘Alexandra Theatre: “The Arabian nights”’, The Argus, 6 February 1888, p.8; ‘The Arabian nights at the Criterion’, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1888, p.8; ‘The Arabian nights’, Sydney Morning Herald, 7 March 1892, p.6
30 See A. Callaway, Visual ephemera, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, p.214. Both artists were involved in scene painting around this time and, with Frederick McCubbin, were guest scene painters at the Bijou Theatre in Christmas 1891, painting the scenery for Much ado about nothing, with the company’s chief scene painter, Walter Brookes Spong. Streeton also completed a gouache sketch, Among the flies, Theatre Royal 1890 (National Gallery of Australia).
31 A. Callaway, Visual ephemera, 2000, p.88

35
be found in the throng, and, at a Melbourne medical student’s ball in 1887, Roberts dressed as Abou Ben Hadad.32

During this period, dress designs and illustrations in the Home and Lone Hand magazines further reinforced the exoticism of the East, while characters and stories drawn from the Arabian Nights were common in children’s books.33 In 1886, the tales were among the ‘ideal books for boys’ listed as part of a review of ‘books for young people’.34 An 1898 article in the Sydney Morning Herald reviewed The Arabian nights, written by Andrew Lang and illustrated by H.J. Ford. The critic applauded the quality of this version, which was aimed at younger readers, recalling that ‘most of us who love the “Arabian Nights” first read them in hideous editions, cheap and ugly’.35 News of forthcoming editions and reviews of recent publications relating to the tales also came to Australia via newspapers. In 1878, The Argus noted that ‘Captain Burton [was] engaged in a new and full translation of the “Arabian nights”’,36 and, in 1882, reviewed the New Arabian nights by Robert Louis Stevenson, published that same year.37 There was also a reference to ‘Queen Scheherazade’ in Thomas Hardy’s 1878 Return of the native. Hardy was a great favourite of both Streeton and Roberts—in his letters, Streeton mentions another Hardy novel, Far from the maddening crowd, and its female protagonist, Bathsheba, on a number of occasions.38

Orientalist Art in Australian Galleries

Australia’s attraction to the East found visual form in the exhibition of paintings inspired by Middle Eastern and North African history, and the Bible. Armchair travellers in Britain, Europe, America and Australia yearned for the exotic to be played out before them through

32 Table Talk, 22 July 1887, p.12, cited in A. Callaway, Visual ephemera, 2000, p.97
33 See J. Docker, The nervous nineties: Australian cultural life in the 1890s, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p.199
34 ‘Review: Books for young people’, The Brisbane Courier, 26 July 1886, p.3
35 ‘Books for the young’, Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 26 November 1898, p.3
36 The Argus, 11 October 1878, p.3
37 The Argus, 30 December 1882, p.4; The New Arabian nights was a collection of short stories written by Stevenson between 1877 and 1880 for magazines, which used a similar embedded tale within a tale structure.
lavish colour and ornamental detail. Streeton would have seen a number of the Orientalist paintings and drawings acquired by Australian public art institutions during the late nineteenth century. He frequented both public and private galleries in Sydney and Melbourne, writing letters to Roberts about visits to favourite works by British and Scottish artists. He also remained abreast of what was happening in the local art world. Moving in the artistic circles of Sydney, Melbourne, and, to a lesser extent, Adelaide, Streeton would have been conscious of the general desire for the exotic and its associations with a cosmopolitan aesthetic, influenced by artistic trends in Britain and France.

From the 1870s to the 1890s, the purchase of Orientalist works of art by the national institutions in New South Wales and Victoria was part of a general trend in collecting policies among Australia's major galleries to acquire paintings by artists who had exhibited at the Royal Academy. Consequently, the majority of Orientalist paintings were by British artists, with only one major composition by a locally trained artist, Robert Dowling, who had lived in Cairo for a number of months during 1872 and 1873. Born in Britain, Dowling arrived in Australia at the age of seven, and undertook early artistic training in Launceston. After moving to Geelong in 1854, intent on establishing a reputation as a portrait painter, he returned to Launceston in 1857 to painting the Indigenous Tasmanians, before leaving to further his study in London. During the 1860s and 1870s, Dowling worked in the academic mode, painting popular genre subjects; literary, historical and biblical themes; and the most substantial Orientalist images by any Australian artist.

Dowling's journey to North Africa and the Holy Land, which included an extended stay in Cairo over the winter season, was likely motivated by the market for Orientalist subjects in London. The trip also provided an opportunity to acquire authentic ethnographic props for his paintings and to develop a greater knowledge of Eastern society and culture for his

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40 For example, Streeton noted the change of Director at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1891 and a trustee at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1892. See A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, late December 1891, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.40; A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 12 October 1892, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.56
41 U. Prunster, 'From Empire's end: Australians as Orientalists, 1880-1920', 1997, p.41
biblical scenes. The historical splendour of the city encouraged Dowling’s interest in exotic and picturesque subjects, and the artist collected material and produced numerous sketches to be used upon his return to London. *A Sheik and his son entering Cairo, on their return pilgrimage to Mecca* (henceforth *A Sheik and his son*) 1874 (Plate 1.3), was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1878, after being exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1875. Dowling’s painting provides a detailed description of the architectural motifs that gave interest to the Cairene street, such as the finely carved wooden lacework of *mashrabiya* windows and painted stonework, as a backdrop for the study of costume and ethnographic ‘types’. In a pamphlet published for the painting’s exhibition at the museum at the Public Buildings in Launceston the previous year, it was noted:

> The intention of the artist was to produce a careful illustration of Oriental life, architecture, and costumes, as he saw them in the streets of Cairo—‘chief of Arabian cities’; and travellers and former residents in that city, have borne testimony to the success with which he has generally worked out his design, whilst the minor details in the distinctive features of his work—the architecture, and the anatomy, and costumes of the figures—have earned for him the commendation of leading men in his profession.42

Against the primary narrative of the sheik returning to Mecca with the black brocade Kiswah that covers the Kaaba stone of the Great Mosque during the Hajj, the social texture of the street is revealed. The artist depicted Bedouins and Jews, a Franciscan monk mounted on a donkey with a green parasol tucked under his arm, lower class children carrying ripe lengths of sugar cane, street vendors, veiled women, musicians, and attendants of the sheik. Also pictured is a woman selling oranges and fowl, a merchant presenting cloth to potential buyers, and men casually smoking long pipes beside stray dogs as the procession passes by. The pattern of luminous costume suggests a Pre-Raphaelite influence.

A crisp white light that falls in hard shafts across the façade of a mosque and the stony street heightens the overall effect. This awareness of light, and its interplay with the cool shadows that reach across areas of the composition, is also expressed in the watercolour paintings of street scenes and bazaars that Streeton would complete over two decades later. Dowling’s light is almost solid, however, and his painting’s highly ornamental detailing is

42 *Mr. Robert Dowling’s Oriental picture*, Walch Brothers and Birchall, Launceston, January 1877, p.1
marked by an academic approach that preceded the atmospheric Impressionism of Streeton. There is an awkwardness in Dowling’s composition and in the size of certain figures, likely to be a result of individual studies, including *Street scene, Cairo* c.1874 (Plate 1.4). Working quickly in watercolour or on small panels, Streeton did not attempt such a complex narrative, instead reducing the mottled crowd to small daubs of paint. The grand scale of *A Sheik and his son* was not repeated in Dowling’s Orientalist oeuvre, though he did produce a number of oils and watercolours depicting Egyptian, North African and biblical subjects. These included the paintings exhibited in London with the Royal Society of British Artists: *The pasha’s desert* 1869; *A shady corner, Algiers* 1872; *The woman of Samaria* 1872; *Upper Nile, Egypt* 1876; and *The mosque door, Cairo* 1880.43

Prior to Streeton’s journey to Cairo, the National Art Gallery of New South Wales had acquired a small group of Orientalist paintings by European artists.44 In 1890, the gallery purchased a watercolour, *Street scene, Cairo*, by the British-born Spong.45 The work was almost certainly viewed by Streeton, as it was exhibited in the Victorian Artists Society show from which Streeton’s ‘*Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide*’ 1890 was acquired.46 The collection also included Alberto Pasini’s *Syrian horse fair* c.1890 and Walter Charles Horsley’s *Great Britain in Egypt* 1886, together with Etienne Dinet’s *The snake charmer* 1889 and Sir Edward Poynter’s *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* 1890.

In July 1890, the overseas advisers in Paris for the National Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased Dinet’s *The snake charmer* (Plate 1.5)—an Algerian scene painted at

44 The National Art Gallery of New South Wales was renamed the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1958.
45 M. Eagle, *The oil paintings of Arthur Streeton in the National Gallery of Australia*, 1994, pp.110-111. The Art Gallery of New South Wales has since deaccessioned the oil painting by Spong. Spong spent 11 years painting in Australia, and was on his second trip to Cairo. Spong worked in England as a theatrical scene artist for the D’Oyly Carte Company. He was known as a watercolourist, and exhibited with the Victorian Artists Society.
46 ‘Victorian Artists Society winter exhibition’, *Illustrated Sydney News*, 7 June, 1890, p.6. Spong moved in the same circles as Streeton, and is mentioned in letters to Roberts from 1891 onwards. Spong painted the backdrop of *Comedy banishing melancholy* for the opening of the company’s second Bijou Theatre, Melbourne in 1890 with the help of Roberts. Spong was a foundation member of the Australian Artists’ Association, Melbourne, in 1886, along with Roberts, McCubbin et al.

39
Laghouat. This oil painting, which was first exhibited at the 1890 Paris Salon, was popular with both critics and the Sydney gallery’s visitors. Benjamin has noted that Dinet’s fluency in Arabic, his semi-permanent move to the oasis town of Bou-Sââd, and his subsequent conversion to Islam provided a very different Orientalist model than that of less-committed painter-travellers. While no Australian artist of the late nineteenth century engaged with the culture and society of the Orient to such an extent, The snake charmer acted as a significant reference point for Australian artists who were working directly from nature—particularly those like Streeton, who believed that travel and the process of painting in the open air were vital.

Though not associated directly with Impressionism, Dinet adopted an Impressionist palette. Artists painting the dry, bleaching Australian light emulated his approach. In 1890, French critic, George Lafenestre, noted that ‘Algeria is a good school for colourists’ and that:

[Di]net was among the first to express the extraordinary and unexpected effects of the sun on the figures in the open air ... his large picture, The Snake Charmer, where all the figures, dazzled by an intense light, squint and grimace in the heat, which also causes observers to squint; but if one can endure this blinding dazzle, one sees that the figures under this excessive radiation are wonderfully individualised and vividly real.
Writing a year later for the *The Argus*, Roberts also noted the dazzling, glittering effect of sunlight in Dinet’s work. In discussing Streeton’s oeuvre in *The art of Arthur Streeton*, published in 1919, Lionel Lindsay speculated about the influence of Dinet on Streeton. He wrote:

I cannot but think that the magnificent Dinet, ‘The Snake Charmer’, in the Sydney gallery, helped Streeton in realizing the atmosphere of summer. Sunlight has rarely been so magnificently rendered as in this characteristic group of Arabs. I know of no realistic picture wherein the centering (here, upon the old man’s head) is so beautifully achieved without trick. The light beats and dazzles; the atmosphere vibrates; the reflections from the sand are astonishingly subtle. But, whether helped by Dinet or his own instincts, Streeton was happy in pitching his key neither too high, which would have blanched his colour, nor yet too low as to lose in light what he might have gained in richness.

Light was a primary subject for Dinet, with the scene painted from direct observation. His stylistic approach did not have the same exacting finish of more academic studio works, but instead possessed a greater sense of movement and energy, heightened by the play of shadow and highlight across the composition. The costumes of Dinet’s characters were used as a vehicle to describe the sun’s white glare through contrast and tonal depth—a method of translating light and heat that would later be employed by Streeton in his paintings of drink sellers.

During visits to the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Streeton was also likely to have encountered Sir Edward Poynter’s grand history painting, *The visit of the Queen of...

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53 ‘On the cunning, grinning Arab who fronts you, snake wreathed, yellowish robed, bare breasted, within one other venomous-looking reptile hanging tense from the right hand, there is sunlight; it glitters on the nearly bald head and greasy nose; it dazzles the eyes of the surrounding group of Arabs, men and boys; it is a peep into the East itself—and every figure and head impress with its truth and character. There is a certain apparently haphazard arrangement, which at first strikes one as a defect, but looking from it to a lot of neighboring works in which there is certainly ‘composition’, it is curious how trite they look, and when we come back to this Eastern piece, as from a dull common room to a brilliant open air, with a sense of freshness and healthfulness.’ T. Roberts, ‘The National Art Gallery of New South Wales’, *The Argus*, 31 October 1891, p.14

54 L. Lindsay, ‘Arthur Streeton’, in S. Ure Smith, B. Stevens and C.L. Jones (eds.), *The art of Arthur Streeton*, Angus and Robertson Limited, Sydney, 1919, p.12; Lindsay visited Dinet at Bou Saada in 1929. In conversation with Lindsay, Dinet noted that it was painted in a town South of Bou Saada; it ‘was done...in the open’ and ‘the old man was afterwards bitten by one of the horned vipers and died’. Lindsay opines, ‘I don’t think he remembers how good the picture is in its marvellous truth of light’. L. Lindsay, letter dated 27 March 1929, inserted in autographed copy of Dinet’s *Khadra: danseuse Ouled Nail*, given to him by Dinet at Bou Saada, 26 March 1929, Mitchell Library, Sydney, cited in U. Prunster, ‘The snake charmer (Le charmeur de vipères)’, cat. 69, R. Benjamin (ed.), *Orientalism*, 1997, p.130
Sheba to King Solomon 1890 (Plate 1.6). Appointed the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University College in London, Poynter was a highly esteemed arts educator and academic painter, who upheld the values of the Aestheticist movement from its infancy in the 1860s. By the time Streeton had moved to London, Poynter was the President of the Royal Academy and Director of the National Gallery. The National Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased The visit in 1892 for the large sum of 2,900 pounds.55 By 1896, the painting was reported in The Brisbane Courier as having been a ‘prominent feature in the Sydney Art Gallery’ for several years.56 In 1882, a decade before the acquisition was made, the gallery trustees had missed out on Edwin Long’s Babylonian marriage market 1875, which influenced their decision to pay such a comparatively high sum in the hope that the vast canvas would attract more visitors.57 Six months after the painting arrived in Sydney, the Daily Telegraph noted that gallery ‘attendance … has increased very largely’, which signalled both the success of the purchase and the popularity of the subject with the city’s gallery goers.58

Poynter’s Queen of Sheba is depicted as a richly decorated exotic beauty, sexualised through her bare breasts and the sensuous line used to describe her figure as she ascends a staircase, flanked by gilded lions, to the throne of Solomon.59 The ornamental allure of the queen is heightened by emblems of opulence, such as the pair of peacocks in the lower right of the composition, the lavish detail and texture realised throughout the surface of the work, as well as the frame itself. Poynter’s nephew, Malcolm Bell, wrote in 1905 that ‘the splendid Queen of Sheba’s Visit to King Solomon … to England’s irreparable loss, has

55 See Cablegram to E.L. Montefiore, 3 August 1892, E. Poynter artist files, Art Gallery of New South Wales Library and Archive; There was some debate about cost, aesthetic merit and display of the work, and a critic wrote in 1894 that ‘Mr Poynter will probably live in history as a disa-Poynter’, Daily Telegraph, 19 November 1894, cited in U. Prunster, ‘From Empire’s End: Australians as Orientalists, 1880-1920’, 1997, p.43
56 ‘Cable Messages’, The Brisbane Courier, 6 November 1896, p.5; See also ‘The Solomon and Sheba picture’, Sydney Morning Herald, 12 November 1892, p.7
57 ‘Poynter’s painting was in the same vein of archaeological costume drama and, as far as the Trustees were concerned, its high price was justified because it would be a direct means of ‘attracting throngs of persons to the Art Gallery’.’ U. Prunster, ‘From Empire’s end: Australians as Orientalists, 1880-1920’, 1997, p.42, including quote from Sydney Morning Herald, 31 December 1892, p.5
59 See A. Inglis, ‘The queen of the south’: archaeology and Empire in Edward J. Poynter’s The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon’, Melbourne Art Journal, no. 5, 2001, pp.25-40
gone to far-away Sidney [sic] to set a noble example of imaginative and technical achievement before the artists of Australia’. Though the painting certainly had an effect on the gallery’s visitor numbers, its influence on the ‘artists of Australia’ might not have been as profound as Bell suggested. However, it would have signalled to Streeton and his contemporaries the popularity of Oriental subject matter in Europe, and, specifically, at the Royal Academy. In turning to the Arabian Nights as the inspiration for Scheherazade, Streeton included none of the florid richness of Poynter’s work, nor the monumental scaling. Rather, it is the nude itself that has been employed as a vehicle for aesthetic investigation. Sensuality, demure postures and bare-breasted costumes link the two Eastern queens.

The Figure of a Queen

Although it would remain Streeton’s only work to reference the Orient of the Arabian Nights, Scheherazade reveals the poetic response of the artist to these popular tales, and his desire for the exoticism of the East. This desire was shaped by nineteenth century understandings of masculine and imperial authority, which influenced Streeton’s conception of the celebrated storyteller. While the fabled Persian queen shared the power and strength of the biblical Queen of Sheba, they were both depicted as the passive subject of a male gaze. There is a sense of repressed sexuality conveyed through the queen’s downcast eyes in Poynter’s painting that is enigmatically reinforced by the sexual connotations of the lotus flowers held in her hand. The delicate flowers reference the purity of the monarch, as she is both sexualised and chaste—a depiction that exemplifies the constant tension between dualities that are often present in Victorian depictions of women. Streeton’s Scheherazade similarly faces away from the viewer in a submissive pose that is exaggerated by the placement of her hands behind her back.

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63 Inglis further points out that they allude to the ‘riddle of two flowers’, where Solomon was asked by the Queen to decide which flower was real and which fake. A. Inglis, ‘The queen of the south’: archaeology and Empire in Edward J. Poynter’s The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon’, 2001, p.28
In Poynter’s work, the masculine authority of Solomon is established in contrast to the queen’s exotic femininity. The two protagonists are positioned prominently in the centre of the composition, though he stands above her with his right arm extended in a gesture of good faith. According to the First Book of Kings in the Old Testament, from which the story of the meeting is drawn, the queen travelled to Solomon’s court with her train of camels bearing gold, precious stones and spices, to test him with difficult questions.\(^64\) Within this narrative, she is an active agent seeking to confront the great Solomon.\(^65\) However, the painting focuses on the physical interaction between the monarchs, rather than exploring the spiritual development of the queen through her interaction with the King of Israel. The moment of submission depicted by Poynter follows Solomon’s response to the questions and riddles with which she challenged him, and her recognition of his wisdom and prosperity. In the same way, Streeton’s Scheherazade is not engaged in the active process of storytelling; rather, she is presented as a subject of physical sensuality.

The largely unembellished panel of *Scheherazade* does not possess the richness of the earlier studio Orientalist works of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri Regnault or Jean-Léon Gérôme. Renoir’s highly decorative *Woman of Algiers* 1870 (Plate 1.7) displays rich colours and textures, and sumptuous fabrics. Influenced by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Eugene Delacroix, the French artist’s Eastern woman gazes directly at the viewer, communicating a presence that is sensual, powerful and engaged. By contrast, Streeton’s Scheherazade is rendered passive and pure. Articulated in transparent layers of creamy white pigment, using the timber as mid-tone, her down-turned face is framed by her rich black hair set against the circular halo of a luminous moon.\(^66\)

Though Streeton did not identify himself as a Christian at the time the work was painted, and pursued an almost paganistic worship of nature in the spirit of late nineteenth century bohemianism, the visual link to religious symbolism is implicit. Ary Scheffer’s *The temptation of Christ* 1854, purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1886, shows

\(^{64}\) 1 Kings 10:1, Old Testament, *Holy Bible*
Christ’s head similarly framed by a golden halo—a reference to medieval Christian iconography. Another work on panel by Streeton employed such a device. In Cupid c.1890s (Plate 1.8), thin rays of light radiate from the head of a child. In Scheherazade, the glowing orb is rendered in thin sweeps of yellow oil paint, and embellished with inward strokes of pink from the curving edge and small calligraphic blue dashes. It floats against a background evocative of the bush landscape, with the cedar’s silky wood grain running vertically up the face of the panel like the slender trunks of gum trees. It is possible to envisage the scene set in the early evening, as the full moon rises behind the figure of the Persian queen, who stands quietly contemplating the tale with which she will fill the dark hours ahead in order to secure her life for one more day. The presence of the moon imbues her stance with the weight and consequence of the approaching night.

Symbolism and Streeton’s Imagined Orient

Without the anchor of narrative or contextual detail, Streeton’s work speaks of a Symbolist aesthetic. In its composition and form, it is suggestive, rather than descriptive. There are clear stylistic associations with Eastern-inspired allegorical imagery, such as the Sphinx-like posture of the figure in Charles Conder’s Hot wind 1889 (Plate 1.9), while betraying a similarity to Arthur Loureiro’s Symbolist paintings, The spirit of the Southern Cross 1888 (Plate 1.10) and The spirit of the new moon 1888 (Plate 1.11). There are also visual links to the British Pre-Raphaelite artist J.W. Waterhouse’s Circe invidiosa 1892 (Plate1.12), which was purchased by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1892, and shown as part of an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1895.

The work provided Streeton with the opportunity to paint a nude—often a highly saleable subject—while the literary reference reinforced the artist’s bohemian identity through its association with the poetic. During the 1880s and 1890s, Streeton also painted a small

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67 Illustrated catalogue of the National Gallery, The trustees of the Public Library, Museum and National Gallery of Victoria, Varley Brothers, Sydney, 1905, p.21
68 Waterhouse’s Circe invidiosa has been noted in relation to the work of other Australian artists, including Sydney Long’s Sadder than a single star that sets at twilight in a land of reeds (Decoration) 1899. See L. Astbury, Sunlight and shadow: Australian Impressionist painters1880-1900, Bay Books, Sydney and London, 1989, p.166
number of Symbolist works with nude figures hedonistically dancing in lyrical bush landscapes. These included *Twilight* (fairy figure nude against afterglow sky) c.1888–1889; ‘What thou amongst the leaves hast never known’ (or *A bush idyll*) 1896 (Plate 1.13); and *Sydney Harbour: a souvenir* c.1897–1899 (Plate 1.14).69 His nymph-like figures are not dissimilar to those inhabiting Sidney Long’s art nouveau landscapes, and have been described as a romantic and nostalgic means of providing the Australian landscape with an equivalent to classical Mediterranean nymphs and dryads.70 ‘What thou amongst the leaves hast never known’ contains the most overt example, with a nude blue-winged angel with a white halo floating almost unnoticed against the dark green boughs of the gums. Such figures, along with seductive *femmes fatales*, were common in the work of artists and writers associated with the Symbolist movement during this period, who drew inspiration from fantasy, poems and literature.

While the figures in Streeton’s magical bush landscapes serve a decorative purpose, the women in *Schéhérazade*, *Ariadne* 1895 (Plate 1.15) and *Oblivion* 1895 (Plate 1.16) are the key subjects of each painting. Clothed in the same delicately modelled sheer white fabric, the latter two compositions provide a counterpoint to Schéhérazade as both virginal wife and *femme fatale*. In Greek mythology, Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos. Forsaken by her lover Theseus, she was left abandoned on the island of Naxos. In Streeton’s portrayal, she is shown standing on the bleached sandy shore with her head in her hands, as a ship sails towards the horizon. Ariadne’s costume of long white flowing folds, perhaps referencing the Greek *chinton*, is crisscrossed around the front and back of her upper body in a similar fashion to Schéhérazade’s. This, together with the figures’ shared wavy locks of ebony hair and the fact that they were painted in the same year, suggests that the one model may have been used for both paintings. The primary focus of *Ariadne* is the narrative of abandonment that takes place within the sunlit landscape. In *Schéhérazade*, Streeton followed the aesthetic trend established by Roberts’s similarly sized full-length portraits

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that were painted around the same time, with the subject isolated upon an exposed panel.\(^\text{71}\)

Streeton’s *Oblivion*, also drawn from literary sources, was based on Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem, *The lotos-eaters*.\(^\text{72}\) This allegorical work depicts a woman bathed in clear white sunshine, draped languidly across a marble slab. She is positioned in the very foreground of the image, with a band of coastal landscape in the background dividing the upper third of the composition.

The presence of these women in Streeton’s landscapes aligned him with both the Symbolists’ use of allegory, and a British Aestheticist sensibility. The Aesthetic movement flourished in England in the 1870s and 1880s, and the group’s champion, London-based American painter and printmaker, James McNeill Whistler, developed a unique form of Impressionism based on harmonious and evocative arrangements of broad areas of colour and tone. Whistler’s portraits and impressions of London influenced Australian Impressionists, who were responsive to his use of tonal contrasts and decorative details borrowed from Japanese art.\(^\text{73}\) The awareness of these avant-garde directions in Australian art by the 1880s and 1890s also fuelled a growing interest in *Japonisme*, which had been embraced by the young bohemian artists in Streeton’s circle, including Roberts and Conder.

In the first volume of the short-lived *Centennial Magazine*, published in 1888, Julian Ashton argued that artists should move away from depictions of grand histories and ‘preach the beautiful in [their] commonplace and everyday existence’, for, by doing so, ‘they would leave behind them historical pictures of the greatest value to coming generations’.\(^\text{74}\) Such stirrings signalled a receptiveness to Aestheticism in Australia. Within art and literature, there was a desire to create an evocative poetic mood, with the transience of beauty and sensual pleasure considered more important than realistic description, narrative content or moral messages.

\(^{71}\) Like Roberts, Streeton used cedar panels originally intended for doors or the boards around which bolts of cloth were wrapped. Roberts’s group of 23 panels, ‘Familiar faces and figures’, is discussed further in Chapter Five.

\(^{72}\) Geoffrey Smith offers an alternative reading. ‘Equally radical was Streeton’s *Oblivion*, which Smith describes as “very rare, very unusual” because of his use of a figure in the foreground and the Pacific Ocean in the background acting as an allegorical reference to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and a land of slumber.’ R. Gill, ‘Streeton’s long golden summer’, *The Age*, 8 December 2004

\(^{73}\) The ‘9 by 5 impression exhibition’ of 1888 also saw the use of musical titles, as in Roberts’s *Allegro con brio*, Bourke St. W. 1886. This was likely in reference to Whistler’s common use of titles alluding to music.

\(^{74}\) J.R. Ashton, ‘An aim for Australian Art’, *The Centennial Magazine*, vol. 1, 1888, p.31
Australian artists gained access to Whistler and his British contemporaries through etchings, reproductions, local exhibitions, and newspaper and journal articles. In 1887, for example, the Grosvenor Gallery Intercolonial exhibition was held in the south wing of the National Gallery of Victoria, showcasing the works of male and female British artists who were associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement and Aestheticism, including Edward Burne-Jones, Solomon J. Solomon and George Frederick Watts. The influence of Whistler likely reached Streeton via Roberts. Following their meeting in the summer of 1886 at Mentone, Roberts became Streeton’s closest friend and was an influential mentor to the younger artist. Their relationship was intimate, and Streeton put much trust in his painting companion, whom he referred to as ‘Bulldog’.

Roberts had become familiar with the work of the Aestheticists during his time in London from 1881 to 1885. In May 1884, Whistler’s ‘Notes—harmonies—nocturnes’ exhibition was mounted in London, and, following Roberts’s return to Australia in October 1885, Whistler’s Note in blue and green c.1885 was shown in the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists exhibition at Fletcher’s Gallery, Melbourne. The painting was acquired by Adelaide-born painter and printmaker, Mortimer Luddington Menpes, who owned a number of works by his friend and teacher, Whistler. In 1919, Lionel Lindsay noted that it ‘was but natural that James McNeill Whistler, Arbiter Elegantiarum and master of many arts, should become their tutelary god. His “Gentle Art of Making Enemies” published in 1890 was for the elect the gospel of the period’. Streeton had read the Gentle art of making enemies in 1892, while in Mittagong.

As well as providing an introduction to Aestheticism, Roberts’s travels had inspired his experimentation with Orientalist subject matter. He had ventured to Spain as a break from studies at the Royal Academy School in London. In 1883, he stayed three months in Andalusia—an area made popular by the American writer, Washington Irving; French

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75 See H. McQueen, ‘A golden age: Tom Roberts and the arts of Spain’, 2007, p.22
76 L. Lindsay in S. Ure Smith et al. (eds.), The art of Arthur Streeton, 1919, p.8
77 A. Streeton, letter to T. Fink, November 1891, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, p.59; The book containing letters and texts from newspapers was pushed in 1890 as a response to, and in part a transcript of, Whistler's libel suit against critic John Ruskin; See also T. Lane, ‘The 9 by 5 impression exhibition – the challenge of the sketch’, T. Lane (ed.), Australian Impressionism, 2007, pp.157-179
opera composer, Georges Bizet; and French Romantic poet, writer and critic, Théophile Gautier. From the 1830s, Andalusia had become a key destination for French and British painters, such as Edwin Long, Frederic Leighton and Jean-Léon Gérôme, who were inspired by the clear light and picturesque vistas. During his travels, Roberts met Laureano Barrau, a pupil of Gérôme, who encouraged the Australian artist to make colour sketches from life. Following Robert Dowling, by the 1880s Roberts was one of the few Australian artists to explore Orientalist subject matter based on travel. The influence of Eastern themes in Roberts’s work was further established under the instruction of Gérôme and Edwin Long, who were both respected studio Orientalists.

Roberts’s *Seated Arab* c.1884 (Plate 1.17) is an academic Orientalist painting in the French mode. The scene may have been drawn from the artist’s journey to Andalusia, though is likely to have been constructed, or reconstructed, in the studio with a model. The use of exotic props, decorative motifs, and common aspects of the picturesque—such as costumes and atmospheric settings—were conventional ways that artists located their subjects within the Orientalist tradition. The ornamental richness of the painting’s surface is cultivated by the warmth of reflected light from the brass water jar of the *narghile*, the delicate pinstripe of silvery-blue running through the jewel-like green of the Arab’s costume, and the dry texture of the whitewashed wall that frames the figure. Holding the stem of the *narghile* to the corner of his mouth, the Arab sits in leisurely repose. Roberts’s facility in capturing the passive expression of his sitter imbues the work with a depth of characterisation not seen in Streeton’s later studies of Cairene vendors, which were more closely associated with ethnographic ‘type’ imagery, decorative costume books and picture postcards. To the right

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78 U. Prunster, ‘From Empire’s end: Australians as Orientalists, 1880-1920’, 1997, p.44. However, regarding the Spanish paintings, Humphrey McQueen points out that ‘Roberts was a studio worker, meticulous, not someone to set up an easel anywhere. Perhaps the works known to have been started around Granada received finishing touches in London.’ H. McQueen, ‘A golden age: Tom Roberts and the arts of Spain,’ 2007, p.22


80 ‘The picturesque was accepted in the Victorian period as the appropriate aesthetic vocabulary for articulating the racial, political, and economic difference of peripheral peoples from the normative English audience’ A. Erdogdu, ‘Picturing alterity: representational strategies in Victorian type photographs of Ottoman men’, E.M. Hight and G.D. Sampson (eds), *Colonialist photography: imag(in)ing race and place*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p.107
of the composition is a narrow passage of streetscape through which walks a blue swathed man with a yellow turban. Roberts also includes details such as the red and green cloth awnings and an overhanging wooden mashrabiya balcony above a typically Moorish keyhole doorway.

Roberts returned to studio Orientalism during the 1890s, producing portraits with Eastern and Symbolist influences, such as Rose of Persia 1900; An Eastern princess 1893 (Plate 1.18); A study of Jephthah’s daughter c.1899 (Plate 1.19); and the Arabian Nights–inspired, The sleeper awakened c.1905-1913 (Plate 1.20). His paintings portrayed dark, exotic women closely linked to nineteenth century European conventions, with such figures having appeared repeatedly in the novels, poems and paintings of the period. Virginia Spate has noted that by often depicting these women in profile, the artist emphasised their aloofness through expressions that were ‘indecipherable and mysterious’. Eagle described the woman depicted in An Eastern princess as ‘Oriental, doe-eyed, and physically strong, a femme fatale, seductive and at the same time threatening, her attraction was that she was alien and therefore unknowable and untameable’. Though given a more active presence within the image than Streeton’s figure, like Scheherazade, the exotic appeal of Roberts’s princess is signalled largely by the work’s title and the use of gold decoration and draped fabrics. Lena Brasch, the model for the painting, was swathed in a diaphanous costume of plain muslin. Eagle pointed out that such fabric was part of the general equipment frequently employed by art schools’ life drawing classes, while Roberts’s use of the gold circlet followed the pattern of ‘conventional fantasy costume’.

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81 Roberts also painted Odalisque 1896 (location unknown). Virginia Spate notes that ‘at much the same time, drawings of nymphs, sprites, enigmatic faces and nudes began to appear in his sketchbooks among his more usual studies of horses, cattle and stylish women.’ V. Spate, Tom Roberts, Lansdowne Australian Art Library, Melbourne, 1972, p.99

82 V. Spate, Tom Roberts, 1972, p.101

83 M. Eagle, The oil paintings of Tom Roberts in the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1997, p.62

84 Spate notes that Rose of Persia is a ‘fancy’ title for ‘relatively straightforward’ portrait. V. Spate, Tom Roberts, 1972, p.99. Landscape and other figure paintings were similarly given titles and subtitles quoting poetic verses. For example, in 1893, at the Art Society of New South Wales, Streeton exhibited, Cupid c.1890s (Plate 1.8), subtitled with lines from William Blake. See M. Eagle, The oil paintings of Arthur Streeton in the National Gallery of Australia, 1994, p.131

85 M. Eagle, The oil paintings of Tom Roberts in the National Gallery of Australia, 1997, p.64
Streeton was likely influenced by Roberts’s travels to Spain and his experiences working within the London art market. While the opportunity to gain overseas instruction through the viewing of great works would certainly have been appealing, Streeton viewed his journey to London as a means of building a reputation on a grander scale. He followed a general understanding shared by Australian artists of the period that you were not a success unless you had established a degree of artistic standing in London or Paris. As Streeton was not an artist of private means, he did not have a steady income to support overseas travel. He was therefore unable to raise sufficient funds for travel until 1896, when the National Gallery of Victoria purchased ‘The purple noon’s transparent might’ 1896 for 150 pounds.

On to Cairo

In 1897, Streeton departed on the French steamer, Polynesien, bound for London. Upon stopping at Port Said and travelling overland to Cairo, the artist was presented with the opportunity to explore popular Orientalist subjects that had previously found success at the Paris Salon and Royal Academy. As a citizen of the Empire, Streeton was not perturbed by the foreignness of Cairo. His artistic output and writings confirmed his expectations, and were an expression of his desire for the distant lands and people of the Arabian Nights. The adventure, barbarism and mystery of the fashionable tales inflected Streeton’s experiences in Cairo and become part of his own narration.

In relating the details of his adventures in the Egyptian capital, Streeton assumes the role of storyteller, implicitly aligning himself with the figure of Scheherazade. In one particularly lurid story that he recounts in his ‘Personal narrative’, he relates an extraordinary tale told to him by a friend he made in Cairo:

Seated waiting for coffee outside the ‘Café Splendid’ with an Assyrian Lawyer, Tabet Bey, I said this is a charming Café.\footnote{Though Café Splendid has not been identified, Splendid Bar on Sharia Kamel was listed in 1898 as a restaurant. K. Baedeker (ed.), \textit{Egypt: Handbook for travellers}, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition, L. Karl Baedeker, Leipzig, 1898, p.24} Yes, he replied, it is, on the site of this Café many years ago lived a wealthy Pasha, he had the regulation number of wives, four, and many slaves; a recent purchase, a beautiful girl with very fine hair had brought in a large dish of

\footnote{Though Café Splendid has not been identified, Splendid Bar on Sharia Kamel was listed in 1898 as a restaurant. K. Baedeker (ed.), \textit{Egypt: Handbook for travellers}, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition, L. Karl Baedeker, Leipzig, 1898, p.24}
food for [the evening meal] & placed it before the Pasha with his family gathered round the board; he noticed the girl's fine hair & drew it across his hand & gazed at her face a brief-moment; she retired & the meal proceeded: his favourite wife had observed the brief critical appreciation of the Pasha: The following evening the large family assembled again and another slave bore in the large dish which she placed before the Pasha, he looked & saw in the dish the head & hair of the beautiful slave of the preceding night, surrounded with vegetables & gravy in the usual manner.87

Like the interwoven stories of the *Arabian Nights*, the account of the wealthy pasha and his jealous wife is a tale within a tale, drawing the reader into the imaginary landscape of the Oriental city via the artist's very real exchange with Tabet Bey, who the artist noted was 'well read in English verse'.88 Streeton recorded the episode without authorial comment or reference to the *Arabian Nights* tales to which it is so alike; instead, he presented it as a cautionary tale about the inhabitants of this foreign land. Thus, like so many other travellers of the period, pre-extant notions of the exotic—an imagined Orient—informed his experience of the North African city.

In sketching and painting Cairo and its people, Streeton resisted this imagined Orient of ill-fated slaves, savage wives and lustful pashas. Rather, he produced picturesque streetscapes and figure studies more in line with Impressionist works completed in Australia during the 1880s and 1890s. Scenes expressed through quick, gestural brushstrokes and subtle colour harmonies reveal the influence of the Whistlerian landscapes and portraits that had, by the late 1890s, been embraced by the middle classes in Britain and were associated with 'refined taste' in nineteenth century society.

In contrast, Streeton's letter, published in the *Bulletin's* 'Red page', and the recollections recorded in his 'Personal narrative', detail experiences in a faraway exotic land through prose layered with allusions to the country's pharaonic past, Greek myth (via Lord Alfred Tennyson's blank verse poem, *Ulysses*), and the *Arabian Nights*, while also conveying his experiences within the contemporary city. An example of such an experience occurred when Streeton was exploring, as he put it, the 'playground of Cleopatra'. On this occasion, a 'murderous-looking denizen' confronted the artist during a jaunt to the region known as the 'Fishmarkets'. Further embroidering his narrative, Streeton referenced Theseus's escape

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87 A. Streeton, 'Cairo—The pasha's surprise', 'Personal narrative'
88 A. Streeton, 'Personal narrative'
from the labyrinth using the ball of twine given to him by Ariadne, by writing that he ‘found the thread which lead out of the cave’, and escaped back to the sanctuary of his hotel.89 In Streeton’s narrative, the underbelly of Cairo engulfed the unwary tourist and then released him back out onto the newly paved streets of the European quarter.

During the late Victorian period, travel narratives were popular with audiences who had travelled themselves, or who had enjoyed the pleasures of far-off cities vicariously through letters, newspapers, journals and popular literature. The popularity of Orientalist imagery in Britain and, by extension, Australia stemmed partly from a Romantic desire for the picturesque and local colour, a continuing sense of colonial conquest and patriotism, and a desire for an exotic that was not restricted by Victorian morality. Streeton’s appealing exoticism was realised through the representation of difference.90 The subject needed to be challenging, while also acceptable, or at least palatable. This balance is seen most clearly in his writing. Streeton evoked recognisable images of the harem, ancient Egypt, and the presence of British army troops, which he tempered with descriptions of adventures into the seedy environs of the Fishmarkets and tales of beheaded slaves at the mercy of jealous wives.

Nochlin argued that the exotic in art and writing was visually authenticated by realism.91 Streeton’s Egyptian output may also be read in this way, though for different reasons. By employing an Impressionist sensibility and an Aesthetic comprehension of colour and pattern, Streeton’s figure studies and street scenes differed from the French and British Orientalist paintings acquired by the national galleries in Sydney and Melbourne, in terms of scale, narrative weight and compositional focus. They also represented a significant change in the artist’s response to Eastern subject matter in comparison to his first exploration of the theme: Scheherazade. Their sketchy effervescence and the embedded notion of the captured impression from life denoted the lived experience of the artist, and his fascination with the palpable exoticism of the Oriental city.

89 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
91 See L. Nochlin, ‘The imaginary Orient’, 1983, pp.120
CHAPTER TWO: ‘MY NATIVE LAND. GOOD NIGHT’

Arthur Streeton left Sydney on board the French steamer, Polynesien (Plate 2.1), on Wednesday 27 January 1897.¹ In a letter written from the boat to Tom Roberts in February, Streeton quoted a passage from Byron’s Childe Harold’s pilgrimage, evoking a vivid travelogue of picturesque lands:

leaving my old world & looking for the last time on the distant hills on Western Australia
I did feel with Byron

‘Yon sun that sets upon the rest
we follow in his flight,
farewell awhile to him & thee
My native land. Good night’²

Streeton engages Byron as an artistic filter. This identification with the creative persona of the British Romantic poet lends a greater sense of weight and consequence to his journey to England via Asia and North Africa. Streeton also aligned himself with the poem’s figure of the wanderer, and the heroic nature of travel and discovery. Composed in response to his Grand Tour to the East and Mediterranean, between 1809 and 1811, Byron’s tale explores the disparity that exists between his dream of an exotic distant land, and the world of reality. By drawing a parallel between Byron’s voyage and his own departure from Australian shores, Streeton cast himself as the bohemian adventurer.

The romantic escapism of the Byronic quest echoes Streeton’s desire to experience the timeless Orient of the Arabian Nights. In this chapter I will examine how this desire emerged through Streeton’s writings and artistic output during a period when Egypt was undergoing significant social, cultural and economic change, marked by the development of

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¹ It has previously been suggested that Arthur Streeton left Sydney in the later part of 1897 on another Messageries Maritimes liner, Ville de la Ciotat. See A. Galbally, Arthur Streeton, 1979, p.39
² A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, “M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, February 1897, MS BOX 992/4, State Library of Victoria; It is likely Streeton’s love of poetry came from his father Charles Henry. In his correspondence Streeton frequently referenced the likes of Thomas Miller, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Shakespeare, and on his journey towards the East he quoted passages from Byron and Tennyson; George Gordon Noel Lord Byron, ‘Adieu, Adieu! My Native Shore’, from Childe Harold’s pilgrimage, 1812-18 and Lord, Alfred Tennyson, The lotos eaters (The lotus eaters), 1832
a European-style modernity, driven by Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successors, and the presence of the British administration under Lord Cromer.

Late nineteenth century imperial relations greatly influenced Streeton’s journey by steamship, his response to Cairo’s urban landscape, and his experiences of tourism. Social relationships and formalities played out on board the Polynesien foregrounded the artist’s understandings of identity, class and nationhood. His conception of ‘whiteness’, and its associations with privilege and power brought about by a social system based on traditional racial hierarchies, came largely from encounters with fellow travellers and the local populations at Colombo, Port Said and Cairo. Interactions with and observations of the ‘Other’ formed an important counterpoint to understandings of Streeton’s own cultural identity as a member of the British Empire. Such encounters were also part of the new experience of modernity, with change brought about by changes in transportation and the resulting movement towards globalisation.

Tourists such as Streeton actively participated in the geography of the Empire. It is through their methods of observing and recording, often in the form of letters, photographs and sketches, that it is possible to understand social and cultural relationships within a colonial context. These primary sources create a complex, multifaceted reading, and tell of their own material production, as well as the space within which they were created. Alongside the oil and watercolour paintings that will be discussed in following chapters, Streeton documented his experiences of Cairo through correspondence with friends, a letter published in the ‘Red page’ of Melbourne’s Bulletin, and his ‘Personal narrative’. He also collected commercially available albumen photographs of mosques, temples and genre scenes as souvenirs and sources for later works, and at least eight amateur photographs have been attributed to the artist. Through this archive, the chapter demonstrates the degree to which Streeton engaged with the historical context of the British administration in Egypt

4 A. Woollacott, To try her fortune in London: Australia women, colonialism, and modernity, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2001, p.44
and Cairo’s transformation into a modern city, and the impact of such changes on British-Egyptian cultural relations.

Visual signs of British occupation, Egyptian-imposed modernising developments and the presence of tourists in Cairo challenged the supposed ‘authenticity’ of the Eastern experience. In response, Streeton’s paintings of Cairene street scenes diverged from his writings by largely ignoring these markers of the contemporary city. Instead, they conformed to a vision of a picturesque Orient that was more in line with a perceived market for exotic subjects. Within Streeton’s oeuvre, there is one exception to this pattern—Sphinx 1897 (Plate 2.2). The final section of this chapter will examine how Streeton fashioned the identity of the Western tourist in this deftly painted watercolour. Posed atop a camel, the female traveller at the lower right side of the composition sits sidesaddle, with a parasol to shield her from the white glare of the sun blazing down upon the pale sands and imposing Giza monuments behind her. As with Streeton, who was photographed alongside three travelling companions sitting astride donkeys in front of the Sphinx (Plate 2.3), she may be waiting to take part in the creation of her own photographic souvenir. Streeton has depicted the archaeological marvel as a backdrop for a scene that summarised what was then a typical tourist’s experience of the site. Considered alongside lengthy descriptions of passengers on board the Polynesien, and Streeton’s focus on his fellow travellers in Port Said and Cairo, Sphinx indicates the key role tourism played in the artist’s experience of the Orient, and his relationship to the tourist identity.

**A Journey On Board the Polynesien**

Streeton’s first encounters with the East, through the steamer’s ports of call, not only signalled his participation in what Angela Woollacott termed the ‘racial structures of colonialism’, but were also indicative of the specific circumstance of his sea passage. By 1897, steamship travel was a common means of transportation, particularly encouraged by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Advancements in modern steamship technology

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6 A. Woollacott, ‘“All that is the Empire, I told myself”: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness’, 1997, p.1005
enabled vast distances to be traversed in a relatively short time, with the journey punctuated by short stops along the way while the ship docked to refuel and replenish stores. The *Polynesien*, a Messageries Maritimes mail vessel, travelled back and forth from Europe to Australia from 1891 until the 1910s. The journey took around four to five weeks, depending on conditions and delays at ports.

In December 1896, information on the passage booked by Streeton was published in the Tasmanian daily newspaper, *The Mercury*. An advertisement stated that the trip from Melbourne to London, via Colombo and Paris, would leave Sydney at noon on 27 January, Melbourne at one o’clock on 30 January, and Adelaide at one o’clock on 1 February. Under the command of Monsieur Boulard, the ship fulfilled a postal contract with the French government, and was set to dock at Albany, Colombo, Suez and Port Said. Rates for passages to London were advertised at 60 to 70 pounds for those travelling first saloon class. It was also noted that English would be spoken on board the vessel.

One cultural ritual associated with this modern form of travel was the ‘dockside farewell’. The popularity and significance of this grand departure emphasised the magnitude of the journey. Passengers departing from Australian docks were headed for destinations on the other side of the world, and it would often be a number of years before they returned. Streeton’s own dockside farewell provides an insight into the way the young artist saw himself as something of a ‘ladies’ man’. In his letter to Roberts, Streeton recounted that when the *Polynesien* departed:

7 A. Woollacott, “‘All that is the Empire, I told myself’: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness’, 1997, p.1008
8 Launched on 18 April 1890, the *Polynesien* was torpedoed and sunk while at anchor at Malta by German submarine UC22 on 10 August 1918. By the late 1890s, the vessel frequently stopped along a common route including New Caledonia, Noumea, Colombo, Aden, Port Said and Algiers before docking at Marseilles.
9 Those going on to London via Marseilles would be met by an English interpreter who provided ‘every assistance in landing and passing their luggage through the Customs, etc., and [would] also accompany them to Paris and Calais’. *The Mercury*, 24 December 1896, p.4
10 An earlier 1891 advertisement explained that the journey from Marseilles to London was made in part overland, and that ports of call included King George’s Sound, Mahe (Mauritius), Aden and the Suez Canal. Rates ranged from 20 to 65 pounds, with the cost of Streeton’s passage to Port Said likely to have been around 30 to 40 pounds by 1897, which would have included ‘table wines and bedding requisites’. *The Argus*, 29 June 1891, p.1
11 A. Woollacott, “‘All that is the Empire, I told myself’: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness’, 1997, p.1009
There were a lot of friends who kindly waited to say ‘Adieu’ & see me away ... I flatter myself on my adroitness in keeping one or two ladies apart & being able to gently caress & say adieu—Ha Ha Really tis surprising how things do come to pass on these occasions Ha Ha Ha.\(^\text{12}\)

Though not a sexual adventurer on the scale of French writer, Gustave Flaubert,\(^\text{13}\) Streeton would later also assert his liberal bohemianism in the *Bulletin* letter and his ‘Personal narrative’, relating details of flirtations within the seedier districts of Cairo and glimpses of the ‘lovely ladies of the harem’.\(^\text{14}\)

The letter to Roberts was written following the *Polynesien*’s final departure from Australian shores at Albany, Western Australian, with the ship headed northwest across the Indian Ocean towards the first international port, Colombo. As Australia disappeared from the horizon, Streeton described:

> a great coast in the quiet evening east all fading and fading to deep, and the ship straight following in the everlasting golden path of the Western sun that stretched without a break across the Ocean toward the spicy amorous Islands of the tropics.\(^\text{15}\)

Streeton’s stop in Colombo signalled his first experience of the Orient, as it did for his friend, Charles Conder, seven years earlier. Writing to Roberts on 20 August 1890, Conder declared:

> I should like to work very much in Ceylon, which charmed me very much—the little I saw of it ... that city of Arabian Nights—Colombo. I did a sketch in Colombo of a street scene, but it hangs by me here in the studio—it’s not very strong, but it brings back the theme—and, oh, my commercial soul, couldn’t the three of us turn a good 9 x 5 show out of Ceylon.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{12}\) A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897


\(^\text{14}\) See A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’; A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’

\(^\text{15}\) A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897

\(^\text{16}\) C. Conder, letter to T. Roberts, 20 August 1890, R.H. Croll (ed.), *Smike to Bulldog*, 1946, pp.128-9; ‘The Austral called at Albany then Colombo, which appealed to him as ‘that city of Arabian nights’ and where he managed a small oil sketch of a street scene.’ The *Astral* also docked at Naples, where Streeton would also stop on his way to London. Conder then took a train through Italy and France, reaching London in June 1890. A. Galbally, *Charles Conder*, 2002, p.63
Approaching the Sri Lankan capital, Streeton anticipated the ‘city of Arabian Nights’ that had so excited Conder, again drawing upon a Romantic literary reference to encapsulate the encounter. He quoted Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s lyrical descriptions of the ‘Lotos-eaters’ that had inspired his 1895 painting, Oblivion:

We reach Colombo next Saturday in the afternoon—‘And in the Afternoon they came unto a land A land where all things always seemed the same’—By jove the tropical air recalls the ‘Lotus-eaters’ vividly to me—aye ‘And round about keel with faces pale against that rosy flame the mild-eyed melancholy lotus-eaters came’.17

The artist’s enthusiasm for the exoticism of the East is palpable, and the poetic register adopted here returned in his later written accounts of Cairo.

The Polynésien letter combined Streeton’s fervour with more pedestrian descriptions of the day-to-day activities on board and the variety of people with whom he mixed. He related in detail the routine of the second-class traveller, which generally began with a shower or bath followed by a ‘splendid’ breakfast with ‘wine and iced water’ from 10 to 11 o’clock. The morning then continued ‘on deck with all the dingbats’.18 Fellow passengers who gained mention included a six-year-old French girl, Mimi, and the ‘old Frenchmen from New Caledonia & Noumea & their women folk all in pyjamas and dressingowns [sic]’.19 Some of the networks of colonial relations during this period are here exemplified by the presence of French travellers aboard the ship, booked on a passage that saw ports of call following French territorial possessions, such as the Pacific Island nations of New Caledonia and Noumea.20 Streeton’s letter also noted the ‘fairly putrid’ livestock kept in the third saloon, which included ‘8 or 9 bullock, many sheep, fowls’ and ‘pigeons’.21

17 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897; Streeton also recalls Ceylon in a letter he writes to wife Nora Clench, most probably on her way back to Australia from England; ‘Dearest Nora, This is to meet you in Ceylon—& I hope in the best of hope & spirits & having a nice easy voyage—the enervating bright air of the tropics—& those days when the sea is like glass & reflects the clouds all round the ship.’ A. Streeton, letter to N. Clench, 30 Oct 1930, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, p.196
18 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897. ‘Dingbat’ is a term in Australian slang indicating an eccentric person, though Streeton often used the word to describe people in a more general sense.
19 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
20 Woollacott also observed that ‘[t]he remarkable heterogeneity of their co-voyagers was evidence of fluid movement among and beyond constituent parts of the British Empire throughout this period, and the
The artist enjoyed making fun of certain travellers. Victims of his boyish and, at times, insensitive humour were the 'corporal of the Solda [sic] in the “third” who is dreadfully fat haven’t seen him during this hot weather, he must have jumped overboard & joined a troup [sic] of porpoise’, and ‘a funny fat old schoolmaster from Noumea whose pants are very wide at back, & we laugh frequently rudely & heartily at the back view of him’. He added that the ‘mother of joli [sic] “Mimi” joining in our joke says the people at Custom House where he lands will say “What have you in those pants” & request him to let them down to show his valuables, in case they may be dutiable’.22

The artist’s afternoons were devoted to studying French under the tutelage of the Commissionaire and a Third Lieutenant ‘who introduce[d] himself’ after hearing that Streton was an ‘artist with “Mention Honorable”’ from the Paris Salon.23 After dinner at around eight o’clock, Streton was often ‘honoured by the visit of friends from the saloon Premiere—in all the fascinating luxury of evening dress’, who included ‘Captain Buland, Mrs Harper, Mr & Mrs Barnett, Harris [and] Dr Jeremy Grant’.24 Class distinctions were rigidly observed on board, with Streton restricted to the second-class areas of the ship for meals, sleeping and leisure. The artist felt ‘quite flattered’ seeing the ‘glittering company moving with all their state down the twilight deck to [his] part of the ship’.25 As exemplified by the Lieutenant who was impressed by Streton’s Salon success, Streton’s status as an artist meant that he was viewed socially and culturally as a member of the educated middle classes, and therefore deserving of such attention.26 This status would

conversations they shared, often over countless meals with the same table seatings, became opportunities for Australian [men and] women to learn far more about the empire than they had previously known.’ A. Woollacott, “‘All that is the Empire, I told myself’: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness”, 1997, p.1006
21 A. Streton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
22 A. Streton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
23 Streton was awarded a ‘Mention honorable’ at the Paris Salon of 1892 for the work, Golden summer, Eaglemont 1889, which was hung ‘on the line’. The painting had been taken to London in 1890 by Charles Conder, and is now in the National Gallery of Australia collection.
24 A. Streton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897. See also Sydney Mail, 6 February, 1897, pp.271-315; A. Streton is listed as departing on the Polynesien, with W. Barnett travelling Saloon, The Argus, 1 February 1897, p.4
25 A. Streton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
26 A. Woollacott, “‘All that is the Empire, I told myself’: Australian women’s voyages “home” and the articulation of colonial whiteness’, 1997, p.1012

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temper his experiences as a tourist in Cairo, and allow him to distinguish himself from the common traveller in the tone of his letters, and, later, in his ‘Personal narrative’.

Two sketchbooks that were used throughout the course of Streeton’s journey to London via Cairo and Naples contain a number of loosely rendered drawings produced during the initial sea voyage. In one, the artist produced a small series of portrait studies in pencil. Though never used as the basis for finished paintings, the sketches provide a visual complement to the *Polynesien* letter. They also present a point of contrast to later figure studies of itinerant workers in Cairo, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Though the artist does appear to explore different racial characteristics, these on board sketches are, by comparison, much more investigations of the subject as an individual.

A young adolescent girl is the subject of at least six sketches. She is variously shown reading a book and stretched out on a deck chair, smiling directly at the artist (Plate 2.3). It is possible that she is the girl described ‘reading a French book’ who:

> sleeps in a cabin with a man about 60 who they say is not her father (she is a buxom wench about 16 years old) & she has many pimples (a rash) over her starboard cheek & neck, so I take it she is suffering from a serious attack of codlin moth, & by jove the name Codlin-moth sticks to her too.  

Though the drawings do not reveal the pimples or rash that Streeton callously takes pleasure in describing to Roberts, Streeton’s model appears to be of a similar age, and we know from the letter that she, along with the younger Mimi, caught his attention. On a page depicting two men—one in what may be a soldier’s jacket and the other in a boater hat—Streeton has also drawn a child sitting on the edge of a bench or chair. This is most probably Mimi, though Streeton writes to Roberts that there are ‘about a dozen children in the saloon—brown skinned and very vivacious’. There is also a portrait in profile of a

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27 The sketchbooks were most likely purchased from Anthony Horden and Sons, who, from October 1881, owned The Palace Emporium in Haymarket, not far from Streeton’s sister’s house in Summer Hill. On each of the sketchbooks is the Horden emblem and motto, a spreading oak tree with the words ‘While I live, I’ll grow’, printed on the back cover. L.J. Harper, Contextualising choice: Arthur Streeton’s outdoor paintings in relation to artist’s materials, supplies and production, 1883-1897, 2006, p.81
28 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
29 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
woman whose long dark hair is adorned with a scarf tied at the nape of her neck (Plate 2.4). Such images suggest the artist’s interest in marking specific features of his subjects, while also telling the viewer something of the people with whom he travelled in second class.

Streeton completed a small number of sketches depicting the structure of the ship. One illustrates the immense bulk of the large iron chaining that secured the vessel at its ports of call (Plate 2.5). It is a study of light and shade that also acts as a record of both the industrial environs of the ship and the mechanisms of modern travel technology. By contrast, other pencil drawings are more vigorous in their arrangement, with active figures roughly denoted by loose, gestural sketching (Plates 2.6). Streeton also depicted two events that took place on board the French steamer midway through the voyage (Plate 2.7). The first, dated ‘16/2/97’, is a funeral scene, which takes up the top half of the page. The sketch is inscribed with colour notations that suggest Streeton’s initial intention to produce a painting of the incident, though such a project never seems to have been realised. Streeton annotated the second, dated ‘17/2/97’, with the description, ‘attempted suicide at sea’. The pencil drawing captured the action of two men holding onto a woman who had presumably tried to jump overboard. Given the consecutive dates of the two events, it is possible that the suicide attempt was a reaction to the death of a loved one, though the artist does not impart further narrative details. It is likely they took place after Streeton had written to Roberts, given their absence from his account of the activities on board.

**Arrival in the City of the Arabian Nights**

In late February 1897, Streeton disembarked at Port Said with Melbourne-born photographer, Walter Barnett, and his wife, Hilda (known as Ella). They were joined by the ‘pretty child’ called Mimi, and the ‘French woman’, and later by her husband, ‘Prince Zeroff’, who had not travelled on the boat.³⁰ There is little recorded about this stop, though

³⁰ A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’; The arrival is also referred to in the Bulletin letter: ‘A Frenchman, wife and pretty little girl who sits next to me, and little girl will persist in telling all the table how she in her pyjamas watched the islands of the Red Sea from her port-hole, and also that I in my pyjamas looked out of the same port-hole with her—she is only six years old—and the husband, who joined the ship at Port Said, gives me rather a look of interrogation. A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
in an article written for *The Argus*, ‘Colour—Harmony and Discords’, published 13 June 1931, the artist described ‘the varying depths of water about Suez [sic], which, when viewed from the bridge deck, show violet, purple, and pale green, brilliant as the flashing lights in opal’. From there, the group most likely travelled overland to Cairo by the light railway established by the Suez Canal Company in 1894. Streeton recorded on a page of abbreviated notes that they arrived at night with 40 bags, and that he took charge.

The stop in Cairo had been planned, as indicated by the forwarding address included in the letter to Roberts: ‘Arthur Streeton/ c/- Thomas Cook & Sons/ Cairo/ Egypt’. However, there is some ambiguity regarding the duration of his stay in the city. In an article by W.K. West, published in London’s *Studio* magazine in September 1909, it was reported that Streeton had intended to stay only a week, though ‘Egypt so fascinated him that he remained five months painting assiduously and turning to full account the artistic opportunities which were so amply available in these new surroundings’. Streeton then ‘added further to his experiences by spending a month in Naples’. Similarly, the ‘Personal narrative’ recounted that he ‘bowed before the beauty of Grand Cairo in 1898, and intending to enjoy one week in the city ... became a worshipper for five months’. While difficult to ascertain with certainty, it is more likely that Streeton spent less than half this

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31 A. Streeton, ‘Colour—Harmony and Discords’, *The Argus*, 13 June 1931, p.4
32 ‘Between Port Said and Ismailia the Suez Canal Company's light railway, carrying passengers, runs twice daily in each direction ... Trains from Suez leave Ismailia for Cairo every day at 1.20 p.m. and 6.35 p.m., due in Cairo 5.35 p.m. and 10.30 p.m. Cook's representative meets every train, and will attend to the passing of passengers' baggage through the customs, transport of baggage from quay to railway station, etc., for an exclusive fee of 2s. per passenger’. Thomas Cook ltd., *Cook's tourists' handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, Thomas Cook and Son, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and co. Limited, London, 1897, p.12; ‘For the convenience of the public, and for that of their own employés, and to replace the service of steam launches by which traffic had been previously carried on, the Suez Canal Company, in the year 1894, opened a tramway or light railway line, which runs alongside the Canal between Port Said and Ismailia, the total distance being 50 miles. The carriages provided are in every respect suitable, and in fact comfortable, containing lavatories.’ Thomas Cook ltd., *Cook's tourists' handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, pp.40-41
33 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
34 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
35 W.K. West, ‘An artist from Australia: Mr Arthur Streeton’, *The Studio*, 15 September 1909, p.265; Naples was again mentioned in 1910: ‘Mr Streeton was 30 years of age before he set out to make a European reputation... He prepared himself for his future work by spending five months in Egypt, where he painted assiduously, and a month in Naples’. “Bon Ami”, ‘The Studio’, *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 January 1910, p.10
36 A. Streeton, ‘Introduction’; In the typed version of this text the sentence is written, ‘I journeyed to Grand Cairo in 1898 [sic], and intending to enjoy one week in Egypt, I became a resident and worshipper for five months’, transcribed by O. Streeton, A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
time in Cairo before making his way to London via Naples. This exaggeration of the
dating was further distorted by the fact that throughout the ‘Personal narrative’ the year of
travel was incorrectly referred to as 1898, and in The Arthur Streeton catalogue, published
in 1935, the works associated with Cairo also date from 1898. This was then repeated in
newspaper articles, such as Burdett’s interview with the artist in 1940.

While Streeton would have reached Cairo by the end of February 1897, his painting
companion in Cairo, Walter Brookes Spong, left Australia on the Manssilia, which
departed Melbourne on 3 March and had not yet left Albany by 13 March. With Spong
reaching Egypt by the beginning of April, and then taking into consideration the time the
artists would have spent painting together, described as a ‘few weeks’ by a Perth
newspaper, six weeks is likely to be the minimum that Streeton stayed in Cairo, possibly
stretching to two months. Regardless of the eventual duration of his time in Egypt, the
more important aspect to focus on is the fact that he decided to extend this stay beyond the
initial one week. Walter Barnett, who Streeton first met in 1890, perhaps encouraged the
artist’s initial stopover, while Spong’s similar plans for travel to the Egyptian capital a short
time later presented Streeton with the artistic companionship he desired, and perhaps the
motivation to stay and paint the picturesque scenes that are now associated with his Cairo
journey.

In order to evoke the poetic lineage of well-known Oriental texts, Streeton painted an urban
landscape that deliberately excluded many of the signs of modernity and the British

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37 Ann Galbally originally concurred with the artist’s estimated time frame for his stay. See A. Galbally,
Arthur Streeton, 1979, p. 39. In the book of Streeton’s letters that Galbally co-edited with Anne Gray,
however, she revised these dates, putting his stay at three months in line with letters written by the artist in
early June from England. See A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, p.7; Mary Eagle
suggests that the artist spent six or seven weeks, or ‘two months at most’ in Cairo, before passing through
Naples on his way to London, where he had arrived by the first week of May. See M. Eagle, The oil paintings
of Arthur Streeton at the National Gallery of Australia, 1994, p.110
40 ‘Fruit shipments’, Wellington Times and Agricultural and Mining Gazette, 2 March 1897, p.2; ‘The Mails’,
Albany Advertiser, 13 March 1897, p.3. See also ‘R.M.S.S. Massilia’, The Argus, 13 February 1897, p.8
41 The Inquirer and Commercial News, 18 June 1897, p.14
colonial presence that marked Cairo so clearly in the late nineteenth century. Ismail Pasha’s rule from 1863 to 1879 saw a revival in economic and industrial activity in Egypt. Granted the title of ‘Khedive’ by the Ottoman sultan five years after he came to power, Ismail continued his uncle Said Pasha’s deal with the French to construct the Suez Canal, and, in Cairo, he implemented urban and industrial plans to further modernise the city. These changes and developments transformed many of the areas where Streeton worked, influencing the artist’s experience and understanding of this foreign urban environment.

In 1867, in the lead up to the opening of the Suez Canal, Ismail Pasha and his minister, Ali Mubarak, met city planner, Baron Georges Haussmann, at the ‘Exposition universelle’. This meeting greatly influenced the direction Cairo was to take over the next half century, and signalled the move towards European-style industrial and economic policy. However, many of the European dignitaries who attended the canal’s opening ceremonies lamented the modernisation of the city. It was not a new Paris they had come to see, but the city of the Arabian Nights. Three decades later, Streeton’s work echoed similar sentiments as he sought out picturesque views of quaint byways and ethnographical vignettes, eschewing the modernised elements of the Egyptian capital.

42 Readers of travelogues by writers such as Amelia Edwards, Alexander William Kinglake and Douglas Sladen, and travel guides including those published by Murray’s and Baedeker, were prepared for street scenes that illustrated a ‘world of Oriental fiction’. For example see K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.244
43 In 1870, Ismail introduced gas to the city, replaced by electricity in 1898. He also laid well-paved roads to a number of outlying destinations such as the pyramids and his palace at Shubra. See J. Aldridge, *Cairo*, Macmillan, London, 1969, p.195
44 ‘The plan included traffic hubs radiating boulevards, formal gardens, gas street lighting, a water system, a bridge across the Nile, a tourist road to the Pyramids, and even an Opera House modeled on La Scala in Milan. By the time Ismail hosted European dignitaries at the Suez Canal opening in 1869, he could display at least a preview of a Cairo remade in the image of Paris.’ D.M. Reid, *Whose pharaohs?,* 2002, p.216; See also D. Gimaldo Grigsby, ‘Out of the Earth: Egypt’s Statue of Liberty’, in J. Hackforth-Jones and M. Roberts (eds.), *Edges of Empire: Orientalism and visual culture*, Blackwell publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp.38-69
45 ‘In reading Western accounts of the fêtes, one senses that guests and host operated somewhat at cross purposes. Isma’il did his best to create a European image of himself and his country; the Europeans wanted only the exotic. Gautier glanced distractedly past the Parc Monceau bordering his veranda at the Shepheard’s Hotel, seeking the world of the Arabian Nights. The guests at Isma’il’s grand reception at the Qasr al-Nil Palace were treated to a chamber concert and a performance of the Comédie Française; they had looked forward to an evening with Scheherazade.’ J. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 1971, p.11; Stanley Lane Poole reasoned, however, that ‘It is all very well for artists and antiquaries - who, like myself, care more for the past than the future - to groan over the changes which are taking place in Egypt under European influences; but... these changes are... inevitable. It is as much a waste of time to lament the passing away of the old order in Cairo as to deprecate the triumph of incompetent democracy in England.’ S. Lane Poole, *Cairo: sketches of its history, monuments, and social life*, 3rd edition, J.S. Virtue and Co. Limited, London, 1937, p.290
A British Presence in Cairo

Links between Britain and Egypt had been long established by the nineteenth century, as Egypt had formed part of the spice and trade routes between Europe and Asia. Western interests in the country were influenced by its strategic geographical position between the Mediterranean and India, as well as its primary role in Pharisaic, Greek and Roman history, the Bible, the Qur’an, and the Arabian Nights. These layers of imperial conquest, historical vision and fantasy lured the tourists of the Empire. When Streeton visited Cairo in 1897, a British representative had governed the city for 15 years.

Following a financial crisis in Egypt brought about by the construction of the Suez Canal and war with Ethiopia in the mid-1870s, the British entered the country as financial backers. This was prior to subsequent military intervention to suppress a nationalist Egyptian army revolt that would have denied the British a place in Egyptian trade and administration. Britain’s official occupation of Egypt commenced in 1882, and continued until 1936. The country was increasingly ruled by the consul general of Britain’s ‘Veiled Protectorate’, Sir Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, who retained his position from 1883 until 1907. At the commencement of his service in Egypt, Cromer maintained that Britain’s occupation would be temporary.

Egyptian nationalists were aggravated by a continued presence that was to remain over seven decades—a presence they viewed as a means of exercising power over their nation for Britain’s own benefit. Britain maintained that its occupation would prevent nationalist-driven anarchy, and would aid the restoration of the Khedive’s power. They denied any imperialist design on their part. However, their primary focus was arguably not initially on Egypt itself, but on the country’s location as a gateway to the British colony in India and overland to Africa. In the eighteenth century, India came under the imperial influence of Britain, and, despite there being a sea route around the Cape of Good Hope,

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46 As a consequence of the intervention, Egypt was subject to a British administration that often hindered economic reform. Janet Abu Lughod notes that further pressure was placed on Cairo’s economy as ‘European nationals monopolized the important government posts and enjoyed privileges, exemptions’. J. Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 1971, p.8

47 J. Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 1971, p.114

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Egypt offered the quickest means of access to the colony, which was the heart of the British Empire. Britain’s occupation also provided a means of stopping their imperial rival, France, from dominating the region.

In the late nineteenth century, Cairo had become a standard destination for British travellers in search of adventure and the exotic. In 1898, Stanley Lane-Poole wrote:

A visit to Egypt is now an ordinary Christmas holiday. People go to Cairo as they used to go to take the waters at Bath or Tunbridge, and the cataracts at Aswān are almost as familiar as Sandford Lasher. Nor is there any wonder that Egypt every year draws larger crowds of visitors to the banks of her broad river.48

This partly stemmed from the 1815 Congress of Vienna, which created a degree of amity within Europe, in turn aiding the feasibility of travel. From the 1840s, railway networks also made countries such as Egypt more accessible.49 There was an influx of travellers following the installation of rail lines between Cairo and Alexandria in 1852, and between Cairo and Suez from 1854 to 1858. Though Egypt was arguably still a site of the ‘exotic’, due to its position on the coast of the Mediterranean it was now easily reached. Regular steamships departed from England and major Mediterranean ports, with passengers heading to Alexandria and Cairo, and further away to Jerusalem, Beirut, Constantinople and Bombay.

During the nineteenth century, there was an increase in the number of foreigners living in Cairo. This number consisted primarily of Europeans, who were encouraged by the British presence and the system of capitulations set in place under the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha, which enabled trade without paying tax and gave them the right to be tried by their own consular courts. In 1897, the year of Streeton’s journey, the city’s population was close to 590,000, with the European community estimated at just over 30,000.50 Groups of various European nationalities including Greeks, French and Italians formed particular neighbourhoods.

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48 S. Lane Poole, *Cairo*, 1898, p.1
Perhaps not surprisingly, the British had the most significant impact on the city. It has been observed that they took control of the courts, administration and banking, and introduced modern city amenities, such as department stores, an estate agent, a nursing home, the Victoria Hospital and other shops catering to British tastes in food, fashion and accessories. A web spun in the pattern of London society lured expatriates and tourists to the region. However, Streeton’s reasons for travelling and his economic background most likely separated him from the society ‘swallows’ described by Douglas Sladen in 1908. In his book, *Egypt and the English*, Sladen wrote somewhat scathingly that these young ladies:

[saw] less of Egypt than they would if they remained in London and went to the Egyptian department of the British Museum. But they enjoy themselves amazingly having a reliable climate which never plays the deuce with engagements, and they make life in the hotels very gay. There is a dance every night of the week except Sunday at one or other of the hotels.

In the same tone, he described:

various hotels [where] there are enough beautiful young women in beautiful gowns, and well-bred, well-groomed, sport-loving young men to make intercourse socially interesting ... There are dances, races, polo, golf, tennis, croquet, cricket, riding, motoring, shooting, excursions up the Nile, the opera, concerts ... they can all be had for the asking—and the paying.

Ronald Storrs, who took up residence in Cairo in 1904, set out in *Orientations* some of the problems with the movement towards large-scale tourism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Though earnest in his assessment of the ‘genius of Lord Cromer’ for establishing ‘peace, progress and prosperity’, he believed that people visiting Egypt were not truly experiencing the local environment or culture due to ‘the multiplication of hotels, and the mass production of the peach-fed standardized tourist “doing” the whole country in ten

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52 D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.503
days’. 53 William Makepeace Thackeray had already expressed his misgivings about tourism in Egypt in his Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo, which was published half a century earlier, in 1846. 54

One of the founders of this form of tourism was Thomas J. Cook. 55 Thomas Cook and Sons had run tours to Egypt and Palestine from the 1860s, and their office at the Shepheard’s Hotel, established in 1873, was where Streeton organised to have his mail sent while in Cairo. 56 In 1898, G.W. Steevens described the experience of a Cook’s tour in Egypt:

Cook’s representative is the first person you meet in Egypt, and you go on meeting him. He sees you in, he sees you through, he sees you out. You see the black native turban, long blue gown, red girdle, bare brown legs. ‘How truly oriental’, you say. Then he turns round, and you see ‘Cook’s Porter’ emblazoned across his breast. ‘You travel Cook, sir’ he grins; ‘all right’. And it is all right … Cook carries you, like a nursing father, from one end of Egypt to the other. 57

Together with the rise of mass tourism through British agents, aspects of the city that travellers may have found daunting were rendered more readily traversable through the prevalence of spoken English, and through publications such as the society weekly, Sphinx, which began circulation in October 1893. 58

Although Streiton did not participate in these package tours, their commercial success by the late nineteenth century provided a context for his experiences in Egypt and influenced what he chose to draw and paint. The porters and interpreters that serviced the tourist industry were available to the artist during his time in Egypt. They are mentioned in the ‘Personal narrative’, and the occupation of porter is represented in Streiton’s oil painting,

54 See W.M. Thackeray, Notes on a journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, 1846
55 ‘Cook himself paid a visit to Cairo in 1860, and within a month of his return to England he had organized a tour to Egypt for thirty-two ladies and gentlemen, for which he hired two steamers on the Nile. Commercial tourism had begun, and Thomas J. Cook and Sons was to play a useful role in the future of Cairo for the British’. J. Aldridge, Cairo, 1969, p.197; By the 1880s, five to six thousand tourists passed through Cook’s offices in Cairo. L. Whithey, Grand tours and Cook’s tours, 1997; p.260; See also M. Ruthven, Cairo, Time Life Books, Amsterdam, 1980, p.114
56 A. Streiton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
57 Like many of the hotels that lined the wide streets of the ‘European’ quarter, Cook created a ‘micro-environment’ where tourists could see the sights but not be exposed to a culture or society that they would not find to their taste. G.W. Steevens, Egypt in 1898, Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1899, pp.68-69
58 See R.T. Kelly, Egypt, 1903, p.14
'Hassan' the porter. However, depictions of any other signs of tourist infrastructure in his paintings and sketches are rare. With the exception of *Sphinx*, Streeton does not incorporate the image of the Western tourist in his work. While their presence is more clearly communicated in his travel narratives, their absence from his street and bazaar scenes suggests that Streeton undertook a degree of selectiveness in order to convey the exoticism of the Oriental city.

From Azbakiya to the Pyramids: Streeton’s Travel Narratives

Streeton’s travel narratives include letters written to acquaintances upon arrival in London, a letter written to an unknown recipient that was subsequently published in Melbourne’s *Bulletin* on 21 October 1899, and his ‘Personal narrative’. Streeton’s private letters suggest a somewhat superficial experience of the city. To his friends, he wrote of Egyptian cigarettes, drinking too much whisky and his admiration for a dark haired 17-year-old Italian girl. By contrast, the *Bulletin* letter conveys a greater degree of engagement with the environs of Cairo. Streeton played the part of both tourist and tourist guide in the text, demonstrating his familiarity with various sites located along a well-trodden path across the city. In this energetic, abridged travel narrative, the reader is first taken on a journey through the European or ‘Frankish’ quarters of Cairo, with the artist pointing out markers of the colonial presence, such as the British Army Barracks, French Embassy and Ghezireh Palace Hotel, complete with casino and live theatre shows. From here, the reader is taken to the Fishmarket a few streets east of Streeton’s accommodation on Sharia Wagh al-birket. The danger and adventure represented by his encounter with the sordid nightlife of this region was related with some excitement. At the same time, the episode marks a cultural divide, with Streeton expressing his Western identity as distinct from the ‘Oriental Other’.

Reputedly written from ‘9 Waghe-el birghet’, the *Bulletin* letter reveals the aspects of cultural engagement and colonial infrastructure with which Streeton would have been the

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59 This is based on the private letters published and currently available in State Libraries or the Streeton Archive.


most familiar, due to the location of his accommodation. The letter employs the tone of a travelogue—a form of writing that, as Donald Reid suggested, ‘often played up the author’s courage, physical prowess, knowledge, and sensitivity, inviting readers to vicarious adventure from the safety of home’. Structured as a tour of Cairo, Streeton’s letter was possibly written specifically for the *Bulletin*, as he makes no personal remarks related to the unnamed addressee. It appeared in a section of the *Bulletin*’s ‘Red page’, under the heading ‘Foreign Letters’—a section that called for letters from ‘friends and relatives in foreign countries’ that ‘would be valuable and entertaining reading for Australians at home’.

The *Bulletin* newspaper was a Sydney publication that connected the rural communities of Australia, primarily in New South Wales and Victoria, with the capital cities. It embodied a protectionist and masculine Australia, and drew inspiration from the homeland, Britain, while its romanticised portrayal of rural life in pre-federation Australia came to define what it meant to be Australian. The ‘Red page’, on page two, focused on literary gossip and opinions, and was widely read. Published two years after Streeton was in Cairo, at a time when he had abandoned his plans of mounting an exhibition of his Eastern subjects in London, it is possible that Streeton hoped this letter would stimulate interest in his work. The artist had sent to Jim Conroy, his agent in Sydney, three paintings of Cairene drink sellers in 1889, and *The Ezbekiyeh Garden, Cairo* in 1899. With Streeton’s Orientalist works sent back to Australia for sale, the letter established his authority as a travel artist in order to represent his experiences of the East.

The ‘Personal narrative’ consists of a series of non-sequential chapters penned some years after his journey to Cairo, between 1919 and the 1930s. In the process of drafting and redrafting episodes from his journey, Streeton focused the reader’s attention on the life, colour and sensations of the East. He evoked the exotic and bohemian nature of the city’s environs, peopled by eunuchs, whose faces were ‘repellent and cruel’, and concubines with

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63 ‘Many Australians have friends and relatives in foreign countries, whose letters – or potions of them – would be valuable and entertaining reading for Australians at home. A man in the Transvaal just now, for example – with an eye for the picturesque and some skill with the pen – should make a capital correspondent. The Bulletin will at all times be glad to look at interesting letters from Australians beyond Australia. It is of little importance how they are written as long as the matter is first-hand and intrinsically worth print.’ The letter begins ‘Dear ____,’ *The Bulletin*, 21 October 1899, ‘Red page’
great dark eyes’. The unpublished memoir provides a more poetic interpretation of the city, though the artist also expressed some disquiet when recounting confrontations with poverty and disease.

In both the Bulletin letter and the later ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton vacillated between the use of present and past tense in describing a range of encounters. The use of present tense by guidebooks often evoked a lived experience, positioning it as an immediate and possible reality. By contrast, past tense was employed by the travelogue in order to highlight the geographical distance between the reader at home and the Orient. Unlike guidebooks that frequently over-informed their readers, bombarding them with information and detail in order to convey a sense of authority, Streeton presented images of a contemporary Cairo, interlaced with poetic references to Cleopatra and the Arabian Nights. His writing possesses neither the encyclopaedic depth of a travel guide, nor the extended narrative or romance of a travelogue. Capturing a sense of the young artist’s gusto, the pace of his travels along major thoroughfares and past iconic buildings encourages the reader along. While not a heroic journey across the desert to the Sinai or up the Nile, the letter offers a fleeting view, skimming over the public exterior of the city.

Streeton’s account of his movement around Cairo, in relation to its urban geography, suggests that the artist experienced a distinctly segregated city. Structures of social, cultural and economic separation became apparent within the Egyptian capital before 1882, existing as a physical indicator of the cultural complexities of Egypt’s Ottoman heritage. The building of the boulevard Sharia Muhammad Ali between 1845 and 1870 was one of the most palpable markers that separated the eastern ‘Oriental’ side of the city, with its traditional architecture, from the western side that most clearly showed signs of modernisation and European architectural influence. In 1867, Jacques Berque described the city as ‘a cracked vase whose two halves [could] never be put back together’. This division was further emphasised by British occupation.

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64 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
65 A. Behdad, Belated travelers, 1994, pp.42-43
From the 1830s, many tourists stayed in the European quarter along Sharia al-Muski, which had been widened and extended by Muhammad Ali Pasha (see Map 1). As the century progressed, they also began to stay in the Azbakiya region at the Orient, Shepheard’s, Windsor, Continental, Williams and Bristol hotels. Streeton first stayed at the Bristol Hotel, which was frequented by Australian and American travellers (see Plate 2.8). Further out was the Gezira Palace Hotel on Gezira Island, which was visited by Streeton, and Mena House, positioned near the pyramids at Giza. Of these famous hotels, the most iconic was the Shepheard’s, which was described by Streeton as ‘luxurious and expensive’. It created a colonial haven for the tourist through the formation of a community that came together for dances, polo, tennis matches and other familiar British pursuits. The American traveller, Constance Fennimore Woolson, who published her travelogue in 1896, observed that ‘the English colony played lawn-tennis; it attended the races; when Stanley returned to civilization it welcomed him with enthusiasm; and when, later, Prince Eddie came, it attended a gala performance of Aida at the opera-house’. Writing in 1891, William Morton Fullerton opined that:

with the polo, the balls, the racing and the riding, Cairo begins to impress itself upon you as an English town in which any quantity of Oriental sights are kept for the aesthetic satisfaction of the inhabitants, much as the proprietor of a country place keeps a game preserve or deer park for his amusement.

British society took up traditional comforts and leisure activities as a means of remaining connected to the homeland.


67 ‘Before 1882, the dividing line separated a “traditional” sector from a “modern” one, but after Egypt’s colonization the line marked a boundary between different nationalities, a harsher and more intolerable division. One could now speak of a “native” city and a “European” one, as in the large colonial towns of North Africa.’ A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.333

68 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’

69 C. Fenimore Woolson, Mentone, Cairo and Corfu, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1896, p.275; In contrast to British tourists who would also take part in ‘Eastern’ pursuits such as donkey riding and shopping in the bazaars, British residents in Cairo formed a ‘self-contained community, one that was largely professional and middle-class’. They constructed their own environment, ‘a whole exotic world’, that was not necessarily tied to the culture or society of the country they now occupied.’ A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.321

Though identifying himself as a member of the British Empire, Streeton made no mention of partaking in the many pastimes enjoyed by wealthier and often more established long-term residents of the city, with the exception of attending a performance of *Aïda*. In celebration of the Suez Canal opening in 1869, Ismail Pasha commissioned—along with the construction of new roads, palaces, gas lighting and gardens—the composition of the ‘Egyptian’ opera, *Aïda*, by Giuseppe Verdi. The opera in four acts was first performed in Cairo on 24 December 1871 in the opera house that Ismail had built for the occasion. The delay was due to the onset of the Franco Prussian War. Scenery and costumes, which had been made in France, could not be shipped to Cairo from Paris. Though it was not finished in time, and was substituted with *Rigoletto* for the celebrations, *Aïda* continued to be regularly performed in Cairo. By 1897, Streeton was able to enjoy a ‘grand performance of “Aïda”’. He noted in his ‘Personal narrative’ that the opera was written for the Khedivial Opera House, which stood ‘opposite the Ezbeykich [sic] Gardens’.

While *Aïda* celebrated the greatness and wonderment of ancient Egypt’s past, Said argued that, like the expositions and world fairs taking place during the period, it presented the Orient as malleable and transportable. In its various iterations, it was also altered to fit preconceived notions of people and place. Playing on familiar themes of barbarity and the exotic, Verdi’s opera reiterated Orientalist stereotypes that anchored Egyptian culture in distant antiquity. Archaeology and the Bible became a lens through which nineteenth-century Europe framed contemporary Egyptian culture and society.

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71 The libretto was written by Antonio Ghislanzoni, based on a scenario written by French Egyptologist, Auguste Mariette. *Aïda* is an Ethiopian princess, daughter of King Amonasro, who is captured and brought into slavery in Egypt. Radames, who is a military commander, struggles between his loyalty to the Pharaoh and his love for Aïda. The Pharaoh’s daughter is in love with the commander, though this is unrequited. Aïda’s father invades Egypt to gain back his daughter, and the Pharaoh declares that Radames has been chosen by the goddess Isis to lead the Egyptian army. After returning triumphant, Radamas sets the prisoners, including the King, free. Gratefully, the Amonasro makes Radames is successor, though the King and the daughter remain hostages to ensure that the Ethiopians do not avenge their defeat. Though the commander was supposed to marry the pharaoh’s daughter, he instead agrees to flee into the desert with Aïda. They are discovered and Radames surrenders to the imperial guards. He is sentenced to death and is buried alive in a vault. Aïda had hidden in the vault to die with her love.

72 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’

73 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’. “The Opera House built by Ismail for Verdi sat right at the centre of the north-south axis, in the middle of a spacious square, facing the European city, which stretched westward to the banks of the Nile. To the north were the railways station, Shepherds Hotel, and the Azbakiyah gardens... Behind the Opera House lay the teeming quarters of Muski”, E. Said, *Culture and imperialism*, Vintage, London, 1994, p.155

Not far from the opera house was the Bristol Hotel, where Streeton stayed on arrival in Cairo. The hotel was situated at the northeast corner of the Azbakiya Gardens, near the Midan al-Khaznedar, on Sharia al-Rouet (see Map 2). A clipping in the diary of American tourist, Clara E. Whitcomb, dated December 1898, shows a front view of the European-style hotel, set alongside a ‘view of Cairo’ that includes the Sultan Hasan Mosque (Plate 2.9). The cutting, possibly taken from the hotel’s letterhead paper, states that the hotel is located at ‘Esbekieh place’, ‘opposite the gardens’ and facing ‘full south’ with ‘large verandahs’.75

Recalling his first experiences of the city and his new accommodation, Streeton wrote:

[We arrived] in the city at night, to pass thro’ strange crowded thoroughfares and perfumed garden way to the Hotel, & our bed, to [be] awakened by music at one o’clock the next morning throwing ajar the window shutters one hears a tramp of revellers passing below & singing in concert the finest music: such music & rendering I have not yet heard in the streets of any Anglo-Saxon city.76

Streeton conjures an unfamiliar, yet captivating place.77 In an account published in the The Court by an unnamed Australian woman in 1898, the reader is offered more detailed and prosaic insights into the comforts Streeton would have enjoyed:

Like most Oriental hotels, the entrance was spacious and luxurious—eastern carpets and curtains, architecture abounding in quaint carvings and colourings, together with plenty of comfortable, modern chairs of bamboo make, though, perhaps, rather incongruous, yet afford a very comfortable and luxurious resort. In the Bristol, this is so arranged that you can select, as you prefer, either the large, airy, open hall or a cosy, retired alcove.78

This contemporaneous description suggests that the Bristol, while not rivalling more expensive hotels, such as the Shepheard’s, still provided a relatively high standard of accommodation. The hotel’s decor integrated ‘Eastern’ decorations, including Oriental rugs

76 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
77 In his 1940 interview with Basil Burdett, Streeton mentions ‘the Bristol – where Thackeray stayed’, though in fact the British writer stayed at the nearby Hotel d’Orient, also on the north side of the Azbakiyah Gardens. B. Burdett, *An artist’s mountain retreat: how Arthur Streeton rose*, 1940, p.7
78 ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, *The Court*, vol. 4, no. 9, 17 April 1898, pp.131-133
and hand-carved screens that imitated the *mashrabiya* panels that surrounded tradition harems.

Streeton's initial intention to stay for only one week coincided with the duration of Barnett's stay. It is possible that Walter Barnett and his wife also took rooms at the Bristol, and that, after their departure, Streeton moved to find more economic accommodation. In the *Bulletin* letter, the artist wrote that he stayed in 'three different hotels', before finding a 'cosy apartment' with the assistance of the 'Italian Consul'. His apartment at 9 Sharia Wagh al-birket, north of the Azbakiya Gardens, was most likely part of a *pensione*, which he shared with a number of Italians, including the 'landlady', Signora Bozzetti, who was the widow of an Italian officer; a doctor; and the doctor's wife, son, and 17-year-old daughter. The 1898 edition of *Baedeker* noted that Sharia Wagh al-birket contained restaurants, hotels and various European cafés that were deemed 'not suitable for ladies', such as Eldorado, which was situated 'under the colonnades, with stage and Egyptian singers and dancers'. By the first decades of the twentieth century, the street had developed a reputation for its adult entertainments, the rampant venereal disease spread by prostitutes working in the region, and petty crime.

Streeton observed the sights and sounds of his new, rather cosmopolitan, surroundings:

> Just on the side of the window is a court—with windows all round where is the residence of about twenty ladies—they make it pretty lively in their rooms at night. Just now there is a sewing-machine kicking up a row; a canary sings; waiters shout the Italian orders in the café, and the tum-tum-*pom* of the tambourine slides through it all. Some are singing

79 'left ship at P. Said + journeyed with my friend Walter Barnett for 1 week in Cairo. Stayed there 5 months.' A. Streeton, ‘The exhibitions’, ‘Personal narrative’

80 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’. Though not part of the Italian Consulate, which was at that time situated closer to the Muski on the southeastern side of the Azbakiya, Streeton may have been aided by this office. It is equally possibly that Streeton was rather humorously referring to the Italians with whom he shared the accommodation as the 'Italian Consul’. See K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.232; Thackeray also notes the presence of Italians, and the multiculturalism of Cairo: ‘... finding England here in a French hotel kept by an Italian, at the city of Grand Cairo, in Africa.’ W.M. Thackeray, *Notes on a journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, 1846, p.257

81 ‘The Italian residents, 16,000 in number, consist chiefly of traders of a humble class, advocates, and musicians, from the operatic singer down to the Calabrian itinerant.’ K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.54

82 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1898, p.24
Italian opera; and the great hot wind from the Desert—the *khamseen*—blows through everything, and deposits a fine film of dust on the Egyptian cat that sleeps on the bricks through it all. Everybody sleeps in the day-time here, from about 11.30 till 4; and all the cafés are buzzing till about 2 a.m., and often after that.

Streeton’s description evokes a domestic setting, more European than Oriental, with the sound of a sewing machine, a bird and Italian opera flooding through his open shutters. The artist also noted the neighbouring residence of ‘about twenty ladies’. In his discussion of the effects of the British occupation on prostitution, James Albridge noted, ‘there was also another kind of brothel—For Egyptians and Turkish middle classes—in the Sharia Wagh el Birkett (also near Ezbekiya), and here the prostitutes used to lean over the balconies on the first floor dressed in virginal negligees’. It is likely that Streeton’s neighbours formed part of such a brothel, as suggested by his comment that they ‘make it pretty lively in their rooms at night’.

Like a dragoman negotiating an itinerary with his tourist clients, or a guidebook listing the multitude of options for day trips from the city centre, Streeton commences his account of the city by offering the reader an array of possible destinations to explore. These options include the Ghezireh Palace Hotel, Sulphur Baths in Helwan, Tombs of the Mamlukes, and ‘Cairo slums’. The Ghezireh Palace Hotel is selected as the reader’s first destination, with ‘Ottoman Ali’ driving the ‘comfortable victoria with fares printed (and his number 1005) in English and French, and, I think, Arabic’. Streeton described the ‘fascinating architecture’ along Sharia Kamil and Sharia Abdi:

Off we go! Right up the main street, past the luxurious and expensive Shepheard’s Hotel—winding in and out of the swell new quarters, past a most lovely modern

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83 *The summer extends from April to October, and except during the Khamsin—a hot south wind in April and May, at intervals during a period of fifty days—northerly winds prevail. Winter extends from November to March, and, with a few exceptional days, is a season affording unsurpassed comfort to invalids and attractions to ordinary travellers.* Thomas Cook Ltd., *Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, p.32

84 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’

85 J. Albridge, *Cairo*, 1969, p.219

86 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’

87 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’

88 *Carriages, generally good, and with two horses, abound at Cairo. The principal stand is to the right of the entrance to the Muski, and there are others in the Ezbekiyeh, near the Hôtel d’Orient, and in the Place ‘Abidin, near the offices of the minister of finance*. K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.34
Arabesque house—one of the very best—the French Ambassador’s house; past others with beautifully carved projecting windows with wee little openings from which the lovely ladies of the harem may spy you at their ease. O, most comfortable looking places ... Ha! ha!^89

Aspects of Streeton’s narration, including the harem’s proximity to the ‘French Ambassador’s house’, highlight intersections between the European and Oriental in Cairo. The presence of the harem women conveys a sense of a mysterious, sexualised East, and acts as a prelude to the social and cultural divisions that became a theme in Streeton’s writings.

The ‘French Ambassador’s house’ was most likely the French Embassy located on Sharia al-Madabegh, which led down to the swinging Qasr al-Nil bridge. At certain times of day, this bridge closed ‘to allow the high-waisted spectresque [sic] Nile boats to swoop with their lovely sails and rudder (made of a stable-door) down the old river’.^90 While waiting for the bridge to open in the early afternoon (he notes, ‘it’s about 1.45 p.m.’), Streeton observed the crowd of ‘700 or 800’ alongside his victoria cab:

On the left scores of grey and ochre-coloured camels (and something very putrid) wait with their varied loads—as they’ve waited thousands of years before. Arabs, Egyptians, Berbers, Copts, and all sorts wait quietly—their long gowns of a dozen degrees of blue—women sit on donkeys, or squat on their dark haunches, dark-robed against the oranges they sell.^91

Through this description, the artist evoked a timeless scene of Oriental exoticism, marked by an aesthetic appeal to colour. Streeton incorporated these ‘Arabs, Egyptians, Berbers, Copts, and all sorts’ in his bazaar and street scenes, though their depiction was pared down and generalised to convey a legible Oriental ‘type’.^92

As he waited for the bridge to open, Streeton turned his attention to ‘the fair-haired, fresh-complexioned soldier-boys of the Empire’ who hung out the windows of the long barracks

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^89 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’  
^90 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’  
^91 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’  
^92 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
block, smoking cigarettes. Using common slang, he referred to the British soldiers as ‘Tommy Atkins’, describing them in comparison to the Cairene men and women, donkeys and camels. The presence of the British army in Cairo became a significant and highly visible marker of the Empire’s movement towards having political and economic control of Egypt. The Egyptian Ahmed Amin, when writing of his experiences living in Cairo during the first half of the twentieth century, saw the British army’s presence from another perspective. He grew up in fear of the British soldiers, describing the way his father saw their occupation as a ‘symbol of God’s anger’ and a punishment for Cairo’s wrongs. In contrast, Streeton saw the army in all its glory. He viewed the presence of ‘the red coat of Tommy Atkins’ as ‘good for Egypt’, echoing the sentiment of fellow artist, Walter Tyndal, who wrote that the British officer is ‘rarely a cause of complaint. I will even go further and say that Tommy Atkins is popular with the very people whom he is called upon to check’.

In both the Bulletin letter and the ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton’s repeated acknowledgement of the British military presence in Cairo also demonstrated an awareness of cultural tensions extant within the city. In the letter, he wrote:

The English hold the city by the citadel on the rise of the neighboring hill, and with their guns could in one minute shell the palaces, mosques—in fact the whole place. A mosque next to the ‘Sultan Hassan’ one was left with the top unfinished, because the intended top would block out the Khedive’s palace from the guns (so Mr. Atkins told me). Ha, ha! Little by little the French official markings about the city are being taken down, and the notices, directions etc., printed in plain English and Arabic. It must annoy the French very much, to see the place held by a few English troops—who, by the way, are all

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94 Pierre Loti, upon visiting the Mohammed Ali Mosque in 1907, was surprised by the presence of British soldiers: ‘How unexpected are such soldiers in this holy place of Egypt. The red uniforms and the white faces of the north: Englishmen billeted in the palace of Mohammed Ali’. P. Loti cited in A. Beattie, Cairo, p.154
95 ‘I was so terrified of their red coats, blue trousers and general bearing that I usually changed my route whenever I saw them coming. My father’s view of them was no more rational, but typical of the people’s philosophy of surrender. The soldiers were the symbols of God’s anger. The Egyptians had oppressed each other for a long time and had forgotten God’s laws. The English were God’s hand of revenge. They were here to torture and torment them until they saw God’s path.’ Ahmed Amin, ‘Then and now in Egypt: the reflections of Ahmad Amin 1886-1954’ in D. Stewart, Great Cairo: mother of the world, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1969, p.194
96 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Wagh-eel birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
97 See W. Tyndale, An artist in Egypt, 1912, p.133

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waiting ready—and police too—to make a dash, and nip a revolution in the bud, or a rising of the Moslems against the much-disliked Greeks (I dislike Mahometans [sic], and the Greeks especially), who disport themselves with a gaudy display of revolvers in their belts, and serve 'em right if the quiet-looking Arabs do rise and give them a doing.\textsuperscript{98}

Streeton promotes the authority of the British army, its ability to maintain systems of power within the city, and its rivalry with the French.\textsuperscript{99} Although a citizen of the British Empire, it is significant that he uses the term 'the English', rather than a more inclusive descriptor such as 'us' or 'we'. There is a sense that, while he aligns himself with the English, his connection is more an affiliation than a direct identification. He communicates the multi-layered nature of being Australian as belonging to, yet dislocated from, the centre of the Empire.

Streeton’s pro-British sentiment was repeated in a letter to his long-time friend, Frederick Delmar, dated 28 September 1900. He stated, '[b]ut damn—my instinct is English, and if I have any political feeling—it is in favour of British supremacy'.\textsuperscript{100} The artist also wrote to Roberts in 1924 that Britain ‘is the Keystone of the world to-day, I think civilisation depends upon her more than any other country—the British as a race never know when they are beaten—& then great grit usually win through’.\textsuperscript{101} Such examples reveal the operation of identity politics and the influence of international relations on the way Australians such as Streeton viewed their position within the Empire. Significantly, Streeton was living (or had lived) in London at the time of writing these later letters, which may have influenced his sense of connectedness to England. Although, in 1900, international relations were beginning to flounder, heightening issues related to British national identity. Streeton’s support of ‘British supremacy’ echoed the strong connection

\textsuperscript{98} A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’ 1899, ‘Red page’
\textsuperscript{99} Derek Gregory notes that ‘Disputes between the French and the English over their respective roles in Egypt were a commonplace of international diplomacy right through the nineteenth-century, and their tourists dutifully lined up on one side or the other’. D. Gregory, ‘Scripting Egypt’, 1999, p.125
\textsuperscript{100} A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmar, 28 September 1900, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), \textit{Letters from Smike}, 1989, p.84
\textsuperscript{101} A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 13 August 1924, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), \textit{Letters from Smike}, 1989, p.180
numerous Australians had with the British Empire, even at a time when Australia was moving towards federation.\textsuperscript{102}

With the Nile bridge open, Streeton departed the English troops as the victoria was taken past the ‘natty palace built by Imail [sic] Pasha’ and the ‘Great Museum of Gizeh [sic]’ on the way to the Gezira Palace Hotel.\textsuperscript{103} Having enjoyed a ‘nip of whisky’, Streeton entertained his reader with tours of the hotel’s casino and extensive landscaped grounds, followed by a meal at the Table d’Hôte with Streeton’s travelling companions from the \textit{Polynesien}, including six-year-old Mimi and her mother:

At last the Ghezarieh [sic] Palace Hotel—truly a palace, with esplanades overlooking the Nile. And now we’ve had our 2s. nip of whisky—look at the Casino, the gravel walks, and the floor around all rose and red and purple and yellow with the (confetti, do you call ‘em?) coloured paper cut small—they’ve been shying it all over the show. To-day is the Battle of Flowers. Sit here and have more whisky and see the crowd. Ye gods! how swell they look, yet this is the day when lords, peers, countesses, &c., don’t come about—only the common people, shopkeepers, &c. Back to the hotel. Table d’hôte—all staff and dignified too—five or six old maids; one or two old ladies and their daughters. A Frenchman, wife and pretty little girl who sits next to me\textsuperscript{104}

The hotel and its clientele represent the experience of many tourists from this period, who stayed in European owned and operated establishments. The Cairo they saw was limited, with such hotels offering respite from the crowded, dusty streets of the Eastern quarters.

Streeton’s \textit{Bulletin} letter continued by taking the reader to such well-traversed tourist destinations as the Citadel, a stronghold redeveloped by Muhammad Ali; the nearby Sultan Hasan Mosque built during the Mamluk era; and past Ismail Pasha’s palace in Ismailia. A significant diversion from this general tendency towards the more touristy areas of Cairo was the Fishmarket. Located directly east of Streeton’s accommodation on Sharia Wagh al-}

\textsuperscript{102} A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmar, 28 September 1900, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), \textit{Letters from Smike}, 1989, p.84
\textsuperscript{103} Also spelt Ghezireh or Gheezireh. ‘The entrance to the Khedive’s palace is a very jerry-built looking concern – all pretentious, and with cheap Italian decorations and oil-painted columns of marble (haven’t been in his grounds and don’t want to).’ A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’; See Thomas Cook ltd., \textit{Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert}, 1897, p.108; A. Humphreys, \textit{Grand hotels of Egypt: In the Golden Age of travel}, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo and New York, 2011, p.133-145
\textsuperscript{104} A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
birket, the Fishmarket was unlike popular market spaces, such as the Muski or Khan al-Khalili, in that travel tomes did not recommend it as a standard tourist destination. On the cusp of the city’s East-West divide, non-European locals primarily populated the region.

A night excursion to the Fishmarket narrated in the *Bulletin* letter sees the artist ‘winding in and out of a perfect maze of Eastern slum’. He includes a description of the bazaar spaces made up of ‘damned little shops selling sorts of muck to eat, people hammering away making brass and copper wares, tailors and embroiderers at work’. Observing the merchants and workers from the safety of his victoria, Streeton notes there are ‘[n]o white people about here’. This has the effect of alienating the artist, who feels ‘rather strange’, though he returns to the district on more than one occasion.

The market formed part of the ‘Cairo slums’ referred to at the beginning of the *Bulletin* letter. Streeton likely sought out this place of intrigue and danger, and, by using the experience as fodder for his narratives, attempted to fashion himself as part of that adventurous breed of traveller whose worldly experience ensured reliability. His extensive descriptions also play into the fantasy of the Orient as a sexually available eroticised space. In describing the more disreputable aspects of the Fishmarket, Streeton observed that:

> all along each side you see low windows (three feet from the ground)—bars over them, and three or four girls inside lie on their stomachs, and with their heads pressed against the bars, [they] attract your attention by a certain hiss-hiss-hiss, just like adders.

There is some ambivalence in Streeton’s reaction to these women; he is at once captivated and repelled. In the chapter, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’, in the ‘Personal narrative’, the artist describes his encounter with a ‘girl of 18’ from this area who:

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105 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
106 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
107 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
108 The female entertainers that Streeton encountered in the Fishmarket, many of whom were also prostitutes, were known as *almehs*. Flaubert’s night with Kuchuk Hanem is an account of an European’s experience with this type of woman. See E. Said, *Orientalism*, 2003, pp.186-187; See also D. Sladen, *Oriental Cairo: the city of the 'Arabian nights’*, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1911, pp.22-3, p.61
darted suddenly out of doors and spreading her arms barred my progress; she resembled a superb masterpiece in bronze, and was adorned simply, some pretty tattooing across her breast and a scrap of brilliant silk about her waist. She clung to me 'like anything', and I saw behind her several other beauties luxurious as a group by Norman Lindsay; and I felt very much the need of a good cup of afternoon tea.  

In the *Bulletin* letter there are slight variations in the details of story. His encounter was with a ‘little wench of 15’, and she was not described with the same lusty praise:

One afternoon I tried a walk through these slums alone, and it wasn’t pleasant—the guilty, murderous-looking denizen with one eye all rotten with ophthalmia, and the flies bucking into the other as fast as they could—oh, he was a beast! One little wench of 15 rushed from behind the bars and held me with one arm. Eventually, with the fiend and ophthalmia at my elbow I got bushed, and still kept trying to look as though I’d been through hundreds of times, not heeding the persistent invitations of the fiend to come for a few piastres and see a donkey-riding exhibition.  

Perhaps the time and space that separated the writing of the ‘Personal narrative’ and the *Bulletin* letter, and the difference in audiences for which these two narratives were written, resulted in Streeton’s accounts of certain events being enhanced. The example of the Fishmarket girls is telling, as it suggests that in the later ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton made more concessions to an erotic picturesque in fashioning his identity as a bohemian artist, including the local reference to Australian artist, Norman Lindsay, who was known for his voluptuous, provocative nudes.

There is a greater degree of social comment in the above passage from the *Bulletin* letter, with Streeton observing, if only briefly, the conditions of the poor. Western travellers were not generally inclined to learn information about the social state of the people in the cities. However, they did often comment on eye diseases. In his later writings, Streeton remarked on the proliferation of the eye disease, ophthalmia, in Cairo. This shows a concern, or at least an awareness, of one of the many challenges facing the lower classes in Egypt. Flies, which Streeton noted were ‘rife’ during the year he was in Cairo, cause ophthalmia. In a description of the ‘crowds of Arabs’ who watched him paint, Streeton observed children...
dropping pieces of sugarcane on the ground, around which flies gathered. He stated that the flies were an 'innumerable and dangerous pest' and 'about 25% of the population appeared to have lost an eye, or have disease in both'.

Racial tensions brought about by past and present British and French interests in the city, and the Greco-Turkish war, were also referred to in the 'Personal narrative'. Recalling that 'the Greco-Turkish war was then in our daily news', Streeton related that 'conflict between the Greeks in Cairo (30,000), and the Arabs was possible any moment'. The Bulletin letter referred to the 'English troops—who, by the way, are all waiting ready—and police too—to make a dash, and nip a revolution in the bud, or a rising of the Moslems against the much-disliked Greek'. The conflict was between Greece and the Ottoman Empire, which was then ruled by Sultan Abdülhamid II, and began as a reaction by Greece to Ottoman control over the Greek population in Crete. On 21 January 1897, a Greek army landed in Crete to liberate the island from the Ottomans, with a view to uniting Crete.

European powers—primarily Britain and France—intervened and proclaimed Crete an international protectorate. This would have influenced relations between Greeks and the Ottoman-Egyptians in Cairo at the time, particularly as Crete was not far from the port of Alexandria.

Streeton highlighted the unease between the Arab and Greek populations in Cairo when recounting his experience painting with Spong in a spice bazaar. He recalled:

Hundreds of Arabs [were] standing around. The word passes around that we were English, and they were fairly kind and considerate, which would not have been the case if we were Greeks. The Greeks, I think, are the largest foreign population here—and are apparently disliked. They are the money lenders I believe.

In the Bulletin letter he stated, 'I dislike Mahometans [sic], and the Greeks especially'. Streeton demonstrates a lack of cultural knowledge, contradicting this general stance

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112 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
113 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozetti’
114 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
115 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
116 A. Streeton, 'Introduction', 'Personal narrative'
against Muslims by expressing his admiration for the 'quiet-looking Arabs', who were very likely Muslim. His unawareness is again evident when the artist mistakes festivities on the streets marking the occasion of a boy's circumcision as celebrations signalling the end of the Greco-Turkish war. Though revealing Streeton's disconnection from the everyday social and cultural experiences of the Cairene people, such passages indicate a different focus to the pleasant pictorial scenes that appear in his paintings and sketches. Most significantly, the Bulletin letter and 'Personal narrative' express Streeton's ambivalent attitude towards the local people of Cairo, in a way not clearly enunciated in his visual representations. His writings encompass fluctuations between fantastic Norman Lindsay-inspired evocations and more sedate discussions on issues of race, health and politics.

A Visit to the Sphinx

For contemporaries of Streeton, there was no challenging journey along an unbeaten track, and even the boat trip up the Nile had become a somewhat hackneyed affair. There was also a sense that there was no more new knowledge to be acquired; the myriad of travelogues, travel guides, journal and newspapers reports, public lectures and museum exhibitions provided a colossal pillar of knowledge about Egypt, and many travellers accepted the version presented to them. Travel was reasonably comfortable, with rail and steamship services of a comparably high quality. Most importantly, these services were regular and becoming faster by the year. Over time, travel also became a more accessible experience that was no longer restricted to the elite. The industrial revolution contributed to the creation of a new middle class that could now afford to partake in leisure pastimes. 'Travel' was transformed into 'tourism', and was now seen as an end in itself.

In Streeton's 'Personal narrative', he commented disparagingly on tourism when he wrote of Cairo's 'tall minarets of pink and white [which] tower into the blue air, while below

117 A. Streeton, 'Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo', 1899, 'Red page'
118 'as the Greco-Turkish war was then in our daily news, I asked a donkey boy what the festivity was for, and "was peace declared'? - he laughed, "Oh no, the music is for that boy who has been circumcised." I was glad to know the news was not worse'. A. Streeton, 'With Signora Bozetti'
tourists swarm with their brilliant dragomen'.\textsuperscript{119} However, when posing for a photograph before the Sphinx and Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) (Plate 2.10), Streeton played the part of the tourist engaged in the collective experience of sightseeing.\textsuperscript{120} The albumen print, which pictures Streeton with three travelling companions mounted on donkeys flanked by Bedouin guides and a uniformed Egyptian man wearing a tarbush, is the only pictorial record of the artist in Cairo. Most likely taken in the morning, with the sun rising from the west across the desert plains of Giza, the photograph captures Streeton engaged in the common exercise of creating a souvenir of his visit. Dressed in a light-coloured three-piece sack suit with a handkerchief in his left breast pocket and a white cravat, he wears common lace-up leather shoes, made dusty by his travels to the popular tourist site, and a felt square-crowned bowler hat. Unlike Streeton’s fellow travellers and guides, who directed their focus to the camera, the artist looked out of the picture to his right. With a cigar pursed between his lips, and holding onto a long bamboo riding cane angled forward from his body with right arm outstretched, he affects an adventurer’s stance, surveying the landscape around him. Though part of this group of Western men enjoying a customary jaunt to the pyramids, Streeton’s gaze reinforces his conscious self-fashioning of a status beyond that of the standard tourist.

The figure of a female tourist analogous to that of Streeton is depicted in his watercolour, *Sphinx* c.1897 (Plate 2.2). Wearing a narrow-brimmed hat and travelling suit consisting of a dark tailored jacket and pale skirt, she is posed sidesaddle on a camel before the towering

\textsuperscript{119} A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’. ‘The dragomans, who speak English, French, and Italian, undertake for a fixed sum per day to defray the whole cost of locomotion, hotel accommodation, fees, and all other expenses, so that the traveller is enabled to obtain, as it were, a bird’s eye view of the country without being concerned with the cares of daily life... A dragoman is usually employed for the longer tours only, such as the voyage up the Nile, the journey to Mt. Sinai, the excursion to the Fayûm, and a visit to the less frequented towns in the Delta. Visitors to Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, Isma`iliya, and Port Sa'id may well dispense with a dragoman, as every necessary service will be rendered them by the commissionaires of the hotels (5–10 fr. per day).’ K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, pp.13-14

\textsuperscript{120} The Sphinx has been a tourist site for longer than may first be expected. In Pliny’s *Natural history*, dating from the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD, he discussed the Sphinx and the travellers who visited the site, as well as the activities of local villagers who took part in this early tourist trade. Similar to the hired dragomen and local Bedouin Streeton encountered in 1897, the villagers helped travellers climb the pyramids for a small sum. Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol, the ‘Father of terror’, the Sphinx was given its now more common name by the Greeks as it resembled their winged mythical monster with the head of a woman and the body of a lion that set riddles and killed those not able to answer them. Carved from natural bedrock that originally lay at the bottom of the causeway to the Pyramid of Khafre, the immense figure was most likely constructed during the pharaoh Khafre’s reign (c.2558 BC and 2532 BC). It is thought that it portrays his features, with the head framed by the striped nemes head cloth worn only by royalty.
Sphinx, which rises up against the clear blue of a cloudless sky. A Bedouin guide holds a lead rope attached to the halter of her mount. A common sight at this popular tourist destination, such guides made a living offering tourists camel, donkey or horse rides around the Giza complex, or assisting them in their attempts to scale the sides of the Great Pyramid. Wearing a light-coloured cap and dressed in a flowing outer robe and a blue *galabiya*, the handler stands directly beneath the face of the mythical creature at some distance from the camel, and looks directly out of the picture plane towards the viewer. Though the brief description of the figures limit the viewer’s ability to read the expression of the tourist, the black halo of her parasol draws attention to her glance down at the men and children crowding around her. The group’s interaction conveys a common aspect of the region’s contemporary tourist economy, which is not seen in the artist’s other paintings and sketches of bazaars and street scenes. Holding up their hands to the tourist, they appeal for the *baksheesh* that was so often given out by Western travellers.

European and American tourist guides, who drew upon their status as ‘bibles’ for novice travellers to Egypt, not only offered information on where and when to travel, but also often included racist and paternalistic direction on how to handle such interactions with the local inhabitants. In a John Murray guide, in 1858, Sir I. Gardner Wilkinson wrote that the ‘extravagance of their demands is boundless, and they appear to think that Europeans are absolutely ignorant of the value of money’. He advised that ‘Every attempt at extortion should be firmly resisted, as compliance only make applicant for baksheesh doubly clamorous’. Adopting a similar tone, the 1885 edition of *Baedeker* maintained that Egyptians ‘occupy a much lower grade in the scale of civilization than most of western nations’ and ‘if the traveler makes due allowance for their short-comings, and treats the natives with consistent firmness, he will find that they are by no means destitute of fidelity, honesty and kindliness’. Such racially prejudiced and patronising language forms a

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121 For descriptions of Bedouin dress see ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.132, and A. Edwards, *A thousand miles up the Nile*, 1877, pp.4-6
122 See K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, p.16
123 The paragraph goes on to note in a racist tone that ‘The Egyptians, it must be remembered, occupy a much lower grade in the scale of civilization than most western nations.’ Gardner Wilkinson, 1858, cited in A. Beattie, *Cairo*, 2005, p.148
background to Streeton's image of a stately female tourist posed above the fray in all the
glory of Western civilisation.

Walter Tyndale congratulated himself for having 'remained unobserved by the Pyramid
pests who look upon every stranger as their fair prey'. The British artist admitted 'that
the nuisance of the Pyramid Bedouins have been somewhat diminished of late; but they are
nevertheless a great nuisance still. The fault lies to a certain extent with the tourists,
especially the ladies, who take far too much notice of them'. Interestingly, Streeton
reversed the terminology, describing tourists who 'swarm with their brilliant dragomen'.
His use of the term 'swarm' suggests their presence en masse, like Egypt's biblical plague
of locusts, trampling the bazaars and Pharisaic temples armed with their trusty guidebooks.
Pierre Loti, a Breton naval officer, employed comparable language to Streeton when he
described 'a vast hotel [Mena House] to which swarm men and women of fashion'. He
viewed with some distress the presence of tourists:

The tourists who have come tonight, and upon whom have pounced the black-cloaked
Bedouin guides, wear cap and ulster or furred great coat: their intrusion here seems
almost an offence; but, alas, such visitors become more numerous in each succeeding
year. The great town hard by—which sweats gold now that men have started to buy from
it its dignity and its soul—is become a place of rendezvous and holiday for the idlers and
upstarts of the whole world ... and behind the pyramid of Cheops squats a vast hotel to
which swarm men and women of fashion ... and consumptive English maidens; and
ancient English dames, a little the worse for wear, who bring their rheumatisms for the
treatment of the dry winds.

Though the tourist in Streeton's watercolour was not specifically identified in the title of
the work or within his travel narratives, it is possible that she was the female travelling
companion with whom Streeton journeyed to the Fishmarket. Positioned above this small

125 W. Tyndale, An artist in Egypt, 1912, p.129
126 Tyndale continues, 'If the ladies were aware of what these blackguards say of them, they would perhaps
keep them at a better distance. They have lost all the virtues of the true Bedouins, and have acquired all the
vices of the Fellaheen. They are a good-looking set of ruffians, which accounts for the way some visitors spoil
them; but this does not excuse the police from stopping their importunities.' W. Tyndale, An artist in Egypt,
1912, p.130
127 A. Streeton, 'With Signora Bozzetti'
129 P. Loti, Egypt, 1909, p.6
130 Streeton also wrote of another carriage excursion with a female companion excited 'to view these hundreds
of women with dark stuff rubbed round their eyes, and spots of black about the brow and chin, reclining in the
crowd, she appears alone and unaided, as not even her Bedouin guide offers assistance in liberating her from the demanding company at her camel's feet. The scene was most likely drawn from the artist's own experience of the site, and, though unconventional as an Orientalist subject, the composition repeats images produced by commercial photographic studios in Cairo for personalised souvenirs or postcards. The Hungarian photographer J. Dozsay established a studio at the pyramids in 1886, with travellers able to purchase a professional photograph of their group similarly arranged on donkeys or camels with the pyramids or Sphinx in the background. In a photograph attributed to Dozsay by Ken Jacobson (Plate 2.11), the same composition has been used as in Streeton's photograph, with tourists lined up with their guides in front of the Sphinx and pyramids. In another example by an unidentified photographer, possibly Dozsay or Antonio Beato, a woman is mounted on a camel with an accompanying guide (Plate 2.12).

In 1892, five years before Streeton posed for his souvenir photograph in front of the Sphinx, the English historian and travel author, William Fraser Rae, wrote of the great changes that had taken place in the logistics of travel to the Giza pyramid site. For tourists, the Sphinx and pyramids at Giza were once a somewhat risky destination. However, by the 1890s, guards were stationed at most major sites, both for the protection of the monuments and the tourists who made the pilgrimage to see them. Ismail Pasha constructed the road out to the Giza Plateau in 1868, in honour of the visit by the Prince of

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133 'Formerly a trip to the Pyramids involved some toil and a little risk. It was necessary for the sight-seer, who desired to go and return the same day, to rise at daybreak, to ride on a donkey from his residence in Cairo to the right bank of the Nile, to be ferried across the river in a flat bottomed boat, and to remount a donkey on the left bank. After a fatiguing ride he would reach the Pyramids, at which he could take but a hasty glance, as no time could be wasted before starting on the return journey in order to reach Cairo before sunset ... At present, the visitor can drive in a mail coach from Shepheard's Hotel, in Cairo, to the Mena Hotel at the base of the Great Pyramid, take luncheon there, and return in time for dinner'. W. Fraser Rae, *Egypt to-day*, 1892, p.92
134 'An alarmed Yankee described arriving at the Sphinx in the 1840s, and being charged by tattered villagers wielding clubs; but the clubs were for beating off competitors—the other hawkers of mummy beads and jars of water for tourists whose strange passion it was to scramble heavenwards and plant their conquering feet on the summit of Chelop's sepulchre.' M. Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The city victorious*, 1998, p.160
135 M. Rodenbeck, *Cairo*, 1998, p.43; 'Soldiers and policemen guard the sands as they guard the Cairo streets', C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, p.203
Wales and the opening of the Suez Canal. By 1897, it was used by carriages and coaches shuttling tourists to the sites from the Cook's office at the Shepheard's Hotel. The road passed through Ismailiya and over the Qasr al-Nil bridge, with tourists also driven past a mud village and the Giza Museum, then straight on to the pyramids, with the comfortable amenities of Mena House Hotel nearby. The journey was memorable for Streeton, who, three decades after the event, wrote a letter 'To the Editor of the Argus' on 21 July 1927 that included a description of 'a roadway eight miles long [that] is lined with giant Acacias'.

By the time of Streeton's excursion to the ancient site, the pyramids and the Sphinx had become a common scene; they were icons of a great pharaonic past that tourists easily recognised from images they had seen in newspapers, magazines, illustrated books, photographs and paintings. As Thackeray found almost 50 years earlier, the encounter was almost always mediated. With the nineteenth century sightseer so familiar with such famous monuments, these great edifices effectively became life-size reproductions of themselves. Describing his experience of viewing the pyramids from his P&O flyboat on the Nile, Thackeray wrote:

There they lay, rosy and solemn in the distance—those old, majestical, familiar edifices. Several of us tried to be impressed; but breakfast supervening, a rush was made at the coffee and cold pies, and the sentiment of awe was lost in the scramble for victuals. Are we so blasé of the world that the greatest marvels in it do not succeed in moving us? Have society, Pall Mall clubs, and a habit of sneering, so withered up our organs of veneration that we can admire no more? My sensation with regards to the Pyramids was, that I had seen them before: then came a feeling of shame that the view of them should awaken no respect.

136 Thomas Cook ltd., *Cook's tourists' handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, pp.142-143
137 As the road stretched out alongside the Nile, it was lined with trees and date palms. A. Streeton, "'Bobbling' Melbourne's trees. To the Editor of the Argus', *The Argus*, 25 July 1927, p.11
139 W. M. Thackeray, *Notes on a journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, 1846, pp.253
Tyndale likewise admitted that ‘Familiarity may have lessened the excitement which a first gaze at the world’s greatest wonder must produce’; however, unlike Thackeray, the British artist found that this ‘has never robbed it of its awful impressiveness’.140

Streeton made at least one other watercolour study of the Sphinx (Plate 2.13) and, in the Cairo sketchbooks, there is also a small pencil sketch (Plate 2.14).141 The watercolour, which was highlighted with lashings of white body colour to impress upon the viewer the effect of the glaring sun beating down upon the desert monument, depicts the Sphinx in the mid-ground, with a pyramid in the distance to the right. While the commercial photographs in Streeton’s collection pictured the site inhabited by local ‘types’, the artist paints the scene, possibly in situ, without the picturesque inclusion of figures, while also set apart from the tell-tale signs of the present day.

Though Streeton would have viewed reproductions of the Sphinx and pyramids before travelling to Cairo, it is possible that the great distance between Australia and Egypt played a role in him being less desensitised. When writing about the Sphinx in his ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton was clearly struck by the ancient structure’s monumentality. He noted that ‘Among the innumerable sights there is nothing more impressive than the great form of the Sphynx [sic], carved ages ago from the living rock, it rises up from paws to crown of the head about 70 or 80 feet’. As with his descriptions of Cairo, Streeton used a poetic register to record his experiences, writing of the ‘solitary sands’ across which the Sphinx had looked for thousands of years. He also told of the ‘calm immensity of the Lybian [sic] desert, which stretches on every side like a warm grey ocean, with billows and crests fixed & silent—and all caused by the same phenomenon which creates ocean movement, the wind’. The artist also evoked the vast history of the site through reference to ‘the trampling

140 W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.128. Although readily accessible, Frazer Rae proclaimed that the ‘Sphinx still remains the most mysterious among many marvellous relics of the past. Sand no longer hides the greater part of it from view, but the meaning of the gigantic figure remains an unsolved problem.’ W. Fraser Rae, *Egypt to-day: the first to the third Khedive*, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1892, p.97

141 There is also record of a painting, *Sphinx*, oil on canvas, signed, 23” x 19½”, which sold at Joel’s Australian Paintings, 8 December 1972, lot 76. This work has not been traced.
legions of Ceasar [sic] & of Napoleon’. Though he soberly concluded that the memory of them ‘remains like a hard lesson, & they have passed away’.142

Even though tourism on a commercial scale was not established until the mid-nineteenth century, Cairo already had an extensive history of interaction with foreigners. As Streeton intimates in his ‘Personal narrative’, along with traders and pilgrims from all parts of Europe, the Levant and the Ottoman Empire, French and British interests in the area formed a background to late nineteenth century inter-cultural relations. In 1798, the young General Bonaparte invaded Alexandria and advanced on Cairo, defeating the Mameluk army at the Battle of the Pyramids in July. However, this success was short-lived. The French Navy was attacked by the newly arrived British fleet, under the command of Horatio Nelson, at the Bay of Aboukir. This defeat meant that the French were essentially land-based, and Napoleon returned to France in 1799. Following the final blow to French forces by the British Navy in 1801, in 1802 Napoleon ordered the Imperial Press to commence work on Description de l’Egypte, which comprised over 3,000 illustrations that recorded the cultural and scientific finds of the expedition. The volumes paved the way for the study of Egyptology, and captured the public’s imagination. Although the invasion of Egypt—which was aimed at blocking Britain’s trade route to India and re-establishing commerce with the Levant—was a failure, the Description de l’Egypte and the legendary status of the battle would establish firm links between the Emperor and the rich history of the ancient civilisation.

Numerous patriotic images championing Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign were produced in the following decades. In Jean-Léon Gérôme’s Bonaparte before the Sphinx (Oedipus) c.1867–1868 (Plate 2.15), the artist presented Napoleon mounted upon a bay Arabian horse, looking out across the desert as it reaches back to Cairo. The French Salon audience, reading the parallels Gérôme was drawing between Napoleon and Oedipus, would have understood the reference to the classical myth in the work’s alternate name.143 The story tells of a half-woman half-lion who terrorised travellers on their way to Thebes. In order to

142 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
pass along the road safely, travellers had to answer a riddle, otherwise, they would be
devoured. Oedipus solved the riddle and liberated Thebes. Gérôme called upon this myth,
and alluded to the success of the French at the Battle of the Pyramids by including the
shadows of a mounted army reaching across the front of the picture plane, and rows of
French militia in the background. In doing so, he created an image of Napoleon as a hero.

Gérôme chose not to include the smallest Giza pyramid, the Pyramid of Menkaure
(Mycerinus), in his composition. The background was also altered so that it drops away
from the mid-ground, setting an immense stage for the invading army. The creature is no
longer the protector of the necropolis at Giza. Removed from its pharaonic context, it
stands alone as a mythological icon in ruin. Confronted by the mounted figure of Napoleon,
the Sphinx represents the demise of Egypt and the emerging strength of the French Empire.

Streeton’s image of the lady traveller presents a more pedestrian tourist experience. In
comparison to the strong, masculine challenge presented in Gérôme’s painting, Streeton did
not propagandise the role of the West in Egypt. There is minimal cultural or social
engagement between the woman and the local men and children, and no indication that she
has connected with the history or archaeological significance of the site. As Napoleon
stakes his claim of ownership in a bid for a great Eastern Empire in Gérôme’s retrospective
evocation, the experience of this iconic site is almost lost on the tourist in Streeton’s
watercolour—she is otherwise occupied, responding to requests for baksheesh and
protecting herself from the harsh desert environment.

As in the case of Gérôme’s Bonaparte before the Sphinx (Oedipus), Streeton’s Sphinx
presents a challenge to the argument espoused by Nochlin that, in Orientalist painting, the
West was absent from representations of the exotic East.144 Sphinx represents the tourist’s
presence within the Orient, and her experience as outsider. Joining a small group of
Orientalist artists who documented the presence of tourists in their works, Streeton aligned

144 Linda Nochlin wrote, ‘There are never any Europeans in “picturesque” views of the Orient like these
[Gérôme’s Snake Charmer]. Indeed, it might be said that one of the defining features of Orientalist painting is
its dependence for its very existence on a presence that is always an absence: the Western colonial or touristic
presence.’ L. Nochlin, ‘The imaginary Orient’, 1983, p.120
himself with William Simpson and David Roberts, as well as amateur artists such as the Australian Morris Cohen, who created quick, expressive sketches of tourists and European colonials in Cairo.

The British artist and illustrator, William Simpson, produced at least two depictions of tourists at the ancient sites of Egypt: *The Emperor of Austria ascending the Great Pyramid* 1869 (Plate 2.16) and *Heliopolis, as it is* 1878 (Plate 2.17). Working for the *Illustrated London News* from 1866, Simpson’s subjects were mainly related to current events or general interest. *The Emperor of Austria ascending the Great Pyramid* is a pencil and watercolour sketch depicting the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph, being pulled up the face of the Great Pyramid by Bedouin guides. A description of the scene, accompanied by a reproduction of this illustration, appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, 25 December 1869. The climb to the top was a common objective for tourists of both sexes, and was recorded in numerous photographs and postcards. The Emperor was one of a large number of dignitaries who converged on Cairo in November 1869 (the work is dated in pencil ‘24th Nov. 1869’) for the official opening of the Suez Canal by Ismail Pasha.

Simpson moved from reportage to social commentary in the watercolour, *Heliopolis*, which took the often-unruly behaviour of the growing crowds of British tourists as its subject. A woman riding sidesaddle and her male companion are shown racing their donkeys past the Obelisk of Senusert at Al-Matariyyah (Heliopolis). They pay no attention to the site or to the donkey boys motioning for them to slow down. Curator and art historian, Charles Newton, pointed out that they were in defiance of Egyptian hoteliers that often requested tourists not to gallop their mounts. The riders show little concern for the animals, nor do they demonstrate much interest in the monument they have come to see. As in Streeton’s depiction of the privileged lady tourist, they engage only in the present, not stopping to dwell on the past represented by the ruins. These tourists move about the ancient sites with the conceit and confidence of the British Empire on tour, and in their ‘unconscious arrogance’ take little notice of the people and places they have come to experience.

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The modern-day sightseer was also represented in David Roberts’s watercolour, *The Valley of the Kings: entrance to the Tombs of the Kings* 1838 (Plate 2.18). The Scottish artist undertook a series of trips, which included Spain, Tangier, Egypt, Syria and the Holy Land. As a result of his travels, he produced hundreds of detailed drawings and watercolour sketches of mosques, bazaars, and biblical and archaeological sites, and around 50 large oil paintings of Egypt and the Holy Land. After his tour of the Near East in 1838, he published *Views in the Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia*, which included 247 lithographs by Louis Haghe after watercolours by Roberts, and appeared in six volumes between 1842 and 1849. Roberts’s Egyptian work recalls his early career as a theatrical scene painter. His larger images draw the viewer into the experience of looking across an expanse of desert or at intricate carvings on tomb walls. In works such as *The Valley of the Kings*, the armchair traveller was granted a tourist’s vision, while the composition’s fine detail allowed the opportunity to absorb and contemplate the scene set out before them.

In *The Valley of the Kings*, the tourists and their guides are positioned in the foreground of a scene depicting the great archaeological site. They are looking away from the valley, with another group in the middle ground standing at the entrance to a tomb. They focus on themselves, rather than on the majesty of the site that unfurls behind them. There is a similar neglect in *Sphinx*. Echoing many who regretted the number of tourists to be found in Cairo, in the notes that accompanied Roberts’s published lithographs, William Brockedon wrote, ‘now Thebes has become to the English traveller what Rome formerly was, and a visit to the Nile is not an adventure but an excursion’. Tourism eroded the Otherness that it celebrated, bringing the alien, exotic or timeless into an accessible and innocuous present. Roberts’s watercolour quietly details the onset of modernity and the hordes of sightseers that followed. Both artists acknowledged tourism as an integral part of the experience of the Orient—one that could not be completely ignored or erased. Rather than composing an image that paralleled his poetic writings on the Sphinx, or creating something similar to Gérôme’s grand narrative that bound Napoleon to the myth of

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Oedipus, Streeton, like Roberts, painted a scene anchored in his own experience of late nineteenth century Egypt.

An investigation of Orientalist imagery is often assessed in terms of what is represented or misrepresented, with concern for evidence of a ‘staged’ authenticity. The presence of the tourist in Streeton’s Sphinx has an apparent truth, and, to a degree, influences the reading of the Cairo works as documents of a time and space, rather than fictional picturesque vignettes. The following chapters will address both the wonderment and estrangement in Streeton’s images of mosques, bazaars and figures. Not one of Streeton’s other Cairo works returns to the tourist as subject, with the artist instead focusing on the city as a potent vehicle for his aesthetic investigations. Streeton was compelled by the light, colour and sensations of the Orient, but was also aware of not belonging to it, and of being excluded from the internal functioning of Egyptian society and culture.

The Bulletin letter and the ‘Personal narrative’ examined in this chapter form a point of reference, and, at times, a counterpoint, to Streeton’s artistic output. Together with the collection of commercial albumen prints and amateur photographs attributed to the artist, which are discussed in Chapters Three and Five, Streeton’s writings act as a lens through which it is possible to view and analyse his paintings, watercolours and sketches. Though Streeton’s remaining output marginalises the presence of the tourist, he conceded his part within this growing industry. While he was comfortable discussing fellow tourists, and posed alongside travelling companions for a photograph before the Sphinx, through reference and gesture, he asserted his status as an artist above the ‘swarming’ fray.
In recording her first impressions of Cairo, an anonymous female writer for the Australian magazine, *The Court*, in 1898 exclaimed, 'the streets where you see it all! How wonderfully beautiful they are!'\(^1\) Arthur Streeton's *Cairo street* c.1897 (Plate 3.1) captures something akin to this elation, in shimmering patterns of blue and creamy white that vibrate across the surface of the work. The oil painting presents a vivid sunlit vision of a mosque surmounted by three minarets, with a large dome rising above the main wall, and a striped archway leading to an internal garden embellished with the verdant green of trees. At the base of the wall on either side of the large arch, the cloth awnings of an open-air market create watery shadows of brown, grey, purple and blue. The figures have a decorative role within the composition, with daubs of black and white, and high-key blue, orange, red, lemon yellow and green describing the life and colour of the crowd, and leading the viewer's eyes up the canvas and through the gateway. With brevity, Streeton marked out such details as a donkey being ridden by its young handler, a woman veiled in black with a water jar deftly balanced on her head, and a vendor transporting a broad tray piled high with 'flat loaves of unleavened bread'.\(^2\)

*Cairo street* conveys Streeton's attraction to the city's architecture, though an accurate rendering of space and form eluded him. The mosque represented in this painting has previously been identified as either that of El-Shafei in the Southern Cemetery, or one located near the cluster of monuments at the foot of the Citadel that included the mosques of Sultan Hasan and El-Rilai.\(^3\) Both conclusions are problematic, as the scene has been generalised and simplified in its rendering. The dome and façade are stripped of their detail, and the architecture has become fractured, precluding any firm identification of the site. Areas of the mosque's cornices have been reworked, with a semitransparent veil of oil paint

\(^1\) 'Cairo and the Caïrenes', 1898, p.132
\(^2\) Such occupations were often observed by commentators of the period, including artist R. Talbot Kelly, who brought the reader's attention to the donkey boys, drink sellers and 'bread-sellers - men and women, with basket or barrow, [who] hawk their flat loaves of unleavened bread about the street'. R.T. Kelly, *Egypt: painted and described*, 1903, p.19
at the top left wall above the gateway revealing Streeton’s difficulties in resolving the structure. The main dome has also been modified, with the artist creating a more dominant form in modelled strokes of white pigment.

Streeton appears to have included some of the architectural elements from a drawing that was completed in one of the Cairo sketchbooks (Plate 3.2). The view looks north from Bab al-Wazir, and incorporates a cluster of monuments, including the Palace of Alin Aq and the Mosque of Ibrahim Aga Mustahfizan. Founded in 1346 by Amir Shams al-Din Aqsunqur, the latter monument is also known as the ‘Blue Mosque’ due to the blue floral tiles imported from Damascus and Istanbul that line the interior, which were added during the Ottoman restoration in 1692. A minaret positioned on the southwest corner of this mosque dominates the street. Next to the Blue Mosque is the Mosque-Mausoleum of Amir Khayrbak, named after the first governor of Ottoman Egypt, who commissioned its construction in 1502. The main archway on the left side of Cairo street is comparable to a commercial albumen print that was collected by Streeton while in Egypt. Taken by the Armenian photographer, G. Lékégian, the photograph shows the southern gate of the city’s original Fatimid walls, the Bab Zuweila (Plate 3.3). The left side of the arch bears the gate’s red and white stripes, and similar structural angles, with the cloth coverings of stalls set up in the same double-layered manner.

Cairo street almost certainly depicts a fabricated space. Painted after Streeton’s arrival in London, the artist possibly used the sketch and photograph in combination to create the scene. Compositional inconsistencies support this hypothesis, as the artist would not have been in a position to check and realign the features of the buildings and rectify less convincing elements, including the cloth awnings of the market stalls that float unsupported. Though perhaps unintended, the structural flaws in the architectural detail suggest the vibrancy of Egyptian light, as does the vigorous application of colour across the surface of the work. In his Bulletin letter, the artist wrote of getting ‘some of the Cairo brightness in [his] work’, with such an aim perhaps unexpectedly embodied by the
imprecise spatial dynamics that here translate into the gleaming effect of a brilliant winter sun against pale architecture. \(^4\)

By taking the Cairene street as his subject, Streeton shifted his focus from bush scenes and harbour views to an urban environment that he had previously explored in only a limited number of paintings, such as *The Princess Theatre and Burke and Wills’ statue* 1889 (Plate 3.4), *The railway station, Redfern* 1893 (Plate 3.5), and *Circular Quay* c.1893 (Plate 3.6). This interest in architecture is evident in the collection of commercial photographs he amassed during his stay in Egypt, and would continue throughout the following decades as he sought out grand monuments across London, the English countryside, Venice, and later in France in his capacity as an official war artist. Such depictions of the built environment followed the pattern of non-narrative picturesque scenes for which the artist was known.

This chapter will examine Streeton’s visual representations of architecture within the context of a dense urban aesthetic. As a background, the role of photography in documenting urban architecture and archaeological sites will be discussed in relation to works Streeton produced in response to the albumen prints he had collected. In the *Bulletin* letter, Streeton expressed his appreciation for ‘the grand large design of some of the mosques and the fine arches’. \(^5\) He moved around the city with his strong oak sketching stool and sketchbook, capturing in bright lashings of colour the local ‘types’ that peopled the enclosed bazaars of the old city, and the towering forms of minarets that punctuated every turn. The role of local men and women within these scenes was decorative, rather than informative, with little focus on the social and economic roles these people played in the teeming city. Streeton explored the façade of Cairo as a tourist and outsider.

Streeton was fascinated by both religious and secular architecture, including mosques, gateways, and the Citadel, while also turning his attention to a more domestic scene of house builders set high upon a whitewashed wall. The understandings that Streeton gained about the city did not arise from individual buildings or architectural features, but were

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\(^4\) A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’  
\(^5\) A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
drawn from their grouping together to form a whole environment. The oil paintings and watercolours examined in this chapter reveal the artist’s Aestheticist inclinations and a desire to capture the local colour and pattern of these exotic street scenes. Detail and exactitude are surrendered for decorative compositions marked by calligraphic sweeping lines and pooling shadows.

From his lodgings on Sharia Wagh al-birket in the Frankish Azbakiya region, Streeton made his way to the Sharia al-Muski and the Khan al-Khalili, and further south to the Bab Zuweila, Sultan Hasan Mosque and Citadel. The paintings and sketches completed during his stay indicate that he worked primarily in the areas around these inner urban tourist destinations, only venturing as far as the pyramids and Sphinx on other occasions.\(^6\) However, his representations of these public spaces suggest that he did not attach importance to their religious or cultural significance, and instead interpreted them as picturesque sites.\(^7\) Such a focus echoed the attitude of Streeton’s contemporary, Stanley Lane-Poole. In a revealing passage, the English writer proclaimed that ‘[m]any of the buildings of Cairo, especially the later mosques of the Mamlúk period, are exquisitely beautiful, and may be admired as works of art without regard to their history’.\(^8\)

**Souvenir and Source**

Since its invention in 1839, photography has been closely associated with travel. While the technology had become part of the construction of memory for many travellers by the late nineteenth century, it remained largely a studio driven enterprise until the beginning of the twentieth century, by which time the infrastructure surrounding amateur photography had developed extensively.\(^9\) Streeton collected at least 37 commercial albumen photographs of

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\(^6\) While Streeton does complete works depicting subjects outside this area, they were painted from albumen photographs collected by the artist in Cairo.

\(^7\) His engagement with mosques as significant religious sites that were very much a part of contemporary Cairene culture and society was limited. In a colourful family anecdote told by grandson Oliver Streeton, the artist urinated against the side of a mosque, much to the anger of the local people who witnessed the spectacle. O. Streeton, in conversation with E. Kindred, 10 October 2011

\(^8\) S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1902, p.x

\(^9\) N. Micklewright, ‘Orientalism and photography’, in Z. İnankur, R. Lewis, and M. Roberts (eds.), *The poetics and politics of place*, 2011, p.101; ‘At mid-century, photography joined painting and drawing as ways
Egyptian subjects, many of which were architectural studies, while also taking on the role of photographer when in Cairo. Photographs were attractive souvenirs, as the imagery fastened the tourist's experiences to a particular time and space. The practice of viewing and collecting photographs and postcards of distant places was also seen by some as a substitute for travel, and, through travel literature and the press, photographic images of foreign lands became familiar. By the 1860s, professional photographers, such as Francis Frith and Antonio Beato, had begun to supply material to a burgeoning market for souvenirs documenting tourist sites. These sites, such as the Sphinx, pyramids, temples dotted along the Nile, Sultan Hasan Mosque and Citadel, were fast becoming the monuments that defined Egypt in the mind of the late nineteenth century viewer.

Commercial photographs purchased singularly or in complete bound albums documented the sites and monuments tourists viewed in Alexandria and Cairo, or passed as they travelled up the Nile. The images reveal much about how people wished to represent and record their travels. According to Nancy Micklewright, from the large number of photographs available to tourists in local outlets, the selection made was indicative of their response to the country, and would be used to reinforce the memory of the experience.¹⁰ Tourists came to believe they should experience a site based on the specific views depicted in these photographs, and sought out particular aspects to ensure they had experienced it at its best. In the selection of such angles and closed compositions, photographers offered an idealised view, rarely hinting at the growing tourist population or the modernising city that surrounded the site.

Although a growing destination for tourists, Cairo had few photographic studios in the 1860s, with most initially trading in carte de visite portraits of Western sitters or studio-based Eastern 'types'. Changes in the photographic industry followed the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869; the emergence of package tours, such as those offered by Thomas Cook and Sons; and the rise in the popularity of guidebooks, such as Baedeker. The 1870s

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¹⁰ N. Micklewright, *A Victorian traveler in the Middle East: The photography and travel writing of Annie Lady Brassey*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2003, p.76
saw a growth in portrayals of indigenous peoples and scenes of local life. Such images were produced in response to the growing market for tourist souvenirs, but were also employed as study aids for artists, historians and ethnographers. There was a boom in the photography of North African and Middle Eastern subjects from the late 1880s. The commercial centre for the sale of works was in Egypt, though the success of studios relied upon correct placement and price. Most were established in popular tourist hubs, such as Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor and Port Said, and could be found near landmarks, like the Egyptian Museum and Shepheard’s Hotel.

In its 1898 edition, *Baedeker* noted that, at the ‘Shepheard’s and other hotels in Cairo, excellent photographs of Egyptian temples are sold at moderate prices’. The earlier 1885 edition included details on collections of photographs sold in groups of 25 in a ‘small size’, for 25 francs. It also listed photography studios, such as Schoefft on ‘Abbâsiyeh Street, Place Faghalla’; Stromeyer and Heymann; Hr E. Brugsch at the Bulak Museum; ‘Laroche & Co., in the Ezbekiyeh Garden’; and ‘Sebah of Constantinople’, whose work could ‘be purchased at his depot, adjoining the French consulate in the Ezbekiyeh, or at Kaulîmann’s’. The travel guide singled out Sebah for producing the best images of Egyptian landscapes and temples from the numerous photographs available to the tourist.

It has been noted by Jacobson that there was little stylistic change in Orientalist photographs from the 1880s to the 1890s, partly due to the fact that tourists’ views sold in the 1890s were often printed from negatives made in the preceding decades. As there were a greater number of prints produced during this period, there was also a general demise in quality, with processes such as the washing of prints to minimise fading not rigorously maintained. There was also less consideration of composition and lighting, and photographers grew more likely to take immodest photographs as the trade in soft-pornographic imagery increased in popularity. An example of this is *Une danseuse Arabe* (Plate 3.7) by the Schroeder and Cie studio, which was collected by Streeton. The various studios repeated certain scenes and subjects that were easily recognisable and appealing to

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11 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1898, p.226
12 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, pp.234-235
The buyer. These same images of mosque façades and interiors, close-ups of hieroglyphic reliefs, bazaars and genre scenes, and ‘types’ also appear in Streeton’s collection. Purchased as souvenirs, as well as sources for later paintings and watercolours, the subjects point to strong trends in the market for tourist imagery that may have influenced the artist’s output.

The albumen photographs collected by Streeton were popular souvenirs in the late nineteenth century, as they were very thin and could be rolled up for ease of transportation. While the dimensions of the prints vary, a majority fall within the range of the 24 x 30 centimetre print size that became a standard during the period. It is significant that Streeton primarily collected this larger format, as, by the late 1890s, smaller size photographs and postcards were gaining popularity. Streeton also collected at least four photographs in the smaller size, with the printed image of each measuring around 12 x 9.5 centimetres. However, it is likely that the larger prints held a greater appeal for the painter, as they would have been easier to work from.

As with Orientalist artists before him, Streeton purchased photographs as aides-mémoires. In 1875, Jean-Léon Gérôme acquired a selection of photographs from Abdullah Frères, who operated the most important photography studio in Constantinople, while the Austrian artist, Ludwig Deutsch, used the photographs of G. Lékégian to flesh out the backgrounds of his Orientalist paintings. Lékégian had opened a studio opposite the Shepheard’s Hotel on Sharia Kamel at the edge of the Azbakiya Gardens in 1887, and his images of local ‘types’, street activity, markets and architecture appear in works by a number of artists, including the Italian painter, Enrico Tarenghi. Lékégian’s photographs often bore the printed inscription, ‘Photographie Artistique’, as inscribed on Phylaé (Temple of Hathor Aphrodité) in Streeton’s collection, or ‘Atelier Spécial de Peinture’, which indicated that

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14 K. Jacobson, Odalisques & arabesques, 2007, p.70; This trend followed from photographs principally published in Paris that were used for artists as studies for backgrounds and foregrounds known as Étude d’après nature, and were studies of subjects such as clouds and shrubs.
16 K. Jacobson, Odalisques & arabesques, 2007, p.250

103
the photographs were specifically marketed to artists. Like his predecessors, Streeton used photographs to provide details of costume, architecture and decoration, and produced a small number of oil and watercolour paintings based on archaeological and rural sites that appear in his photograph collection.

Streeton did not visit any archaeological sites other than the pyramid complex and Sphinx at Giza, perhaps due to his limited time in the country and lack of adequate funding for extensive excursions. Therefore, it is not surprising that his paintings and watercolours featuring archaeological sites mirror popular tourist imagery. Working from photographs he had collected, including those commercially produced by Maison Bonfils, the Zangaki Brothers and Lékégian, these images focus on two specific sites: the island of Philae, located eight kilometres south of the Asswan Dam in Upper Egypt, and Giza. The works are notable for their absence of Western tourists or picturesque ‘types’. They reveal the artist’s use of ancient architecture as a vehicle for aesthetic investigations into light, the decorative effects of colour and the repetition of form.

In London, in the year following his journey to Cairo, Streeton completed Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae (Plate 3.8). This watercolour was worked up from the photograph, Phylae (Temple of Hathor Aphrodité) (Plate 3.9), which depicted the small temple of Hathor, found immediately north of the Kiosk of Trajan on the eastern side of the island. While approximating the blue of the Nile and brilliance of the white light as it fell across the ruins, Streeton remained largely faithful to the scene. Following the layout of the photograph’s composition, he included elements such as the palm trees that emerge from behind the temple and line the far bank of the river, and he took care to articulate with some detail the hieroglyphics etched into the face of the stone. The fallen column in the foreground of the scene is an addition by the artist—likely a poetic gesture that reinterpreted the form of a large block that lies askew at the bottom left of the photograph.

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17 See K. Jacobson, *Odalisques & arabesques*, 2007, pp.249-250; The photographers who stayed in business after 1900, such as G. Lékégian, had made it through the development of the personal camera and the postcard as they adapted their services. This is important for our study of Streeton as studios began developing tourist’s photographs as a secondary part of their business. See K. Jacobson, *Odalisques & arabesques*, 2007, p.57
During the nineteenth century, the ruins of Philae were a major tourist attraction, and a
favoured subjects for travel-artists, such as David Roberts, who painted *Temple at Philae*
1838, and fellow British artist, Augustus Osborne Lamplough, who produced the
watercolour, *The island of Philae* 1911. Both works depict the unfinished Ptolemaean
Kiosk of Trajan, which has reliefs that feature the Emperor Trajan making offerings to Isis,
Osiris and Horus. In Roman times, Isis was a principal goddess, who was worshipped
throughout the Roman Empire as far as Britain, and at Philae up until 550 AD, when
Emperor Justinian I, who converted the Empire to Christianity, closed the temple. At
Philae, the female Egyptian deities, Mut, Neith, Nekhbet, Sekhment and Hathor, merged
into one goddess: Isis. This began in the New Kingdom (1550–1290 BCE) and was at its
peak in the Greek and Roman period. Though given the title, ‘Temple of Aphrodite,
Phylae’, Streeton’s watercolour depicts a temple that was dedicated to Hathor, as noted in
the title of the photograph, *Phylae (Temple of Hathor Aphrodité).* Represented variously as
a cow, a woman with a cow’s head or ears, or a woman wearing a headdress with a solar
disk between a cow’s horns, Hathor was a sky goddess and the patron of love and joy.
Aphrodite was a principal Greek goddess who embodied many of the same qualities as
Hathor, such as love and beauty.

The use of commercial photographs as an artistic source for paintings was not uncommon
in Orientalist paintings from the second half of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by
*Cairo street* (Plate 3.1) and *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae* (Plate 3.8). Additionally, there is a
clear relationship between a Bonfils albumen photograph collected by Streeton, *Village
Arabe au bord du Nil* (Plate 3.10), and the oil painting, *Old Cairo* c.1898 (Plate 3.11). The
whitewashed mud brick dwellings thatched with palm fronds, and the rising trunks of date
palms that give structure to the photograph, were included in Streeton’s painting, as was a		timber crate, to the left of the composition. Reducing the number of people within the
scene, the artist includes only a seated figure in red and yellow, and a woman in blue
balancing a water jar atop her head as she walks beside a child. Streeton introduced a
number of pottery jars across the foreground, a figure sitting bent over his work in the right
corner, and a domed mosque or mausoleum in the distance.
Streeton also produced a brief pencil drawing, *Colonnades, Philae* n.d. (Plate 3.12), and an oil sketch, *Colonnades, Philae* n.d. (Plate 3.13), based on a Scroeder and Cie photograph of the colonnades that form part of the outer court (Plate 3.14). In all, Streeton collected six photographs of the Philae site, together with one image of Abu Simbel, another of an unidentified petit temple, two of the Sphinx and six close-up photographs of hieroglyphic base reliefs. These photographs were from a range of photographic studios, and, alongside other genre scenes and ‘types’ collected by Streeton, they formed a vision of Egypt for the young Australian artist. The popularity of archaeological scenes may have also influenced his belief that such subjects were marketable and worth pursuing upon arrival in London.

The act of collecting commercial photographs was a means of locating the past and giving it tangibility, even though Streeton never physically visited many of the sites pictured. By contrast, the photographs of monuments and scenes located within the city of Cairo reference sites that were described in the *Bulletin* letter and ‘Personal narrative’, or sketched and painted. These included the Sultan Hasan Mosque, the archway of the Bab Zuweila from Sharia al-Khayamiyya, and the Khan al-Khalili bazaar.

‘Grand large design’: The Mosques of Cairo

Art critic, Frank Myers, wrote in Sydney’s *Lone Hand* that Streeton had ‘worked amongst the mosques, the citadels, the palaces, the many quaint ways of the immemorial town ... He learned much of the drawing, more of color, in studying the old mosque architecture’. Streeton was certainly taken by the visual impact of the many mosques of Cairo. He joined the throng of artists and writers who celebrated the decorative detail and design of these buildings, while sidelining their religious and cultural significance. The British painter, R. Talbot Kelly, observed that in the general absence of two and three dimensional pictorial representations in public spaces, buildings such as mosques ‘formed the only possible monument to departed greatness, and supplied much of the historical record of

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18 F. Myers, ‘Arthur Streeton’, *Lone Hand*, 1 July 1907, p.307
Mohammedan rule in Egypt'. He described their design as ‘simple but dignified’, with an often unadorned façade detailed by windows, ironwork and a battlemented or corniced skyline.

In William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo*, the author devoted an extended passage to describing his impressions of the ‘old mosques’ he visited, exclaiming that ‘these architectural beauties keep the eye charmed’. He expressed astonishment at the variety of architectural forms and their ornamentation—‘the difference in the shapes of the domes, the beautiful fancies and caprices in the form of minarets, which violate the rules of proportion with the most happy daring grace, must have struck every architect who has seen them’. For Thackeray, ‘these fantastic spires, and cupolas, and galleries, excite, amuse, tickle the imagination, so to speak, and perpetually fascinate the eye’.

In Cairo, Islam was expressed as a social religion that relied on a network of structures, including mosques, schools and public fountains, known as sabils. Important religious, intellectual and political sites in the city were often influenced by civic patterns. For example, commercial areas, such as bazaars, needed to be near mosques so that stallholders could partake in their requisite religious duties throughout the day. The American traveller, Constance Fenimore Woolson, recognised that mosques were not ‘exclusively religious’ sites. While they fulfilled their function as places for ablution, prayer and repose, in ‘mosques not often visited by travelers’, she saw ‘men engaged in mending their clothes, and others cooking food with a portable furnace’. Edward Lane similarly wrote of people ‘lounging, chatting together, eating, sleeping, and sometimes spinning or sewing, or engaged in some other simple craft’. He pointed out that these practices, though ‘contrary to precepts of the prophet’, did not indicate irreverence for the space—Cairenes ‘highly respect their mosques’.

19 R.T. Kelly, *Egypt: painted and described*, 1903, p.53
21 W.M. Thackeray, *Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo*, 1846, p.261
22 C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, p.157
In 1897, Streton would have observed the government-led conservation of religious sites and historic monuments that was underway across the city by the late 1890s, with some mosques partially covered in scaffolding. This generated a degree of resentment for preservationists who sought to ‘aestheticize, historicize, and monumentalize’. However, the mosques of Cairo were not relics of the past, but were living religious sites for worship, charity and study. For example, the al-Azhar Mosque housed a theological university of international standing, and, throughout Cairo, schooling in Arabic and the Qu’ran was often undertaken in the kuttabs attached to local mosques. The wider social and religious meanings of mosques thus often differed from the historic or aesthetic values ascribed by tourists and artists.

From the height of the towering minarets, religious officials, known as muezzins, performed the adhan, or call to prayer, five times a day. The minaret was therefore linked to a specific liturgical function, unlike other aspects of the mosque’s design, such as the dome. Along with the muezzins calling in chorus across the city, the architectural structures announced the presence of the mosque, attracting attention from a distance long before the façade of the mosque came into view. This visual effect often played a significant role in the placement of the minaret, as the concern was not just the audibility of the adhan; the prominence of the minaret rising over the city skyline became a way of linking secular spaces and connecting points throughout the city.

Fenimore Woolson observed that the tourist was often more sure of what a mosque should look like before visiting Cairo, as the real experience revealed buildings ‘embedded in other structures, so surrounded and pushed and elbowed by them, that you can see but little of their external form; sometimes a façade painted in stripes is visible, but often the doorway is all’. The majority of mosques in Cairo feature three primary architectural components: the dome, minaret and portal. The well-known mosque of Sultan Hasan, for example, is

25 ‘From the galleries the Muezzin summon the faithful to prayers five times a day, a little after sunset, at night fall, at day break, midday, and afternoon. Most people content themselves with these calls to mark the time, for as the day is divided into two periods of twelve hours each, beginning from sunset, clocks and watches would require to be set daily.’ ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.133
26 C. Fenimore Woolson, Mentone, Cairo and Corfu, 1896, p.163
largely unadorned, with the exception of these three elements. The restricted layout of Cairo’s often narrow, winding streets presented a challenge to mosque architects, who often overcame this problem by locating at least one of the primary motifs so that it could be easily viewed at each stage in the viewer’s approach. The dome and minaret were viewed from a distance, while the portal, or entry to the mosque, was visible at closer range. Perhaps one of the reasons for the popularity of the Sultan Hasan Mosque, and why Streeton chose to depict it on more than one occasion, was the fact that it is free standing, with the tourist able to walk around the structure without interruption.27

In discussing the age of a tree in an article written for The Argus in 1930, Streeton noted that it ‘was stated in the Chepstow guide-book to be 700 years, about the same age as Westminster Abbey or the glorious mosque of Sultan Hasan in Cairo’.28 Built between 1256 and 1363 for Sultan Hasan bin Muhammad bin Qala’oun, the mosque was designed on a monumental scale. At the time of Streeton’s journey, it was at least double the size of the average mosque in Cairo. The location was selected for its visibility, and for the prominence of the building within its surroundings.29 The writer for The Court described ‘the mosque of Sultan Hassan, or the “Superb Mosque”’, 30 as ‘the finest existing monument of Byzantine Arabian architecture’. She provided specific details regarding the structure, reporting that it was built in the ‘form of an irregular pentagon, and is richly decorated with marble mosaics and Cufic inscriptions’.31

During his stay in Cairo, Streeton visited this popular mosque with Walter Brookes Spong. In his most detailed and lyrical description of any site in the Egyptian capital, he recounted his awed response in viewing the exterior of the building, and his experience of walking through its interior spaces. Streeton began his recollection of the morning visit by describing his impression of ‘looking up at the Portal’:

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27 C. Fenimore Woolson, Mentone, Cairo and Corfu, 1896, p.164
30 Also commonly described as the ‘Superb Mosque’. K. Baedeker (ed.), Egypt, 1885, p.260
31 ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.148
ones admiration is instantaneous. One can’t be critical one looks with the wondering eye of a child. It was like nothing I had seen—the stone decoration cut in most exquisite design. This impressive entrance is 60 feet high ... four great walls rise up in their strength & simplicity. [In] the centre the covered fountain where the faithful perform their ablutions, & from the eastern corner the grand minaret circles up ... to where the hawks are soaring in the blue air. [Adjoining] the base of the minaret is the tomb of the Sultan. [Its] massive door of wood and iron bars is 15 feet high, up out of reach are still some exquisite ornaments of inlaid gold.32

The portal described is depicted in *Sultan Hassan Mosque* 1897 (Plate 3.15). The subject was first sketched in pencil and then overlaid with watercolour and white bodycolour. Local Cairenes are represented in gestural marks of blue and green, with daubs of brown to indicate a subject’s head. Their presence in the shallow foreground brings colour and movement to the scene, highlighting the immensity of the structure that towers over them.

Light spills over the face of the building, which advances from shadows of brown, chalky blues and purple. Brief, yet full of loose painterly energy, the small watercolour appears to be a sketch worked up in situ. Streeton approached the portal from the left, fabricating the openness of the streetscape by excluding any details of the surrounding buildings that would have been visible from his position. Conversely, John Frederick Lewis, in a watercolour, *Exterior of the mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo* c.1841/1851 (Plate 3.16), approached the scene from the right, framing it with buildings closing in upon a laneway. Both works convey the elaborate decoration of the portal, which was distinguished by the architect as a feature of the mosque’s design through a slight shift in axis from the façade.

Streeton completed another painting of a portal in *(Mosque doorway)* c.1897 (Plate 3.17).33 The bleached façade of a smaller mosque forms a backdrop to a shadowy figure and large ceramic pot that invite the viewer into a foreground shaded by palm trees.34

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32 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’

33 It is possible the work was mentioned by Streeton in a letter to Barnett: ‘Have made a rough design for the mosque door frame & post it along for you to see—you may suggest some improvement (?)—am afraid it doesn’t look much—it was kind of you to chat with me & think (illeg.) the idea—there’s something in it I’m sure’. A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett letters, in W.H. Gill letters, papers and pictorial material, 14, ML MSS 285, 1896-1939, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

34 The artist R.T. Kelly described ‘doorways, which are trefoil-headed and richly embellished with pendentive carvings, a fitting framework to the handsome metal-work which is so common a feature of the door itself ... You will notice in nearly all cases that the lintel of the door is formed of stone, apparently coloured in black and white designs of a curious pattern. In reality the span is a built structure, the several stones of which are
ground is a study of the social and communal context of such buildings. A man enters the mosque, or madrasa, through the portal, allowing the viewer a glimpse of the light emitted by low hanging lamps. To the man’s left, a boy has assembled himself on a bench, while a veiled woman sits cross-legged on the street below. Against the side of the mosque, an awning projects, signalling the presence of a shop selling an assortment of wares, including lamps and gleaming brass or copper trays, and vessels.

Streeton would have also encountered such activity outside Sultan Hasan; however, in the watercolour, Sultan Hassan Mosque, his focus remains the architecture. In his ‘Personal narrative’, he similarly conveys his interest in the physicality of the building. Upon entering the Sultan Hasan Mosque, he was at pains to convey the feeling of space, and included dimensions of the chamber and ornamental script:

Passing in to the tomb chamber 50 feet square, the four walls decorated by a simple dado of Egyptian characters, the letters of which are 8 to 10 feet in length. This Koran design flows round the four walls large & simple like the handwriting of God.35

His reference to the ‘handwriting of God’ relates to the biblical story of Belshazzar’s feast.36 He continued on, lapsing into a poetic abridgment of Egyptian history:

The tomb or sarcophagus reposes in the centre of the floor, above it a lamp is suspended by a chain which carries ones vision far up through the amber twilight up to the apex of the dome, this serene resting place is lit by windows in the dome, unglazed & perpendicular, they are let open to the pure air & the birds. A complete sense of repose falls over one, & our thoughts revert back to the Nile, the Pharaohs & their civilization, & lastly to Sultan Hassan & his mosque built from stones which were removed from the outer casing of the Cheops Pyramid over seven centuries ago.37

While passing through the impressive interior, Streeton and Spong wore the requisite ‘large slippers without which no christian [sic] may enter’.38 Thackeray noted that these were

35 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
36 ‘Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lamp stand in the royal palace.’, Book of Daniel 5:1-6, Old Testament, The Bible
37 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
38 A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
made of straw.\textsuperscript{39} Fenimore Woolson was similarly required to don the ‘big shuffling slippers’ used to ‘cover the shoes of the Christian infidels, so that they may not touch and defile the matings [sic] reserved for the faithful’.\textsuperscript{40}

In a rare description of the interior spaces of Cairo, Streeton noted that, once within the mosque, ‘the effect of the imposing architecture was such that [he and Spong] conversed in whispers’. Passing ‘into the courtyard about 1/2 an acre open to the sky’, they were freed from this awed spell by the recitations of a group of children who were learning to memorise the Qur’an as part of their studies and by ‘an American family talking loudly’.\textsuperscript{41} Thackeray also encountered tourists during his visit to the mosque, noting ‘[t]here were very few believers in the famous mosque of Sultan Hasan when we visited it, except Moslemish beadle, who was on the look-out for backsheesh, just like his brother officer in an English cathedral’.\textsuperscript{42}

Walter Charles Horsley’s oil painting, \textit{Theological students in the university mosque, el Azhar; Cairo} 1895 (Plate 3.18), is one of the few paintings that depict the presence of the West in Cairo. It also represents an exceptionally rare portrayal of non-Islamic travellers within a mosque. The al-Azhar Mosque housed the first theological institution that was established in Cairo, and at the time that Horsley was painting in Cairo, it was the principle theological university of the Islamic world. It has been a centre for learning since the appointment of 35 scholars in 989, and, during the Ottoman period, students and scholars came from across the Ottoman Empire and Middle East to undertake their studies. In Horsley’s painting, an Anglican clergyman and his wife observe a lesson in Arabic, as an uneasy and somewhat awkward narrative relationship is established between the visitors and the students. Horsley illustrates a paternalistic condescension, though the couple is not disrespectful. He presents an engaging contrast between the Church of England and Islam, permitting the clergyman, as Orientalist, to become part of the picture.

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\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{39} Thackeray was made to wear ‘straw slippers, so as not to pollute the sacred pavement of the place’, before being conducted through the Sultan Hasan mosque. W.M. Thackeray, \textit{Notes on a journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo}, 1846, p.261

\textsuperscript{40} C. Fenimore Woolson, \textit{Mentone, Cairo and Corfu}, 1896, p.157

\textsuperscript{41} A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’; The mosque served as religious school for all Muslim sects, and was a symbol of acceptance and toleration within the city.

\textsuperscript{42} W.M. Thackeray, \textit{Notes on a journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo}, 1846, p.261
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112
Though Streeton provided a written response to his mosque experience, neither he nor his painting companion, Spong, are known to have completed sketches or paintings of any mosque interior. It is possible that this was due to the artists’ inability to secure a painting pass, or firman, which Walter Tyndal records he had to obtain in order to be allowed to paint inside the mosques of Cairo. However, Streeton did purchase at least two photographs of interior scenes.

Across from the south-eastern side of the Sultan Hasan Mosque is the Citadel, set upon the peak of Mokhattam Hill. In *The Citadel* c.1897 (Plate 3.19), Streeton illustrated the Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha, enclosed by the walled fortress, in silhouette against a moonlit sky. Between 1176 and 1183, a Lieutenant of the Ayyubid ruler, Salah al-Din, built the monumental structure as a royal residence and military barracks. Over the course of its long history as the seat of government for the Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman and Khedival rulers of Egypt from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Citadel has been reorganised and enlarged in six major stages. One of Cairo’s most prominent landmarks, it formed a centralised place of rule for Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successors. Until the late nineteenth century, the concentration of authority and power in the citadel was a traditional marker of an Islamic city, later replaced by palaces and the other administrative buildings within a city’s boundaries. In Cairo, the Citadel was displaced as the seat of power in 1874, with the construction of the royal residence that Streeton described as ‘the natty palace built by Imail [sic] Pasha’.

Streeton’s painting sets the high horizon line at the very peak of the hill, where the Mosque of Muhammad Ali is visible within the western boundary of the Citadel. Construction of this mosque began in late 1828, with much of the work finished by 1849—the year in which its patron, Muhammad Ali Pasha, died. The monumentality of the mosque produced

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43 Arthur Streeton may not have needed a firman (official permit) as had painters working in Cairo during the preceding decades, such as David Roberts. Donald Reid suggests that a visiting card may have sufficed, though this changes with the beginning of World War One. D.M. Reid, *Whose pharaohs*, 2002, p.74; Though Tyndale did not specify which mosque he was granted rights to paint, it is unlikely Streeton or Spong purchased one of these tickets as there is no mention of such painting opportunities. W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.34; ‘The mosque now being a “sight” more than a place of worship,’ Tyndale observed, ‘a fee is charged for admittance.’ W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.25
44 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
a recognisable profile that visually dominated the skyline. In Streeton’s painting, the mosque reaches into the inky night, with its grandiose structure flanked by two tall minarets on the western façade, two smaller towers on the eastern façade, and another four towers surrounding the central dome.

The Albanian Muhammad Ali took over the governorship of Ottoman Cairo in 1805, with his descendants in power, even if only nominally, until 1953. Though granted his position by the Ottoman sultan, once in power, he began seeking independence from the Turkish Porte, which he largely achieved. However, his cultural leanings remained Ottoman, which influenced the building of his mosque in the Ottoman fashion, unlike other mosques of the period that included Mamluk architectural motifs. By the end of the nineteenth century, minaret styles had reverted to Mamluk traditions in tandem with the movement towards nationalisation and a modernised Egyptian identity. The presence of two minarets, which in Ottoman mosques indicated the patronage of the sultan, showed Muhammad Ali’s defiance of the Porte by representing himself as equal to the sultan. The minarets were slender versions of the Ottoman style, with elongated conical caps, and were some of the last that retained the Ottoman influence on Cairene architecture.

The Citadel and Mosque of Muhammad Ali are also depicted prominently on the city skyline in Streeton’s panorama of Cairo (Plate 3.20). Though untraced, a reproduction of the painting reveals the artist’s sustained interest in the composition of architectural forms within their urban surrounds. The Ayyubid city wall in the foreground, which was built as a military fortification during the same period as the Citadel, contains the decorative clutter of monuments and minarets rising across the mid-ground of the elongated panel.

‘Graceful towers’

While the Sultan Hasan and Muhammad Ali mosques and their minarets were prominent features of Cairo’s nineteenth century urban landscape, the minarets that frame the Bab

45 What the scene does not picture is the Muhammad Ali Mosque’s façade, decorated with geometric and organic patterns of leaves and vines, and inscriptions from the Qur’an, the hadith and popular prayers.
Zuweila, another of Streeton’s subjects, appear embedded within the urban fabric of the Cairene street. The Bab Zuweila is a gateway located north of the Citadel, at the end of the qasaba that ran along the former Sharia al-Mu’izz li-din Allah. This central qasaba was the ‘commercial lifeline of the whole city’, with various sections named after the products available, such as the al-Khayamiyya, or ‘Street of the Tentmakers’. In two watercolour studies of the Bab Zuweila, Cairo [Bab Zuweila] (Plate 3.21) and Street scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila] (Plate 3.22), Streeton provided a clear visual link between the religious architecture of the city and the social space of the surrounding bazaars. The gateway, or bab—taken from the word ‘door’—was built out of hewn stone, and remains one of three Fatimid gates that currently stand in Cairo. It marks the southern boundary of the original Fatimid city walls, and was once used as a ceremonial entrance for sultans coming down from the fortress on Mokhattam Hill. The gate was named after the Fatimid soldiers from the Berber tribe of Zawila, who were billeted there at the time of the gate’s construction in 1092. During the Ottoman period, the gate was known as the ‘Bab al-Mitwalli’, because the wali—the commander of security for the area—lived nearby.

On the south side of the gate from Sharia Ahmad Mahir are two rounded towers connected by a covered passageway over the large arched opening. To the west, the wall becomes part of the mosque. A small pencil drawing of the subject from this angle was completed in Streeton’s sketchbook of Docklands and London scenes. The canvas board sketchbook, from which the drawing was later removed, was most likely purchased by the artist after his arrival in London in 1897. The drawing was probably based on earlier studies or an untraced photograph, and provides evidence that Streeton returned to the subject of the Bab Zuweila while in London. Ruled up by the artist using a straight edge, the small drawing is

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46 J. Antoniou, Historic Cairo, 1998, p.32
47 J. Antoniou, Historic Cairo, 1998, p.86
48 It also once a place of public executions, with the heads of criminals placed on stakes along the wall, J. Antoniou, Historic Cairo, 1998, p.86
49 No image available. The sketch was brought to the attention of E. Kindred by Christopher Day in 2007. It was originally part of a sketchbook of Docklands and London sketches. H. Day, Sir Arthur Streeton’s sketchbook: Docklands & London 1905, Hobart Press, Hobart, 1994. The sketchbook was taken apart with pages sold individually by Christopher Day Gallery. The sheets measured 25.4 x 41.3cm. The artist removed certain sheets from the book, while loose sheets from other sketchbooks were added.

115
Another pencil drawing, *Grand Cairo* c.1897 (Plate 3.23), is a frontal view of the sunlit façade. It focuses on the architectural forms at the base of the minarets framing the shaded gateway, through which a crowd of veiled women and men wearing turbans and tarbush walk. While Streeton employed quick hatching lines, there is a delicate articulation of the detail on the minarets. However, decoration throughout the composition is simplified and flattened, with the artist taking care in his delineation of light and shade. A similar version of the scene appeared in Streeton's sketchbook (Plate 3.24).

Streeton produced the two watercolours of the Bab Zuweila, *Cairo [Bab Zuweila]* and *Street scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila]*, from the entrance of the Mosque Madrasa of Sultan Mu'ayyad Shaykh. On the left is the dilapidated façade of shops that form the Wikala of Nafisa-al-Bayda—once known as the Sukkaviya, or 'house of sugar'. The minarets, mounted on existing twelfth century towers that form part of the Mosque Madrasa, were built inside the gate between c.1415 and 1421, rather than on the mosque itself. The watercolours clearly demonstrate the primacy of the towers as a feature of this urban streetscape. Inscribed with a contemporaneous signature and the word 'CAIRO', it is possible that *Cairo [Bab Zuweila]* was completed in situ, while *Street scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila]*, signed and faintly inscribed in a cursive hand, was produced in London.

In *Cairo [Bab Zuweila]*, the scene was first sketched in pencil, before watercolour was overlaid. The decorative verticality of the minarets as they tower above a busy market scene is emphasised by the inclusion of a single tree that rises with long-limbed ornamental delicacy. Such picturesque additions do not appear in David Roberts's, *The gate of Cairo, called Bab-el-Mutawellee* 1843 (Plate 3.25), an oil painting after a watercolour of the same scene painted between 1838 and 1839. While Streeton's foreground is dominated by large

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50 This measurement was provided by Christopher Day. The work was viewed by Emma Kindred in 2007 at Christopher Day Gallery, where it was the verso of another drawing that was subsequently framed for sale.
areas of fluid grey and blue shadow, and briefly-described figures in blue, red and yellow, Roberts presented a closely observed scene that is richly textured by the colourful array of black veiled women, seated merchants, bread sellers and heavily laden camels. The finely rendered *mashrabiya* balconies that extend from the face of the buildings along the right side of Roberts’s composition are, in Streeton’s watercolour, reduced to a pattern of repeated verticals that draw the viewer’s eye down to the cloth-covered passageway.

Mamluk minarets, such as those that surmount the Bab Zuweila, were often three tiered, while later Ottoman-style minarets, such as those seen rising from the Mosque of Muhammad Ali, were generally pencil-shaped, with only one balcony. In Cairo, many mosques have more than one minaret, and were almost exclusively founded by monarchs. Early examples were made from fired brick, with stone gradually favoured. The array of minarets reaching up from the colourful displays of busy commerce in Streeton’s scenes feature a variety of profiles. Architecture and design was a vehicle for artistic expression, with buildings, and minarets especially, often decorated with Islamic texts, religious patterns, and organic or geometric designs. As with Fenimore Woolson, who provided extensive detailed descriptions of these ‘graceful towers’, Streeton recognised the potential of the minaret as a decorative device within his aesthetic compositions.51

Architects employed square, rectangular, circular, octagonal, hexagonal and faceted profiles, often varying in successive stories, with minarets changing from a hexagonal to circular design feature for example. The shafts are adorned with decorative devices, such as calligraphic inscriptions, ribs and banding. Linear mouldings, which were used to emphasise the architectural form, often have geometric or arabesque detailing as infill, sometimes framing epigraphic cartouches. Decoration was carved or produced by inlaid, often bichrome, stonework. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was also painted or tiled. In her appreciation of minaret design in Cairo, the writer for *The Court* described a streetscape as ‘closed in by one or more exquisite minarets rising up so brightly, so

51 ‘the rich fretwork of the decorations and soft yellow hue of the stone of which it is constructed add to this beauty. Invariably slender, it decreases in size as it springs towards heaven, carrying lightly with it two or three external galleries, which are supported by stalactites, and ending in a miniature cupola and crescent’. C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, p.164
elegantly, against the blue, clear sky, adorned with galleries, brackets, cornices, or pilasters, yet so perfectly proportioned that the impression you gain is of pure gracefulness and delicacy.\textsuperscript{52}

As in other parts of the Muslim world, the minarets of Cairo feature a finial at the very tip of the shaft, which is most often made from brass or copper. Throughout Cairo, these are almost always topped by a crescent that symbolises the lunar calendar upon which Islamic chronology is based. The points of the crescent often reach together to form a full circle, and Streeton, perhaps not aware of its symbolism, generally reduced the motif to a sphere so that it appeared as a gleaming ball set at the minaret’s tip.\textsuperscript{53} The upper structure at the top of a minaret, upon which the finial rests, came in three main shapes: the domed, helmeted \textit{mabkhara}; the pear shaped ‘bulb’; and the ‘cone’, most often found in Ottoman mosques. Streeton’s \textit{Cairo} (Plate 3.26) is a watercolour inscribed with the date, ‘11 Mch 97’, and the loosely descriptive, ‘Sketch / Cairo’, indicating that it was completed during the trip, but before the arrival of Streeton’s painting companion, Spong. The domed, ribbed \textit{mabkhara} of the central minaret is in the Ayyubid style that was later also employed by the Mamluks. The scene focuses on the dense arrangement of architecture, with the religious building enclosed by the domestic weight of houses, the movement of circling birds, and washing gently flapping in the warm desert wind. The minaret is the only indication of the mosque’s existence, and illustrates the embedded nature of such buildings within the local street.

\textbf{Innumerable Trees: A Street in the European Quarters}

In a small oil painting, \textit{House builders, Cairo} c.1897 (Plate 3.27), a group of six Egyptian workers are viewed high up on a building that is not dissimilar to the domestic structures rendered in \textit{Cairo sketch}. Behind them rises the ghostly whiteness of a distant minaret. The workers’ activity is almost lost in a stark composition dominated by an unadorned wall and two small yellowing trees around which white birds swoop. Across the high horizon of pale

\textsuperscript{\textcopyright 1998, pp.133
\textsuperscript{53} An unusual finial is featured on the mausoleum of Imam Shafi‘i. This bears a boat with a curved bow and stern similar in shape to a medieval oil lamp.
architecture, the workers become a pattern of white and blue, while, below them, a striped awning introduces brief notes of red and yellow. Streeton used a pencil to mark out the subject, which can be seen under the thin veils of creamy white oil paint.54

In this work, Streeton chose to depict light above all else. In 1931, J.S. McDonald wrote that Streeton ‘found the Egyptian colour and key much like our own. He sent back impressions of Cairo which, unlike the work of Europeans in that city, plainly said: “I am familiar with these appearances”’.55 When writing for the 1935 Arthur Streeton catalogue, M. Irwin McDonald similarly described the artist ‘reveling in the white hot glare of the African sunshine … accented with dashes of barbaric colour’.56 Here, more important than costume and architecture, the bright crisp light is captured through a vocabulary of pared back design, the arrangement of pinks and white across the canvas, and the softening greys of shadow. In The manners and customs of the modern Egyptians, Edward Lane provided a detailed description of such domestic construction, noting that the brickwork and flat roofs were often plastered, and were ‘generally without a parapet’.57 The dominance of white throughout the composition is thus also a result of the light filtering over the plastered, or sometimes whitewashed, brickwork that gave the city its distinctive brightness.

Dwellings occupied by middle and upper class Egyptians were generally two or three stories high. With privacy being the primary architectural aim of most residences, larger

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54 Conservation notes record that there are pin holes at the top, bottom and right side of the canvas, as well as a description of a particle of ‘foreign matter’ of a ‘clear hard substance’, that could have been sand that attached to the wet surface of the painting had it been completed in situ. ‘Arab house builders’ was inscribed by the artist on the upper centre left verso of the canvas in pencil. Conservation treatments have revealed irregularly cut edges of canvas, with an extra rectangular tab on the upper left of the work. This suggests that the canvas was cut down before framing. Conservation files, National Gallery of Australia. The verso of the work is inscribed with framing instructions, possibly in the hand of the artist, ‘2/4 dark oak’. It is likely that this note was made in the late 1890s when Streeton was in London, and may refer to the ‘green oak frames’ the artist received from Walter Barnett. A. Streeton, Australian painting and sculpture artist files, National Gallery of Australia


57 ‘The superstructure, the front of which generally projects about two feet, and it supported by corbels or piers, is of brick, and is often plastered. The bricks are burnt, and of a dull red colour. The mortar is generally composed of mud in the proportion of one-half, with a fourth part of lime, and the remaining part of the ashes of straw and rubbish. Hence the unplastered walls of brick are a dirty colour, as if the bricks were unburnt. The roof is flat, and covered in plaster. It is generally without a parapet.’ E.W. Lane, An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, p.6
houses had an enclosed court that could not be viewed from the street due to a winding entry passage. In his notes for the 'Personal narrative', Streeton described 'the high walls of the wealthy Egyptian [whose house] seemed to have but one entrance, a portal overhung perhaps with a purple mass of bougainvillea [and] two guards on duty with splendid uniform and glittering swords'. In describing the 'well kept, bright-faced houses' of the European quarter, Fenimore Woolson also noted the 'purple bougainvillea' that grew in 'glowing' gardens amongst 'giant poinsettas' and 'crimson hibiscus'. Like Streeton, she found delight in the 'Streets shaded by innumerable trees', such as those ornately limbed examples favoured by the artist as decorative devices in *Cairo [Bab Zuweila]*, *House builders, Cairo* and a number of drawings completed in his Cairo sketchbooks.

In *House builders, Cairo*, the central tree leads the eye up to the builders, creating a focal point around the action upon which the viewer's attention rests. The presence of trees most likely situates the scene in the newly developed eastern suburbs of Ismailia or Azbakiya. *Baedeker* noted that in these regions, as part of M. Barillet's project of creating green spaces within the city, 'hundreds of thousands of trees were planted within a few years, and their annually increasing shade [had] converted many of the dusty and stifling roads in and around Cairo into pleasant promenades'. It is possible that the species of trees painted by Streeton was the 'lebbek (Albizzia Lebbek), which has long been erroneously called by travellers the acacia of the Nile (the latter being properly the *sunt* tree).' The effect of blooming flowers and the rich green of trees in the European quarters was an antidote to the modern architecture that had encroached on the region by the 1890s. British artist, Walter Tyndal, responded to the gardens:

> The new suburbs, which are stretching out to the north and south of the modern Cairo, have little to attract one. Architectural studies may be made to learn what to avoid. I avoided them altogether until the blossoming trees, the flowering shrubs, and the gorgeous colour of some of the creepers attracted me from one otherwise villainous house to another. There are scarcely any flowers to be seen in the old parts of the city, so that

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58 A. Streeton, 'Personal narrative'
59 C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, p.151
60 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.76. These trees also appear in a small number of drawings in Cairo sketchbook B. They were likely completed in the Frankish quarters (see Plate 4.2).
the houses and mosques could wait; but not so the blossoming trees in the gardens of the modern quarters.61

The first decade of British occupation saw no significant changes in the direction or rate of progress in terms of urban construction. Civil development primarily followed the pattern set during the reign of Ismail Pasha, with much of the construction that was brought about by British occupation an extension and realisation of plans made during this earlier period.62 Under Ismail, Cairo underwent continued urbanisation—often described as ‘Haussmanisation’—which was linked to population growth that started in the mid-nineteenth century. There was a substantial increase in population between the beginning of British occupation in 1882 and Streeton’s visit in 1897. As Janet Abu-Lughod noted, in Egypt, the increase was from 6.8 million to over 9.7 million, and in Cairo, from 400,000 to 600,000.63 Significantly, a large proportion of this increase came from the immigration of people from Greece, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, France and England, as well as the British military and civilian personnel working for the British administration. This growth was set against the context of an Egyptian cotton boom, which was partly related to a decrease in cotton supply from America due to the Civil War.64 The old parts of Cairo were often limited in space and overcrowded. They were not amenable to Ismail and his successors’ vision of a modern urbanity, nor did they offer suitable accommodation for new residents.65 Demographic growth called for large-scale construction, and led to an expansive period in building trades between 1897 and 1907.66

There was a reorganisation of urban spaces in which a new street system, based on the grid, gained primacy. According to historian, Andre Raymond, perspective and alignment were privileged, with architecture standardised on the basis of Western models.67 Due to a lack

61 W. Tyndale, An artist in Egypt, 1912, p.174
62 This is also in some way due to an indirect influence of the British dating from before their official period of occupation.
63 J. Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 1971, p.115
64 J. Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 1971, p.103
65 A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.308
66 'The peak was reached in 1907 and 1908, when, respectively, 3164 and 3444 building permits were issued, as compared to 1071 in 1879 and 1834 in 1882. In 1907 there were 21744 construction workers in Cairo, triple the number in Alexandria.' A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.322
67 He noted, however, that ‘the local tradition of the rab might well have supplied a native form of group housing.’ See A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.309
of time and money, this development was limited to the area northwest of the old city, giving Cairo the 'façade of urban respectability, while the old city remained largely unaltered'. 68 Foreigners took up long- or short-term residences in these new quarters, enjoying the modern infrastructure developed on European lines. The street plans from Shubra to Ismailiya remained largely unchanged from those set out by Ismail in preparation for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and set the pattern for expansion in the areas around which Streeton stayed during his time in Cairo.69

The 1885 edition of Baedeker noted that this region was:

once the focus of the Oriental traffic of Cairo, but the native industries have gradually to a great extent been absorbed by Europeans. The principal hotels, several of the consulates, numerous cafés, palatial dwelling-houses, handsome shops, and the theatres are situated in this magnificent place, in the centre of which are Pleasure Grounds.70

The 'Pleasure Grounds', also known as the Azbakiya Gardens, formed a major part of the development of green spaces within the city, and were the subject of both Streeton's paintings and writing. 71 They were situated opposite the Bristol Hotel at Azbakiya Place, where Streeton first stayed, and just south of Sharia Wagh al-birket, where he took up rooms after Walter Barnett had departed for London.72 Published in the same year as Streeton’s journey to Cairo, Thomas Cook’s Tourists’ handbook for Egypt described the gardens as the ‘most important public place in Cairo, adjacent to several public or official buildings—the Opera House, the Palace, and the chief banks and hotels’.73 M. Barillet, formerly the chief gardener to the city of Paris, set out the gardens in 1870. Octagonal in shape and originally covering an area of 20.5 acres, tourists and locals alike enjoyed the numerous walks around gardens that contained a variety of rare and beautiful trees and

68 A. Raymond, Cairo, 2000, p.314
69 Janet Abu Laghod observed that 'by the end of the Isma’il period there were only some 200 houses and palaces in the entire “western” zone. The street plans for the new areas, however, provided a framework which remained relatively unchanged throughout the later period of intensive settlement. The British built their colonial city within the lines of the French-style town begun by Isma’il, line which are still easily detected on a map of the contemporary city.' J. Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 1971, p.107
70 K. Baedeker (ed.), Egypt, 1885, p.258-259
71 Variously spelt, Ezbekiya (by Streeton), Ezbekiyeh, Ezbekiyeh and Ezbekyeh.
72 B. Levine and K.M. Jensen, Around the world, 2007, p38
73 Thomas Cook ltd., Cook's tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert, 1897, p.101
shrubs, and the open spaces that were ‘planted with the *Lippia nodiflora*, to supply the place of grass, which does not thrive in this dry climate’.74

In his ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton recalled that the ‘the Ezbeikieh [sic] Gardens, where a fine Egyptian Band are performing’.75 Baedeker noted that this band ‘generally perform[ed] European music, and play[ed] in the Gardens daily from 5 to about 8 p.m.’, and a British military band played two evenings each week during summer. While the gardens ‘afford a delightful promenade’, the guidebook listed other attractions, including ‘several cafés, a theatre, where Italian comedies are performed in summer, a French restaurant, where a good supper is procurable, and a photographer’s studio’.76 Just as the Jardin d’Essai in Algiers drew artist-travellers, such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the Azbakiya represented a ‘colonised’ space that offered the sightseeing Streeton respite from the dusty bazaars of Cairo.77 Although tourists were encouraged to visit the gardens, interestingly, in 1897, Cook commented that ‘European residents of the better class are seldom seen in the garden’.78

The oil painting, *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo c.1897* (Plate 3.28), presents the artist’s response to the decorative possibilities of the wide roads that lead into the rich greenery of the gardens.79 The vertical composition recalls a Japanese aesthetic of flattened space, and a

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74 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.258
75 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
76 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.258
77 ‘The Ezbekeyyah [sic] is the largest and the best known public place in Cairo. Before Mohammed Ali’s time it used to be one large sheet of water during the inundation. He cut a canal round it in order to keep the water from the centre, and laid it out as a garden, with trees planted on the bank of the canal. In Said Pasha’s time it became the favorite locale of low European coffee-shops and beer-houses. In 1867 the present Khedive began transforming it into its present state. The trees were cut down, and the whole of the area filled up to the level of the surrounding ground: a part was then cut up into building-plots, and the remainder enclosed within high railings, and, after many changes of plan, finally laid out as a sort of public garden, after the Continental fashion, with cafes, al fresco theatres, grottoes, ornamental water, &c. The cost of making this garden was totally disproportionate to its size and appearance, and so must be the money spent in keeping it up.’ J. Murray, *Murray’s handbook*, 1875, p.140
78 Thomas Cook ltd., *Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, pp.101-102; Baedeker similarly notes that though ‘the garden was at first visited almost exclusively by Europeans... it is gradually becoming the fashion for Arabs to send their veiled wives and their children to promenade here, while the Europeans of the better classes now treat it with unreasonable neglect.’ K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.258

123
limited colour palette that was favoured by artists of the Nabis—particularly Édouard Vuillard. There is a move away from perspective and shadow, with the focus instead on an elongated pictorial format, abstract elements of colour and line, and decorative motifs. Streeton also employed the high horizon line and unusual viewpoints that had attracted Aestheticists such as Whistler to Japanese prints. An inner arc tracing a fence-line that encloses another garden space echoes the half circle that curves into the left side of the work. It is probable that this is the circular green space that formed a roundabout between the Bristol Hotel and the Azbakiya Gardens, known as Midan al-Khaznedar. This would suggest that the painting was completed from the Bristol Hotel, and, given the elevated viewpoint, may have been painted from a window or a balcony off the artist’s hotel room.

Three leafless trees are set along the first arc, their thin trunks leading up towards knots of playful arabesque. Below them, men and women in blue and black galabiyas and yeleks sit or stand along the curb, while donkeys and their handlers wait ready to respond to the requests of the unseen tourist. Further up the canvas, towards the path leading into the gardens, people are marked out in yellow, red and pink, with the heads of men briefly embellished with daubs of red and white to indicate the common headdress of a red tarbush around which a white turban is wrapped. The painting creates a visual analogue to Douglas Sladen’s observations that ‘[r]eally fine impressions of native life may be made all round the Ezbekiya Gardens, when the cabmen and donkey-boys and the stalls frequented by them are to be found’.  

In a photograph attributed to Streeton (Plate 3.29), the fence on the left side of the image most likely marks the boundary of the Midan el-Khaznedar, which is seen on the left side of The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo. In the surrounding street, men and women, who are dressed in both Eastern and Western clothing, walk past a street vendor’s cart and a victoria cab, possibly of the kind hired by Streeton when he embarked on his journeys around the city. Streeton has photographed the varied social and cultural identities within the Frankish quarter, and comparison of the two representations highlights the degree to which he homogenised the region and its population in his painting. A photograph taken nearby

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80 D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.352
shows a camel with its back piled high with clover hay, set against a backdrop of European-style architecture (Plate 3.30). In these photographs, Streeton captured contrasts between the old and new by recording the changes in the urban landscape of Cairo that stemmed from modernisations enacted during the nineteenth century by Ismail Pasha and later by the British. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the wide boulevards of the Azbakiya region that reveal the dusty tracks of people, donkeys and horse-drawn victorias. The photographs also illustrate aspects of contemporary commerce not conveyed in Streeton’s paintings of bazaars.

In another photograph, Streeton focuses on a view of a street from an elevated vantage point (Plate 3.31). The building on the right is the Bristol Hotel, where Streeton stayed during his first week in Cairo, and the arc of Midan el-Khaznedar (see Map 2) can be seen at the very left edge of the image. It was from this unseen area at street level that Streeton took the two photographs mentioned above, with the photograph of the camel showing the Italianate façade of the Bristol Hotel in the background. The elevated view, and the angle at which the photograph was taken, suggests that Streeton was standing in one of the top floor rooms or on one of the large balconies at the Khedivial Hotel. From a similar elevation to the aspect captured in The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo, Streeton angled the camera a little further across to the west. While this distanced vantage point separated the artist and his subject, the scenes from the street indicate a more direct engagement. However, such photographs taken from a hotel window register the specificity of a traveller’s point of view. They are inscribed with something of the individual’s experience and the intimacy of the creator’s private space.

It is likely that Streeton borrowed a camera that belonged to his travelling companion, the noted professional photographer, Barnett, whom he had met in 1890. The camera was used to take at least eight photographs of the regions surrounding the Azbakiya Gardens and the bazaar district near the Bab Zuweila. This was not the first time Streeton had attempted photography. In 1890, he wrote to Roberts, ‘I have been having a go at photography

81 Streeton observed that ‘[t]here is an unusual brilliance in the morning air of Cairo and a distinctive and pleasant fragrance, perhaps resulting from mignonette, clover piled on camel’s backs, coffee, incense and other flavours of the Orient’ A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
lately—my brother in law has a 1/2 plate camera—most interesting’. It might be assumed that the photographs were taken in the first week that Streeton spent in Cairo, while the Barneffs were still in the city, and Streeton was staying at the Bristol Hotel. In a letter written to his friend between June and October 1897, Streeton explained that something had happened to the camera and that he would need to provide Barnett with compensation in the form of a painting. This suggests that the camera had been left with Streeton after the Barnettts had left Cairo.

While tourists embraced the trade in commercial photography, the introduction of the first Kodak box camera in 1888 meant that travellers to Egypt could produce their own souvenirs. By the time of Streeton’s arrival in Cairo, a tourist-driven market for materials and developing services supported the rise of amateur photography. For those tourists wishing to take photographs themselves, Baedeker advised its readers that photographic materials, including ‘dry-plates, films, etc. [could] be obtained in Cairo’, though ‘it is preferable to bring a good stock carefully packed from home, taking care to attend the customs examination in person. The plates should not be more than 8 by 10 inches at the largest’. Baedeker also noted that Heyman and Co., located next to the Shepheard’s Hotel, was an agent for the Eastman Kodak Company, and supplied film and developed plates.

The technology developed by Kodak also made it easier for commercial photographers to work without the cumbersome equipment used in the production of the albumen prints that Streeton had collected. A majority of the non-commercial photographs in the Streeton Archive were inscribed with ‘AS’ or ‘AS / Cairo’ on the verso in pencil, and while it is possible that they were taken by Barnett during the week he spent with Streeton in Cairo,

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82 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, ‘Tuesday evening’, 16 September 1890, CYREEL 275, A2478, 13, 14, 18-22, Tom Roberts papers, Mitchell Library
84 In 1888 George Eastman introduced Kodak a portable roll-film camera pre-loaded with a 100-exposure roll of film. Once the film had been used, the camera was sent back to Rochester, New York, where the film was developed and a new roll of film could be loaded into the camera. Other cameras followed, including a folding model, the Autographic and the Brownie. These types of cameras were easy to use, and proved popular with amateur photographers such as Streeton.
85 K. Baedeker, Egypt, 1898, p.xviii
86 K. Baedeker, Egypt, 1898, pp.27-28
their 'tourist snap' sensibility suggests that they were produced by the amateur Streeton. This is perhaps most evident in the two street scenes with the Bab Zuweila in the background (Plates 3.32 and 3.33), which are both askew and have areas of blurred shadow in the foreground. The photograph of a drink seller (Plate 3.34) reveals a similarly unskilled handling of the camera, with the subject's head cropped just above his eyes. These 'tourist snaps' form part of a larger framework that saw the development of photography in private and commercial sectors, with the medium becoming a significant record, as source and souvenir, for both artists and travellers by the time Streeton was working in Cairo.87

Late nineteenth century colonialism was closely related to such visual technologies, with Streeton’s photographs, by extension, communicating aspects of a colonial encounter. Alongside more tradition mediums, such as oil paintings, watercolours and drawings, they were effectively another way of describing and assigning values and boundaries through representation. Through the lens, Streeton documented his experience of social and cultural identity, situating the subject as ‘Other’. The photographs allowed the artist to attain a sense of objectivity—what he may have considered to be a ‘truth’—that could stand for his experience of the Orient. However, accurately assessing Streeton’s intentions in his amateur photographs is difficult, primarily due to the fact that he was relatively new to the medium, and was using the camera in the technically challenging context of a busy street.88

Unlike paintings and sketches, where he had more control over the outcome of an image and could interact with the surface of the work directly, in the Cairo photographs, Streeton was dealing with a mechanised instrument that relied on light, time, chemical stability and various other factors. It is also difficult to determine whether his selected views were intended exactly as they appear, or whether certain angles or subjects were affected by his positioning at a window or other such vantage point. In the paintings and sketches, by contrast, it is possible to more confidently draw conclusions regarding what was

87 See D.M. Reid, Whose pharaohs?, 2002, p.89
88 ‘Blurred figures, obtrusive foregrounds, apparently uninteresting views and total failures [were] especially characteristic of early photographs of all sorts’, and further that ‘[t]ravel photography was particularly venerable to such errors, the conditions for taking and processing pictures being far from optimum.’ J. Ballerini, ‘Orientalist Photography and Its “Mistaken” Pictures’, H. Krawitz, (ed.), Picturing the Middle East: a hundred years of European Orientalism, A symposium, Dahesh Museum, New York, 1996, p.15
deliberately included or excluded. However, as a photographer, Streeton did make
decisions regarding the primary subject of the composition, just as he did in his paintings.
This indicates that he showed interest in documenting the areas surrounding his
accommodation in Azbakiya and around the popular bazaars, producing un-posed images
of the people and architecture alongside the posed drink seller as a ‘type’.

Through an examination of the photographs both taken and collected by Streeton, and the
paintings, watercolours and sketches he completed of the architectural monuments located
across the Egyptian city, this chapter has demonstrated the artist’s fascination with the
decorative and picturesque. Streeton’s admiration of ‘the grand large design’ of the
mosques and gateways of Cairo saw him approach religious, secular and domestic
architecture with an Aestheticist’s eye. Restricted from the intimate interiors of the home
or harem, he focused his energies on the façade of the city and the patterns of a colourful
crowd that moved through dusty streets and passageways. The following chapter focuses on
a particular and highly significant aspect of the Cairene street: the bazaar. While continuing
an approach established in his architectural studies, Streeton’s homogeneous portrayals of
Cairo’s markets were at odds with the varied economic and social function of the spaces in
which he moved. By presenting the city as timeless and unchanging, the artist’s visual
constructs were removed from the everyday realities of British occupation, modernity and
contemporary commerce.

89 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, ‘Red page’
Oh, it's indescribable: food spices, and queer things one never dreams of. On one side an Arab bare to the waist pounds spice with a heavy pestle and a mortar of solid stone four feet high and weighing half a ton. Next to him a shop full of beautiful lamps for mosques ... Then the perfume bazaar, and the wily merchants who sit in their booths two yards square and read, then hand the rarest attar of roses from Persia, &c. Then the slipper bazaar—thousands and thousands of red and buff and lemon-colored slippers hanging like an exhibition of scarlet herring or capsicums. And the bronze and brass and silver work bazaars!—and the jewellery bazaar each little shanty with its great iron safe. Then the Persian carpets and the silk wares, and the silk carpets!

Arthur Streeton’s Bulletin letter reveals his enthusiasm for the rich colours and smells of the Cairene bazaar. These market spaces, in their various forms, provided extensive material for artists. The notion of the bazaar as a site of unrivalled exoticism for the painter became a familiar evocation in travel journals and novels of the period. In Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo, William Makepeace Thackeray wrote:

There is a fortune to be made for painters in Cairo, and materials for a whole academy of them ... There is a picture in every street, and at every bazaar stall ... should any artist (by some rare occurrence) read this, who has leisure, and wants to break new ground, let him take heart, and try winter in Cairo, where there is the finest climate and the best subjects for his pencil.

For Streeton, as for other Orientalist artist-travellers, including John Frederick Lewis, Jean-Leon Gérôme and Walter Tyndale, these sites contained a bountiful supply of picturesque subjects. However, such exotic visions often belied the reality of a country operating under British administration, modernisation and mass tourism.

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1 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
2 The British artist R. Talbot Kelly, described the ‘Gay saddlery, the glitter of the coppersmith’s display, and the ever-lively native café ... forming pictures calculated to drive the artist to despair’. R.T. Kelly, Egypt: painted and described, 1903, p.15; Walter Tyndal wrote that the bazaars were ‘full of human as well as pictorial interest. Various combinations of colour ... leave ample scope for the painter to arrange his scheme.’ W. Tyndale, An artist in Egypt, 1912, p.3
3 W.M. Thackeray, Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo, 1846, p.279
Various painters, writers and tourists eschewed any signs of modernity or Europeanisation within the Egyptian capital, thereby contributing to the fabled image of the exotic Orient. Douglas Sladen expressed this idea most clearly when he proposed that if the tourist ‘will shut his eyes to the few fellow-travellers and Levantine shopkeepers whom he passes, the scenes of the Arabian Nights are before him’. To underscore the extent to which Streeton engaged with this idealised aesthetic vision, this chapter identifies the bazaars Streeton represented, and contrasts his exotic vision of these urban markets with their local cultural significance as sites of economic and social interaction. By focusing on Islamic architecture, men and women in traditional dress, and picturesque scenes of the Nile, Streeton imaged a timeless Oriental city, seemingly uncorrupted by colonial contact.

By the late nineteenth century, the region surrounding the Azbakiya Gardens down to the Ismailia quarter was understood by contemporary writers, tourists, and, later, historians as ‘Westernised’ or ‘Europeanised’. In contrast, the areas encompassing the majority of Cairo’s bazaars remained ‘Eastern’ and ‘Oriental’. The comparable comfort and ease of shopping in the European quarters—near Streeton’s accommodation in the Azbakiya—became a significant incentive for tourists who sought to satisfy their consumer desires in familiar surrounds. Offering an explanation for this trend, Walter Tyndale maintained that European travellers did not have the time or patience to partake in the often-extended drama of bargaining. Instead, they preferred to buy goods with set prices and quality markers. He recorded the opinion of one of the local merchants working in the Khan al-Khalili:

An old acquaintance recognises me and invites us to sit down ... I ask how business is, and he tells me that it is Allah’s will that things are not what they used to be. ‘Large rival stores now exist in the modern parts of Cairo and are injuring the trade of the Khan

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5 Discussing the ‘Arabian Bazaars’, Baedeker stated that ‘strangers are to be dissuaded from making purchases in these bazaars. Many so-called Oriental articles are manufactured in Europe and are obtained at home equally genuine and much cheaper. The prices demanded by the dealers for ‘antiques’ are absurd, though unfortunately many travellers are foolish enough to pay them, in spite of the notorious fact that most of the articles are forgeries.’ K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1898, p.28
Khalil.’ He might have added that prices are more fixed in these new stores and that visitors have not the time to spend hours over a purchase.\footnote{W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.8. Such accounts of how merchants and traders experienced the bazaars are rare, with the communications of travellers and colonists forming a majority of the primary sources available. European impartations of a local’s attitudes are also uncommon, so this account stands as an important acknowledgment of the harm done to tradition trade by imported standards of contemporary commerce.}

However, the Eastern bazaars did offer the Western tourist an opportunity to dabble in the exotic. Stanley Lane-Poole observed that ‘It is in the “bazars [sic]” that one feels most the shock of contact with the unfamiliar’:\footnote{S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1902, p.26}

You may get hotel life, club life, polo and tennis, and even golf, excellently at Cairo—the European Cairo—but these things are common to all ‘winter resorts’. In the ‘bazars’, among the people, you get something that the Isma’iliya quarter cannot give, that no other place can quite rival, something that painters love and that kindles the imagination. After all, the most interesting things are always the unfamiliar, the first plunge into Egypt is a revelation of fresh ideas, new tones of colour, and the pungent odours of a strange native life.\footnote{In his marking of the difference between the ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ sides of Cairo, Stanley Lane-Poole wrote that ‘As soon as you have turned you back on the European suburb and the hotel region, and escaped from the glass shop fronts and Greek dealers of the Musky, the real Eastern city begins to dominate you. It is quite easy to lose oneself in the quaint old streets of Muslim Cairo when only an occasional passer-by reminds one that Europe is at the gates. A large part of Cairo is very little spoilt: it is still in a great degree the city of Arabian Nights.’ S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1902, p.4}

The status of the bazaar as a tourist attraction belies this distinction between the familiar and the foreign. As such, Western travellers considered the bazaars to be largely innocuous and unthreatening, though still fascinating for their exoticism.\footnote{J. L. Abu-Lughod, ‘The Islamic city: historic myth, Islamic essence, and contemporary relevance’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, May, 1987, pp.155-176; C. Geertz, ‘The}
Cairo’s markets, these divisions signalled distinct socio-cultural and economic environments.

By comparing the different spaces of the bazaar that Streeton represented through his writing, painting and photography, this chapter moves from the glass-fronted shops of Sharia al-Muski, which sold European wares, to the permanent suqs, khans and periodic open-air maydans on the eastern side of the city.¹⁰ Tourists strolling through Cairo’s Westernised streets and markets, typified by the main thoroughfare of Sharia al-Muski, would have noticed clear differences in structure and the types of goods available when they reached the suqs and khans, which were often laid out in the same way as a medieval trading centre, while still organised in linear form. These markets were generally grouped together by trade, such as the Suq al-Nahhaseen, also known as the Bazaar of the Coppersmiths.

Traders in the traditional market spaces were often positioned in relation to their function. For example, maydens for fresh produce were located near the Bab al-Futuh and Bab al-Nasr—two of the three remaining main gates of the city, where peasants from surrounding villages could easily deliver fruit and vegetables for sale. A covered bazaar selling similar produce existed opposite the other main gate, the Bab Zuweila, where Lane-Poole observed that there was a

fruit-market where the produce of the gardens round Cairo was sold; it was roofed over, like most of the bazaars in former days, to keep off the rays of the sun, and the fruit, which smelt like the gardens of Paradise, was tastefully arranged and decorated with flowers and sweet herbs.¹¹

¹⁰ It is also possible to break the bazaar spaces down in another way, with primary concern assigned to the differences in the formalised structure of the space. In this approach there are four categories. There are the suqs, which are arcaded streets lined with shops; qaysariyas, which are planned developments based on Byzantine halls; maydans, or open-air market places, which feature a number of different trades; and khans, or trading establishments, which primarily accommodate merchants and their goods.

¹¹ S. Lane Poole, The story of Cairo, 1918, p.270

Itinerant vendors also undertook the sale of fruit and vegetables, though Baedeker noted ‘to Europeans [such goods] usually look very uninviting’. In each form of bazaar, the social and physical orientation varied. The permanent bazaar passages in the suqs and khans were often narrow, covered over with matting or planks that were supported by beams stretching across the street, creating a canopy of shade. Shops opened onto the street, and in front of each was often a mastaba, from which the merchant observed the passing crowd, inviting customers to sit and share cigarettes, tea, or a water pipe, known as a shisha, while they bargained. By contrast, maydens were set up in open spaces.

**Sharia al-Muski and Surrounds**

Streeton’s letters and ‘Personal narrative’ indicate that the artist spent some time working in the region surrounding Sharia al-Muski. In 1897, the market district that was laid out along this major road, closest to the Azbakiya region, was lined with glass-fronted shops selling imported European goods, primarily to wealthier Cairenes, tourists and Europeans living in Cairo (see Map 2). Lane-Poole wrote of the ‘eminently European shops of Ezbeikiya [that] display their plate-glass windows and the Greek, Italian, and Levantine rogues who stand smoking within, ready to cheat us’. He lamented that he would have to go ‘some distance before [he could] find the picturesque cupboard-shop of the East, with its sedate occupant and its queer little stock in trade’. A stereograph of the thoroughfare, published in America by the Keystone View Company in 1908 (Plate 4.1) depicts the glass façades of the Westernised buildings Lane-Poole described, together with horse-drawn carriages and figures in European-style dress. According to Baedeker, by the late 1880s:

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12 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1898, p.36
14 ‘There being little or no sense of public domain, most inhabitants did not hesitate to encroach upon public thoroughfares with their personal properties, shops and buildings. A common problem was the mastaba (stone benches) that stood before shops. While these served to facilitate the conduct of business with clients and could prove useful as barricades in time of trouble, they seriously impeded the way.’ S.J. Staffa, *Conquest and fusion*, 1977, p.264; ‘These shops are all open towards the street, and about six feet wide; in front of each is a “mastaba,” or seat, on which, also, the shopkeeper offers his prayers at appointed hours’. ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.148
15 The difference between the merchants in the Europeanised shops along Sharia al-Muski and those of the more traditional bazaars in the 1890s is articulated by Stanley Lane-Poole: S. Lane-Poole, *Cairo*, 1898, p.283
This street, the beginning of which has frequently been sketched by European artists, has now to a great extent lost its Oriental characteristics, but it still presents many picturesque and attractive features ... Among the shops, many of which present quite a European exterior, are numerous tobacco and cigar stores, emporiums of clothing, and stalls of fez-makers, with the peculiarly shaped iron they use in their trade.16

Janet Abu-Lughod pointed out that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the region developed as the ‘first Westernised commercial zone’, with the establishment of shops by European merchants encouraged by the ‘burgeoning taste among the elite for goods of Western manufacture’ and the protection of Muhammad Ali Pasha.17 Though this primary roadway would have been highly accessible for Streeton, the actual Muski streetscape of modern glass-fronted shops and European merchants does not appear in any of his writings or paintings. However, it is possible the region was depicted in a small number of drawings that appear in his Cairo sketchbooks. These feature trees rising up between open urban spaces similar to that which appears in the Keystone View Company stereograph (see Plate 4.2).

In contrast to the modernising Sharia al-Muski, Streeton’s experience of what he terms ‘the Mousky’ was full of Oriental detail and exotic sensations. In a chapter of his ‘Personal narrative’, entitled ‘With Signora Bozzetti’, Streeton wrote, ‘There is a feeling of novelty sketching at a shop front in the Mousky; crowds of Arabs packed around’.18 In the same chapter, he visits the area a second time:

Through many strange byways I walked till I entered the Mousky, that narrow and busy thoroughfare of native stalls, of surprising light and shade, strange sights and sounds, and the atmosphere heavy with a blend of all the spices and perfumes of the East.19

His experience of the precinct is at odds with the image of Sharia al-Muski presented by Lane-Poole and Baedeker, which suggests that Streeton was not actually on that main

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16 K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.253; R.T. Kelly similarly maintained that ‘many streets, such as the Muski, have during the last few years lost much of their Eastern character ... In the Muski, the “caboot” or wooden roof which formerly spanned the streets has been removed, and the small but attractive native shops, with their old-worlds superstructure, have to a great extent been replaced by large plate-glass windows and modern fronts. The streets have practically been rebuilt, and the Muski of long ago is no more.’ R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, pp.23-24

17 J. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 1971, pp.84, 96

18 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’

19 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
street, but in one of the laneways that made up either the ‘Muski bazaar’, which led off the main street in a dense looping mall, or the Suq al-Attarin. Taking into account Streeton’s description of the area as a busy thoroughfare, and his evocation of an ‘atmosphere heavy with a blend of all the spices and perfumes of the East’, it is perhaps more likely that the artist was actually in the latter. Baedeker provided a brief description of this market:

Near the end of [Sharia al-Muski], a little before its junction with the broader street El-Ghurýeh, we observe on the right the Sûk el-'Attârîn, or spice-market, which is easily distinguished by its aromatic odours. The perfumes of Arabia, genuine and adulterated, wax-candles, and drugs are the chief commodities here. Attar of roses is sold by weight at high prices. The small bottles into which it is put have very narrow necks, through which one drop at a time only can pass. Customers should of course see that the bottles are accurately weighed beforehand.

Both of these smaller, more traditional bazaar spaces would have held more interest for an artist seeking picturesque detail than the Europeanised Sharia al-Muski.

In the letter published in the Bulletin, written from ‘9 Waghe-el birghet’, Streeton conveyed his fascination with the bazaars of Cairo: ‘Tis a wonderful land this Egypt! I’ve been time after time through the slipper, brass and bronze, jewellery, silks, ring, curio bazaars—and yesterday with another artist I did a quick sketch of a spice bazaar’. The watercolour, The spice market, Cairo 1897 (Plate 4.3), is likely the ‘quick sketch’ cited in this passage. The scene was originally drawn up in pencil, over which watercolour pigment was applied freely and vigorously. Framed by overhanging balconies and cloth awnings that provide shade for the people who inhabit the bazaar, the pale pools of sunlight in the foreground create a vertical passageway that draws the viewer’s focus up towards an intricately fashioned minaret. On the top level of the minaret, the artist momentarily disturbs the perspective in the scene, with the barriers rising up to the left and right, rather than turning down.

20 K. Baedeker (ed.), Egypt, 1898, p.41
21 K. Baedeker (ed.), Egypt, 1885, p.253
22 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
Mosques, particularly their minarets, were often used as geographical markers. They were a way for people to make sense of the many small, winding and intersecting streets and laneways that threaded through the city. This is clearly articulated in *The spice market, Cairo*, where the minaret that forms part of the Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay funerary complex rises above Sharia al-Muizz, south of Barsbay’s madrasa, near the markets of the Khan al-Khalili district. The minaret has a square base with a *mugarnas* cornice, which is an architectural ornament consisting of a succession of tiered niches, often likened to stalactites. Above this is set a circular second tier and *mabkhara*, or minaret finial. This detailing is clearly articulated in Streeton’s watercolour. Mamluk Sultan Al-Ashraf Sayf-ad-Din Barsbay commissioned the construction of the foundations of this mosque in 1425. It has a cruciform four-iwan design, and was dedicated to Sufis who wished to study the four rites of Islamic law according to a traditional madrasa structure. Found on the corner of the Sharia al-Muski and Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah, Streeton’s view is from the Suq al-Attarin or a nearby laneway.

Although the scene is completed with Eastern details, such as hanging brass lamps and *mashrabiya*, its colour comes from the *galabiyas* and turbans worn by the men who populate the mid-ground of the image. By employing a vertical composition, Streeton highlights the minaret’s visual dominance within the urban landscape, defining this archetypal Cairene street as a ‘vertiginous optic’, in line with images produced by contemporaneous photographers and painters who captured the hustle and bustle of narrow laneways through views that ‘plunge up or down’.

The light in the foreground also has the effect of elongating this central motif, making it seem larger and more imposing. The architectural forms on either side of the composition are loosely suggested, with the artist allowing the watery shadows of purple and brown to take on a physical presence and obscure such details as a man in a yellow *galabiya* sitting upon a wooden stool on the left side of the foreground.

When writing of the ‘sketch of a spice bazaar’ that he made in the company of ‘another artist’, Streeton referred to Walter Brookes Spong, who was specifically named in

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23 R. Benjamin, *Orientalist aesthetics*, 2003, p.40
Streeton’s account of purchasing perfume from a shop in the ‘Mousky Bazaar’ relayed in the introduction of his ‘Personal narrative’. The passage narrates Streeton’s interaction with a perfume merchant, and suggests Spong’s failed grasp of the etiquette of commercial transactions in the bazaar, when he experiences the revenge of the shop owner he has slighted:

At a small shop in the Mousky Bazaar, Mr. Spong, the scene painter, and I were being entertained by a perfume dealer with coffee and cigarettes, his alluring goods were ranged round him all within an arms reach, as he sat upon his five square feet of carpet. The floor of the shop was raised three feet from the Mousky street on which it projected, and the Mousky embowered in dark canopies resembled a shadowy fragrant lane. The perfume dealer was selling me half a crown’s worth of Attar of Roses, and before pouring precious drops into a small phial he showed the differences between the true and the false perfume, by burning some of each on cigarette papers. This demonstration was probably prompted by Mr. Spong’s whispered doubts of the honesty of the Arabs, whilst he was sipping our host’s coffee. But Spong, the scene painter, also purchased a half crown bottle of Attar of Roses, and upon opening our treasures at the hotel, my bottle perfumed the room, while the bottle of Spong, the unbeliever, contained no perfume of any kind.

The artist returned to this scene in a newspaper article he penned for The Argus in 1931, on this occasion telling the story in the third person. These accounts of the artists’ negotiations not only demonstrate an engagement with the society and commerce of the bazaars, but also vividly evoke the figures that both would paint. Streeton observes, with some self-satisfaction, the consequences of Spong’s discourtesy. Here, the merchant is not just an element of the picturesque, but an active agent in his environment, punishing Spong for his insult. It is also significant, however, that Streeton’s narration hints at the way in which the perfume dealer acted out a common Orientalist stereotype of the untrustworthy Oriental merchant. In his book, Egypt and the English, written at the turn of the twentieth century,

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24 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
25 A. Streeton, ‘Introduction’
26 ‘A painter and his friend were sipping coffee in the Mouski, Cairo; their host, a dealer in perfume, was selling the painter 10 piastres worth of attar of roses, his friend whispered his doubts of the honesty of Arabs. The Arab dealer put a touch of true and of false attar upon two cigarette papers and burnt them to explain the difference. Then the friend also bought a small phial of attar. Afterwards at the hotel the painter opened his phial; it perfumed the room. Then the friend opened his phial, which was devoid of perfume of any kind.’ A. Streeton, ‘Smells! Records of a sensitive organ’, The Argus, 2 May 1931, p.6
27 Derek Gregory has noted how merchants ‘had indeed learned ‘how to manage a Howajji [foreigner]’’. Often skilled at understanding the relative value of different coin denominations such as rupees, pounds, dollars, and reyals, the Cairene merchants were acute participants in contemporary commerce of the Cairo market place and tourist industry. D. Gregory, ‘Scripting Egypt’, 1999, p.124
Sladen similarly commented on the ‘crafty scent-dealer’ who ‘keeps his scents in gilded bottles, from which he with-draws the stopper to wipe it on your sleeve and bid you sniff. It is always his “most precious essence” which you choose, worth a shilling a drop’. Thus, although the merchant is offered an active role in Streeton’s representation of the Eastern bazaar, his characterisation is one that conforms to Western prejudices.

While Streeton found in ‘the Mousky’ all the splendours of the East, he removed from his representations any suggestion of the precinct as a popular tourist destination that was fast being transformed through modernisation, and was home to numerous Greek and Levantine merchants selling European goods. His decision to paint only the exotic in the popular tourist areas around the main bazaars, public mosques and Citadel indicates a selective representation of such spaces. Though it was rare for artists to include images of tourists or the British colonial presence in their depictions of bazaars and streetscapes, William Holman Hunt’s *A street scene in Cairo: the lantern-maker’s courtship* 1854–1857, 1860–1861 (Plate 4.4) and Walter Charles Horsley’s *Great Britain in Egypt* 1886 (Plate 4.5) are notable exceptions.

In Hunt’s oil painting, a European gentleman in a stovepipe hat riding a donkey through a crowded bazaar heightens the sense of distance between cultures. As he takes part in this familiar tourist activity, the narrative of courtship unfolding in the foreground would have appeared timeless and foreign to his audience. Hunt’s inclusion of this Western signifier anchors the scene in the artist’s present, and acts as a confirmation of his experience. In *Great Britain in Egypt*, Horsley’s British soldiers are, by comparison, the central focus of the café scene. The formality of the soldiers presents a contrast to the casual Cairenes who observe the foreigners in their city with some interest. It is the British who become the

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28 D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.342; Tourists were also urged by guidebooks such as *Baedeker* to be wary of dealers of antiques and antiquities: ‘So-called antiquities are largely sold at the hotels at exorbitant prices, far exceeding their true value, and many of them are even specially manufactured for the purpose. Caution in making a purchase is far more requisite in the East than in Europe, as Orientals regard skill in cheating simply as a desirable accomplishment.’ K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.252

29 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
objects of curiosity, rather than the merchants of the bazaar. Unlike Hunt and Horsley, the people and places depicted by Streeton are largely homogenised, becoming part of one vast exotic Eastern image free from Western intrusion.

The Khan al-Khalili and Surrounds

Introduced to Egypt during the Fatimid period, khans, also referred to as caravansaries, wikalas and okells, were buildings, usually two stories high, in which merchants and traders assembled in large open-air interior halls to sell or exchange their goods. Surrounding the communal area were chambers used for storing goods, while the upper floors functioned as a hostel. The most popular example of such a bazaar in Cairo was the Khan al-Khalili, which specialised in ‘valuable goods of the transit trade’, and was a popular bazaar destination for European tourists. As it was once the centre of commercial life in the city, the Khan al-Khalili formed a distinct quarter, ‘intersected by a main street and numerous cross-lanes, formed by long rows of tradesmen and artisans, all covered over’. Douglas Sladen noted that, during the nineteenth century, the Khan al-Khalili was also known as the ‘Turkish Bazaar’, and was where ‘the merchants congregate who cater for the custom of tourists’. He also observed that this khan, ‘to nine foreigners out of ten, is the Bazar [sic], and they confine their attention to a couple of streets in it’.

Streeton’s watercolour, Cairo [Khan al-Khalili] c.1897 (Plate 4.6) represents the famous bazaar. It calls attention to the architectural structures that rise above the market space, closing it in from the bright light of day. John Frederick Lewis’s The Bezestein Bazaar, el Khan Khalil, Cairo 1872 (Plate 4.7) was painted from the same aspect. Lewis produced at least two richly detailed versions of the scene, one in oil and one in watercolour. In both iterations, he depicted the ornamental textures of red Moroccan leather slippers, slices of melon, shimmering textiles, intricately carved woodwork and painted stonework. Like the fabrics that hang from the walls, the men of the market are also on display. In contrast to

30 Ursula Prunster noted the artist ‘enjoyed painting anecdotal details designed to amuse or interest his European audience.’ U. Prunster, ‘Great Britain in Egypt’, cat. 33, R. Benjamin (ed.), Orientalism, 1997, p.89
31 S.J. Staffa, Conquest and fusion, 1977, p.327; see also R.T. Kelly, Egypt, 1903, p.33
32 K. Baedeker (ed.), Egypt, 1898, p.47
33 D. Sladen, Egypt and the English, 1908, p.344
Lewis, who worked up elaborate portraits of the merchants, musicians and customers who lined the narrow khan to create an anecdotal narrative of life in the Bezestein, Streeton only sketched in the suggested forms of his figures. They appear ghost-like in their brevity, and echo the lightness of the shafts of sunshine streaming into the dark shadows through rectangular openings in the roof above.

In [Bazaar, Cairo] c.1897 (Plate 4.8) Streeton again presented a passageway of what appears to be a khan, with a central gateway through which the Eastern crowd walks. The vertical orientation of the composition concentrates a majority of the detail and action in the lower quarter of the image, with the viewer’s gaze drawn up past the arch towards the closed-in roof. A similar scene is represented in Lewis’s The bazaar of the Ghureyah from the steps of the mosque of al-Ghuri, Cairo c.1841/51 (Plate 4.9). In this detailed pencil and watercolour study, Lewis demarcated a darker vertical rectangle in order to describe the shadowy depth of an area of the bazaar. Streeton, by contrast, only included this vertical slice, and, by structuring the image in this way, focused on the vast stretch of the surrounding buildings.

In Streeton’s painting, there is a sense of the bazaar’s closeness, with the dark architecture that frames the foreground highlighting the narrowness of the passageway. This frame becomes a kind of barrier, dividing the space between the viewer and the people of the bazaar. The Western observer assumes a voyeuristic role, as a spectator not invited to take part in the activity. There is as a demarcation of distance and division—defining ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion. A similar device was employed by Streeton in Cairo shop 1897 (Plate 4.10), with the archway in the foreground indicating a boundary between the local Cairene’s interaction within the bazaar, and the artist-tourist as onlooker. Unlike his letters and other writings, such paintings communicate the artist as a removed, unseen spectator, rather than as a participant. In this artistic vision of a city not traversed by tourists, viewers are offered a glimpse from around a corner or through an archway.
In his letter to the *Bulletin*, Streeton described ‘a shop full of beautiful lamps for mosques’. These ornately worked brass and copper lamps hang from the eves in *Cairo shop*, while smaller household goods are set up on tables. This stall may have been located in the ‘Nahhaseen’, which forms a section of Sharia al-Muizz, or within the narrow passageways of the Khan al-Khalili. Of the Nahhaseen *suq*, R.T. Kelly wrote that:

>This street of the coppersmiths is one of the most interesting of bazaar streets. Here in poky little shops are sold all sorts of domestic utensils in brass and copper, nearly always beautiful in form, though rather rough in workmanship. A very large trade is done here, the natives often investing savings in copper-work, which is always sold by weight, and is readily marketable in case of need.\(^{36}\)

The archway in the foreground of the painting situates the scene within the city’s complex network of public and private spaces. Streeton was probably looking through a street gateway. The traditional city was divided by these gateways into closed neighbourhoods, or *haras*, with the gates closing in each *hara* at night. At the time Streeton was painting, such gateways were found only in the older sections of the city, which had not seen the modernising developments implemented by Khedive Ismail Pasha and his successors. The gateway depicted in *Cairo shop* may have led into one of the *wikalas* found near the region of the Khan al-Khalili. *Wikalas* were large buildings that were centred on a courtyard. They combined living units in the upper stories with commercial uses on the ground level. The minaret of the madrasa and mausoleum of Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub dominated the coppersmith market in this part of the city. Streeton may have painted the view through the gateway situated beneath the minaret, which looked into the Wikalat al-Qutu, erected after the original *khan* of Salah al-Din was demolished in 1511. The construction of other *wikalas* contributed to the area becoming a commercial centre.

As in *A street, Cairo* and *Cairo (Khan al-Khalili)*, Streeton depicts the figures of *Cairo shop* in a way that speaks more of the picturesque than of the vital economic function of the marketplace. In reality, the bazaars frequented by Streeton were the central focus of the

\(^{34}\) A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’

\(^{35}\) John Murray’s guide records that ‘Within this khan is a square occupied by dealers in copper and some other commodities.’ J. Murray, *Murray’s handbook*, 1875, p.142

\(^{36}\) R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, p.35
city’s social and commercial activities. Such spaces had an important role to play in maintaining local communities that depended on trade for access to consumables and, often, income. As one of the most significant socio-spatial systems in Egypt, the bazaars provided a forum for communication about the state of the economy and the related spheres of trade and production.37

Even though there is a lack of information about Cairo’s nineteenth century bazaars from a non-Western perspective, understandings of the economic and social flow of the market can be gained through examining its everyday processes.38 Price changes and negotiations acted as indicators of the health of the economy, and haggling in the bazaar was a meaningful exchange, revealing much about the way the city was operating in the changing climate of late nineteenth century international commerce. Trade in the bazaars was a marker of what was happening inside and outside the city, relating to all aspects of the economy, including industry and production. For example, local buyers could gain information about the state of Egypt’s cotton industry or Syria’s arms markets from the prices they were able to achieve for these products. Therefore, the availability and prices of goods were significant gauges of political movements, colonial progress and the effects of wars, and the settlement of a foreign workforce.

Policies of economic expansion that were established under Ismail Pasha were continued during the period of British occupation. Prime areas of economic progress were seen in the construction and operation of dams and barrages. At the same time, the agricultural sector did see a decline in the production of export crops, such as wheat and beans, with cotton replacing them as the main ‘cash crop’. There was a general dearth of industrial progress during this period, which was part of a deliberate strategy on behalf of the British to ensure Egypt continued to produce raw products for British industry. However, the cotton industry saw the development of mechanised ginning and pressing, the extraction of oil from

37 C. Geertz, ‘The bazaar economy: information and search in peasant marketing’, 1978, pp.28-32
38 It is difficult to gain accurate information about the processes of the markets from a non-Western perspective due to a high rate of illiteracy among bazaar workers, traders and merchants, the lack of standardised weights and measures, and the dearth of recorded material, as most operations were based on oral exchange. The low level of general information about services and products meant that some buyers and sellers within the bazaar aimed at gaining information, while others aimed at disguising it.
cottonseed, and the use of this oil in soap production. Foreign trade also increased with the exportation of cotton, wool, eggs, rice and onions, and the importation of manufactured articles, raw materials, fuels and foodstuffs. These broad economic movements trickled down to the market stalls to influence the day-to-day spending of those who worked and shopped in Cairo’s bazaars.

By the 1890s, there was considerable change taking place in the bazaars, which was directly related to Egypt’s national and international economic policies. The city’s economic situation was affected by a number of adverse factors, some of which were closely linked to the bazaars’ commercial processes. The small scale of the home market, due to its minimal purchasing power, meant that there was not enough demand for Egyptian products or support for local industries. Another factor was the lack of tariff protection for Egyptian goods, which encouraged the importation of European items, such as those found in the glass-fronted Levantine-owned shops of the Sharia al-Muski. As in Ottoman Istanbul, a preference for foreign goods developed, which had a significant impact on local merchants and artisans who sold locally produced items in the bazaars.

Foreign workers also influenced the social balance of employment and trade in the marketplace. In his economic analysis of Cairo, Charles Issawi wrote that in 1907, ‘Of the semi-Egyptianized communities, the Jews were well in control of finance, the Syrians provided officials, men of letters, traders and village usurers, and the Armenians [were] skilled artisans’. Essentially, the industrial and commercial middle class during this time was comprised primarily of people from minority communities. As Issawi argued, this had a marked effect on petty trade and industry, which would have been visible to Streeton, even though he had trouble identifying cultural difference or diversity. For example, boot making and mending was mostly performed by Greeks and Armenians, drapery mostly by

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40 C. Issawi, *Egypt*, 1947, p.30
41 See D. Quartaert (ed.), *Consumption studies and the history of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2000
42 See D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.344
43 C. Issawi, *Egypt*, 1947, p.35
44 See discussion of Greeks and ‘Mohometans’ in A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
the Jewish and Syrians, and tailoring mostly by the Jewish.\(^{45}\) Control of these trades took away opportunities from the local Egyptian under-classes, which formed a backdrop for the later independence movement, led by Mustafa Kamel. Such a diversity of racial and cultural backgrounds was not perceptibly represented in Streeton’s bazaar scenes. The artist selectively depicted elements within the bazaar environment in order to communicate his vision of the city, with the result that his impressions in many ways orchestrated narratives of a timeless, homogenous Orient.

Unlike the artisans that form the core focus of Rudolf Ernst’s *The brass workers* c.1888 (Plate 4.11), the two principal figures in *Cairo shop* are relatively static. There is not the same level of engagement in the manufacture of the brass and copper work. Nor had they been assigned the roles of ‘buyer’ and seller’ that are so clearly demarcated in Gérôme’s *The carpet seller* 1887 (Plate 4.12). While it is possible that the positioning of the two, with one standing and one sitting, has been presented in a way that suggests their participation in the daily activities of the marketplace, it is impossible to know anything of their exchange. Streeton’s work hints at picturesque chatter, rather than an active narrative of commercial exchange.

In the watercolour, *Egypt yesterday and today* (Plate 4.13), Tyndale depicted a similar scene, located at one of the grand arched entrances to the Khan al-Khalili.\(^{46}\) Narrating his travels in Egypt in a book published in 1912, the British artist left a highly detailed record of his experience in the coppersmith market that provides an insight into what may have also been Streeton’s own experience of that space. Significantly, together with his meticulous articulation of the items for sale and the colour and light of the space, Tyndale commented on the difficulty of painting such a scene:

\(^{45}\) ‘Special status also stands out as a major factor of solidarity in merchant corporations at all social levels. Merchants involved in domestic commerce as opposed to import-export merchants were often non-Muslims. Copts, Jews, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics were often retail merchants. These sold such things as green groceries, clothing, haberdashery, miscellaneous furnishings, and small wares and owned many shops.’ S.J. Staffa, *Conquest and fusion*, 1977, p.327

\(^{46}\) See G.M. Ackerman, ‘Why some Orientalists traveled to the East: some sobering statistics’, H. Krawitz (ed.), *Picturing the Middle East*, 1996, p.4
I had often been attracted by the lamp-shop there, but had put off painting it on account of the elaborate detail, and doubts whether the results would be proportionate to the work involved ... Every type of Egyptian lamp hung round the entrance, and lamps and lampstands lined the walls of the passage leading into the store beyond. There, in the deeper shades, the sparkle of polished metal suggested innumerable lamps of which the near ones were samples. Brass bowls and trays, teapots and candle-sticks, filled up the spaces where lamps could not be hung.47

The high level of description demanded by the subject, and the difficulty of conveying the brilliance of the copper lamps against the architecture, as cited by Tyndale, would also have posed a challenge for Streeton.48 Along with hanging lamps and tables laden with handcrafted wares, in both images, the artists include the carved wooden mashrabiya, which was viewed by painters and writers alike as a potent signifier of a timeless, picturesque Cairo.49 However, the similarities in the two works are offset by differences in the level of detail included in each. In Tyndale’s scene, there is much more information communicated about the occupations and pursuits of the figures, which gives the image a narrated quality. While Tyndale focuses on an accurate record of objects and a resolved depiction of people, Streeton’s painting is a decorative impression of ornament and architecture.

In *Cairo shop*, the turbans and galabiyas in blue and white at the left side of the composition suggest that the crowd, to paraphrase Streeton, is comprised only of ‘Orientals’.50 Although there was a significant number of ethnic and cultural groups

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47 ‘Descending some steps we come to the handsome gateway built by Garkas el-Khalily in 1400; innumerable lamps, copied from those which used formerly to adorn the mosques, are exposed here for sale; brass finger bowls, salvers and ewers cover the counters, and tall damascened lamp-stands fill up every available place on the floor. The original colouring of the gateway seems to have worn itself down to making a quiet and harmonious background to this sparkling mass of metal work.’ W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.9
48 Walter Tyndale observed that ‘With the buff-coloured stone of the building, this metal-work made a harmonious whole. To pull this together so as not to lose the breadth of effect would be no easy task’. W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, p.138
49 ‘In addition to the human attraction of the streets, domestic architecture is interesting. The ground floor usually consists of shops, and above are the jutting upper stories. The supporting corbels are often richly carved, and many of the large arched doorways of the houses are richly moulded and embellished in a manner suggestive of the most ornate period of Norman work ... Wrought-iron or bronze grills protect many lower windows, and the upper stories are rendered remarkable by the projecting balcony and windows of “mashrubiye” work.’ R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, p.22
50 ‘All are orientals here—Arabs and Copts, with many a grand old face. Princely-looking chaps a few of them’ A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’; The turban was common headwear in Egypt during this period, with colour and wrapping styles signaling differences in religious and
working and living within Cairo, Streeton generalised their appearance—differences were simplified or ignored. It is also notable that there is, again, no trace of a foreign presence within the scene. While the work may not have been painted on one of the main bazaar days, which were generally Mondays and Thursdays, it is unlikely that there would be no Europeans within the painter’s view. Whether the scenes were based around one of the markets within the older parts of Cairo or on the Sharia al-Muski, the bazaars would have been frequented by tourists, European expatriates and those local Cairenes who had adopted Western dress, as was the fashion during the late nineteenth century.

The processes of contemporary commerce that took place in Cairo’s suqs and khans were secondary to Streeton’s desire to capture a picturesque Orient. The artist represented a homogenised, archaic urbanity. In *A street in Cairo* c.1897 (Plate 4.14), the viewer’s attention is drawn to the light, jewel-like colour and closeness of the traditional Eastern market, together with details that would have allowed Streeton’s contemporary audience to understand the scene in line with their own ready-formed ideas about the Oriental bazaar. The same subject was also painted in *Cairo* 1897 (Plate 4.15)—a watercolour of a similar size, expressed in a fluid, sketchy manner. It is possible that Streeton completed this latter watercolour first, using it to map out colour and arrangement. However, the lightness and freedom of handling in both works suggests the immediacy of *plein air* painting.

As a result of having been painted from the same point of view, there are few compositional differences. The right side and foreground of the scenes are similar, with the exception of a boy wearing a red tarbush, who has a more defined position in *Cairo*. Though perhaps unwittingly, in a number of Streeton’s bazaar paintings the artist recorded one particular aspect of modernisation through such depictions of male dress. While the tarbush, when worn with the more tradition *galabiya*, assumed the guise of an ornamental Eastern motif for Streeton, by the late nineteenth century, it had become a sartorial cultural backgrounds. However, Streeton eschewed such indicators of the diverse cultures within Cairo’s urban community.

51 In the permanent bazaar quarters the main market-days were Monday and Thursday, though these spaces were almost always a site of some activity. K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.252
statement of modernity.52 Introduced to Cairo by Muhammad Ali Pasha, the flat-topped, conical, felt headwear, adorned with a black or coloured tassel, was worn by Ottoman officials, the Egyptian court, the civil service, the army, the police, and members of the ‘modernised’ elite. Lane-Poole described ‘petty Government clerks, or effendis, clad in stambúly and tarbush’.53

Western artists and writers associated the headwear, and the trousers and frockcoat that often accompanied the tarbush, as part of this dress reform, with the movement away from traditional dress, and, consequently, tradition values. Tyndale, upon coming across an ‘old acquaintance’ in the bazaar, expressed that he was glad to find that his friend ‘still retain[ed] the kuftan and ample turban, and [had] not adopted trousers and the ugly red tarbouch [sic], as most of the metal workers have done’.54 Tyndale continued:

The encouragement given in Egypt to the adoption of western clothes is a fatal mistake. The courteous manners of the oriental seem to leave him with the cast-off kuftán; his morals are distinctly worse when the ties of his creed are loosened; and the Christian missionary knows well enough that the westernised Egyptian is not a fertile soil for the Gospel seed. We must not flatter ourselves that our hold on Egypt is in any way strengthened by this silly fashion; we have only to attend a nationalist demonstration to see how the trousered effendi out-numbers the robed Egyptian. Should the sword of the preacher unhappily be held aloft and a holy war proclaimed from every pulpit, this European veneer would vanish like smoke, and the effendi would revert to the garb of the sheikh.55

The tarbush, particularly when paired with trousers and coat, was seen by some as an aberration of the picturesque, and was continually remarked upon by dissatisfied tourists who wanted to experience something of the Arabian Nights, rather than a modernised Cairo. While Streeton’s incorporation of the tarbush in these bazaar scenes may suggest that he avoided editing out all aspects of social and cultural change, this iconic headwear is perhaps more likely included without any understanding of its social implications.

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52 Also referred to as a fez, the tarbush was introduced across the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1828-39). Mohammed Ali Pasha incorporated it into the Egyptian military uniform. In 1825 Egypt began production of the tarbush, though the economic downturn during Ismail Pasha’s reign caused them to again be imported.

53 S. Lane-Poole, The story of Cairo, 1918, pp.2-3

54 W. Tyndale, An Artist in Egypt, 1912, p.8

55 W. Tyndale, An Artist in Egypt, 1912, pp.114-115
Through the use of Eastern motifs, such as the tarbush, Streeton worked within a particular mode of address that people could understand, and to which they could relate. As with other tourists of the period, he went to the East in search of what he already knew about the Orient, employing an Orientalist language with which he felt he could interpret that which he saw and experienced. A similar Orientalist language of Eastern motifs was employed in the development and production of the Cairo Street at the Paris World Exhibition in 1889. Timothy Mitchell argued that the manner in which this street was laid out offered a ‘framework of meaning’ that presented the street in a way that was legible to a Western viewer.\(^{56}\) When an Egyptian delegation on their way to the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists in 1889 travelled via Paris to visit the exhibition, they noted how it represented an antiquated Cairo, with paintwork made to look ‘dirty’ and cafés hidden behind the façade of a mosque.\(^{57}\) The street conveyed a sense of the chaotic through a bazaar of shops and stalls crowded with donkeys, and Frenchmen dressed as merchants.

A romanticised, archaic Cairo is also evident in Streeton’s bazaar scenes through his inclusion of elements that conformed to Western perceptions of the Oriental exotic. In *A street in Cairo*, there are pottery vessels, hanging lamps, and women veiled in black carrying jars on their heads, whose simplified forms are repeated as they walk into the crowd of the bazaar. While this lyrical arrangement has the effect of leading the viewer into the space, it is curious that these women do not appear in the smaller work, *Cairo*. It is likely they were later decorative additions employed by the artist to enhance the Eastern exoticism of the scene.

Though the bazaars, as public spaces, were primarily male-dominated areas of the city, Streeton would have seen the women of the lower classes shopping or fetching water from the *sabil-kuttabs*, or public cisterns, which were often erected near mosques. The *Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt*, noted that ‘It is an error to suppose that Egyptian women live in prison-like seclusion. They are less under restraint in Egypt than in any other Mohammedan country, and go out freely so long as the face is kept veiled’. However, it is

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\(^{57}\) T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 1988, p.1
made clear to the reader that ‘Muslim law forbids a woman’s face to be seen by men, except only by husbands, fathers, or sons’.58 If the hypothesis is accepted that Streeton painted *A street in Cairo* later, these women are a telling addition. They have been incorporated as formulaic representations of the exotic, not dissimilar to the stereotyped elements Mitchell identified in his examination of the Cairo Street at the Paris World Exhibition.59 In *Bank of the Nile* c.1897 (Plate 4.16), Streeton employed similar aesthetic strategies in his rendering of a popular Orientalist scene. In the foreground is a woman swathed in black, facing away from the viewer, with a water jug balanced upon her head. Reduced to the most basic contours, the female figure became a summary motif used by the artist in a number of his Cairo scenes.

As with the water-carrying women veiled in black and boys wearing the red tarbush, Streeton identified specific features in order to create scenes that satisfied expectations set by Western Orientalist art. The incorporation of ‘Eastern’ details extends to the background of both urban street scenes, with Streeton marking out the façade of a mosque, and its minarets. Such design elements are most clearly rendered in *Cairo*, where a horizon line is formed by the top of the bazaar’s cloth covering, with the minarets rising above the busy scene below. By contrast, in *A street in Cairo*, the top left side of the image is framed by the architecture of the bazaar. The work is bounded by what appears to be an overhanging wooden balcony, which defines the area and gives it a greater sense of enclosure. In the foreground of both works are jars, hanging lamps and the decorative *mashrabiya* windows that were disappearing from the city’s streetscapes due to a ban implemented earlier in the century by Muhammad Ali.60 The lightness of the brush evokes arabesque design that is almost calligraphic in the way the pigment curls over the washes of colour used to describe the cloth coverings of the stalls.

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58 Thomas Cook ltd., *Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, p.44
60 This highly decorative woodworking was no longer reinstated into old buildings or added to new ones due to a government ban set in place during the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha. They were recognised as being a fire hazard. See M.P. Robertson, *Letters from an Egyptian to an English politician upon the affairs of Egypt*, George Routledge and Sons Limited, London, 1908, pp.102-3. Around the time of Streeton, Stanley Lane-Poole observed that ‘There are of course new houses and rebuilt fronts and even glass window sashes’ but ‘the exquisite meshrebiyas with their intricate turned lattice work are nearly all gone to make way for Italian persiennes.’ S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1902, p.6
Maydens and the Bazaar as Social Space

Away from the covered suqs of the Khan al-Khalili and paved streets of Sharia al-Muski were the periodic maydens. These markets were held across Cairo, notably in regions where Streeton was known to have worked, including the surrounds of the Sultan Hasan Mosque at the foot of the Citadel. Douglas Sladen noted:

> the only good market in Cairo is the Market of the Afternoon, held in the early hours of the afternoon in the Midan Mohammed Ali under the Citadel. Here the adventurous tourist can find the native doing his small marketings, looking at his shows, and gambling after hours.61

In a monochromatic Indian ink and body colour sketch, Streeton set out a scene of an open-air market space before the imposing structure of unidentified mosque, [Scene in front of a mosque] (Plate 4.17). There is little concession to the architectural features of the building, which appear somewhat formulaic, with the focus instead being the hustle and bustle of the periodic mayden and the local Cairenes who frequented such markets.

While the drawing does not include the stalls and vast arrays of goods present in other representations of the bazaar, Streeton included his most detailed and defined representation of the social relationships that existed within the market space. Lane-Poole noted that working alongside the merchants of the bazaar, there existed ‘what may be called a running or itinerant market of water carriers, coffee sellers, auctioneers, and hawkers of vegetables, fruits, sherbet, and all manner of goods, whose street-cries form a literature of their own’.62 Though not a merchant or shop owner, the water carrier positioned at the right of Streeton’s composition, was an integral part of the bazaar. Unlike his other drink seller paintings, which will be examined in the following chapter, this is the only work in which the occupation is given an active context.

As a key site of communication, bazaars informed both economic and social discourse, and it is in this drawing that Streeton most clearly realised a vision of the Cairenes as part of a

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61 D. Sladen, Egypt and the English, 1908, p. 355
62 S. Lane Poole, Cairo, 1898, p.15
North African markets of the nineteenth century were vibrant, active spaces where social relationships were developed and enacted. They enabled the constant flow of trade and employment for the petit bourgeois and the majority of town workers, functioning as a point of intersection for different races, cultures and religions. For the Cairenes, engagement in the processes of the bazaars was—and, to a great extent, still is—a way of expressing community identity. They had a distinct social structure, with buyers and sellers competing and exchanging with each other, not only for goods, but also for information. The commerce of the marketplace cannot operate without the active involvement of people who work, trade and buy. Therefore, an understanding of the world surrounding the people of the bazaars stems from the social interactions within that environment.

The nineteenth century bazaar was a site where friendships and familial, political and bureaucratic relationships were cultivated and enacted. The goods that people bought, the stalls at which they made their purchases, and the people from whom they made these purchases, could be translated into information about their family, culture, religion and social values. The layout of the bazaars throughout the city was also significant, with rows of shops interspersed with mosques, schools, fountains and hammams, essentially making them not only commercial areas, but spaces that acted as identity markers, incorporating the social, cultural, and religious aspects of the community. Writing in the same decade as Streeton’s journey to Cairo, Fenimore Woolson observed:

the bazaars are not continuous rows of shops: one comes not infrequently upon the ornamental portal of an old Arabian dwelling-house, upon the forgotten tomb of a sheikh, with its low dome; one passes under stone arches; often one sees the doorway of a mosque.64

In his analysis of Moroccan bazaars, Clifford Geertz saw ‘in the details of bazaar life something of the spirit that animates society—an odd mixture of restlessness, practicality,

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63 C. Geertz, ‘The bazaar economy: information and search in peasant marketing’, 1978, pp.28-32
64 C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, pp.185-186
contentiousness, eloquence, inclemency, and moralism’. Individuals in the markets did not act as separate agents, but were part of a complex arrangement of economic and social relations that adhered to social structures existing within the public context of that space.

The experience of the markets was different for each of the participants, whether they were travellers, British administrators, Arab merchants or fellahin workers. For example, the merchants and traders who frequented and worked in the bazaars were an influential group in traditional urban society. They regularly offered economic support to political leaders and religious activities, which suggested a role within the community in addition to their commercial role in the bazaar. The bazaars also had a political function as an area where ideas about identity, nation and daily life were transmitted. However, it is significant that, unlike the Algerian and Moroccan casbahs, the bazaar quarters of Cairo were not generally recognised as Arab strongholds. Rather, they were a site of trade in a city with a long history of occupation, and thus generally did not produce the tacit and often active national opposition to European colonial forces seen in other North African countries.

The casbah was different to the bazaar in terms of its function as a market space. It is understood to be a socially and culturally significant urban feature, similar to Cairo’s Citadel. Located in the older parts of the city, the casbah was generally some distance from the areas in which Europeans lived and stayed. In certain cities the area evolved into a site of resistance against Europeans, as in the case of Algiers. Similarly, the casbah in Tangier was often not a safe place for Europeans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cairo’s Citadel, by contrast, was a popular tourist destination. There was no equivalent to the casbah in Cairo, with very few places in the city not at least symbolically occupied by the West. Even the Fishmarket, which was considered dangerous by some travellers, catered to the needs of expatriates and tourists by supplying prostitutes, food and material goods. This difference was primarily a result of the diverse cultural groups that had occupied the Egyptian capital for centuries.

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The bazaars were commercial sites that often represented a significant percentage of income for merchants and street vendors, such as the water carrier in [Scene in front of a mosque]. Although the role and presence of the water carrier in Streeton's drawing has been contextualised within the marketplace, he is still very much depicted as a 'type'. He is represented in a similar way to the people that appeared in postcards and photographs produced for the tourist trade. This is also true of the group of women positioned in the centre, dressed in the full costume of the lower classes, as described in detail by Edward Lane.\(^6^6\) As in *A street in Cairo*, the artist also returned to the standard motif of women with amphora-shaped pottery vessels balanced upon their heads. Grouped together, the women and the attendant water carrier form part of the generalised Eastern crowd that populates all of Streeton's bazaar works. It is a common scene that restricts the figures to legible 'types' that fall neatly into the Western viewer's preconceptions of the Orient.\(^6^7\)

Having explored the function of the Cairene bazaar as a site of contemporary commerce and socio-political interaction, this chapter has demonstrated the degree to which Streeton engaged with the reality of the city's urban marketplaces. Focusing on Aestheticist values, such as colour, form and pattern, the artist eschewed signs of modernity and the European presence in favour of an idealised, picturesque vision of the bazaar as an Oriental signifier. As was the case with his depictions of architectural subjects in the form of towering minarets and monumental gateways, the role of people within the scene is reduced to ornamental motif. An exception to this pattern is found in [Scene in front of a mosque], which provides a link between Streeton's bazaar scenes and the figure studies that will be discussed in the following chapter. This ink sketch demonstrates the manner in which Streeton sought out the local Cairenes who populated the urban streetscape. His approach reflected a tradition of picturing ethnographic 'types', with his handling of the subject revealing a sustained fascination with the aesthetic possibilities of costume and the decorative appeal of formulaic arrangement.


\(^6^7\) It is unlikely that in the black-and-white sketch that Streeton represents the social dynamic recorded by the handbook published by Thomas Cook and Sons, where 'a well-to-do Egyptian keeps a sackka, or water-carrier, who takes rank as upper servant, and attends the ladies in their walks or drives', given the women's class, as indicated by their costume. Thomas Cook Ltd., *Cook's tourists' handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert*, 1897, p.43
CHAPTER FIVE: THE ‘MANY HUMOURS OF STREET LIFE’

Upon arriving in London around June 1897, Arthur Streeton had ambitions to establish himself through an exhibition of decorative subjects, including a group of Cairene figure studies. In a letter to Walter Barnett, dated 22 June 1897, Streeton described the ‘Egyptian work’ adorning the walls of his first London studio, which he noted ‘has a cheery note about it that is pleasant to me’. Streeton was happy with his new situation, and keen for his friend to view his recent output and ‘smoke one of [his] last Cairo cigarettes’. On 6 October 1897, Streeton wrote to Barnett about sketches he had been working on of Cairo and Naples, and his hopes for an exhibition to launch his career. Barnett had sent two green oak frames, and the artist enthused, ‘if I became known in London it will be by a series of decorations within these frames … I may cause a demand & have an Exhibition entirely of decorations’.

This prospective show was likely built around figure studies using ‘good women models’ that Streeton would ‘treat in a decorative way’, and the ‘sketches of the East’, which he referred to in a letter to Frederick Delmer, penned later that month. Streeton’s initial belief in his Eastern paintings as a means of establishing a reputation in London suggests a perceived market for Orientalist travel pictures. Following themes he had favoured in Cairo, a number of these works were completed in London from sketches and photographs. They depicted typical Orientalist subjects, such as the brightly dressed drink sellers, who held a particular and sustained fascination for Streeton. Free from dramatic artifice, Streeton’s Cairene figure paintings are both aesthetic investigations of Eastern colour and summaries of an ethnographic ‘type’, set within the frame of a timeless, exotic Orient. Without complex, layered compositions, they are stripped down to a study of the figure in costume, thus becoming a vehicle for ornamental motif.

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1 D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.351
3 A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett papers
4 A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett papers
5 A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmer, c. October 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, pp.74-76
This chapter will explore Streeton’s figure paintings against a background of Australian Impressionist portraiture. It will examine the way Streeton’s representations of these figures conveyed a legible vision of the East to a Western audience. The full-length figures borrow a compositional strategy used by Tom Roberts in the 1880s and 1890s in his portrait series of Australian personalities. Examined alongside a second group of works representing Indigenous Australians, also by Roberts, the recognisable Sydney and Melbourne identities in the ‘Familiar faces and figures’ series introduce an important contrast. While Roberts set forth voguish portrayals of the fashionable set and ethnographic investigations of Indigenous Australians, Streeton diverged from these models by foregrounding the decorative in his portrayal of the urban Egyptian.

Drawn from the streets and bazaars discussed in the previous chapters, the figures depicted by Streeton had been celebrated by both artists and writers who visited the East. Walking through the bustling markets two decades before Streeton, Amelia Edwards noted:

> Every shop-front, every street-corner, every turbaned group is a ready-made picture. The old Turk who sets up his cake-stall in the sculptured recess of a Moorish doorway; the donkey-boy with his gaily caparisoned ass, waiting for customers; the beggar asleep on the steps of the mosque; the veiled woman filling her water-jar at the public fountain—they all look as if they were put there expressly to be painted.\(^6\)

Auctioneers, food and drink vendors, craftsmen and hawkers were also among those people whose daily activities directly related to the vast bazaars of Cairo, though they did not occupy a permanent shop. These occupations served the demands of both the local and tourist market. In his 1908 publication, *Egypt and the English*, Douglas Sladen noted that, ‘If the traveller be staying at “Shepheard’s”, or the “Continental”, he can find many humours of street life without stirring from the step of his hotel’.\(^7\) From this array of ‘street life’, Streeton’s paintings and watercolours of drink sellers, a porter, a knife grinder and a veiled woman emerge as a catalogue of types in the Orientalist manner. They were the people accessible to undistinguished and unconnected painter-travellers, such as Streeton, whose preference for these popular subjects conformed to modes of the picturesque that

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\(^6\) A. Edwards, *A thousand miles up the Nile*, 1877, p.3  
\(^7\) D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.351
saw the peasant class as symbolic of a time and space removed from the industrialising West. Those subjects considered ‘picturesque’ in this way generally retained traditional dress, while Cairo’s local middle and upper classes, including the aristocracy and military elite, more readily adopted Europeanised dress as part of Egypt’s move towards modernisation.

The late nineteenth century fashion for representing local subjects from the lower classes was encouraged by the availability of commercial photographs of types. The photographs, both taken and acquired by Streeton—and on which he based at least one of his figure paintings—indicate a preference for imagery consistent with particular patterns of collecting. For example, among his collection of commercial photographs, there were no specific images of modernisation and Westernisation in Cairo. This consequently affected the manner in which the artist approached the Eastern figure as a decorative device. Stock images of waterwheels, cultural events and scenes of men and women collecting water provided Streeton with aide-mémoires, and were likely purchased with the intention of using the images as the basis for works that could be produced later in London. Often, as in the case of the photographs of the Philae temples and the numerous ancient Egyptian reliefs, they were substitutes for a lived experience.

Similarities in themes, subjects and compositions across the breath of nineteenth century travel photography demonstrate how the medium provided a system for understanding the development and dissemination of Orientalist types. For the purposes of this chapter, the actual photographs of people, both individually and in groups, are assigned less importance in terms of their role as records of life in Egypt. More significant is their ability to present insights into how photographers, and, by extension, artists, constructed understandings of Egypt and its people.

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9 ‘It is impossible to look at these images without considering them as constructed visions of the subject by the photographer. The construction took place on several levels, most obviously in simple matters of costume, prop, and setting, but beginning with a determination of which subjects should be photographed and how they should by presented.’ N. Micklewright, A Victorian traveler in the Middle East, 2003, p.97
While providing a record of the various occupations pursued by the Cairene men and women that Streeton encountered, his figures also reveal the artist's desire to capture the aesthetic possibilities of costume. As with the majority of such representations produced during the late nineteenth century by Western travellers and colonial expatriates, Streeton's figure studies were not portraits of individuals, and did not necessarily reflect the perspectives of the subjects or express anything of their character. With simplified compositions employing a limited palette, the group of works considered in this chapter may be understood as an exercise in addressing Aestheticist pictorial values and Orientalist subject matter, with no overarching narrative. Formalist concerns took precedence over any engagement with the language, customs or religion of the people. As with the paintings he had produced in Australia, Streeton remained preoccupied with the picturesque, and he celebrated the colour and exoticism of his subjects, with the aim of creating small, enchanting and saleable pieces for potential buyers in Britain and Australia.

**An Oriental Type**

In his studies of urban Cairene figures, Streeton presented a consistent image of an Oriental type that was easily interpreted by a late nineteenth century audience, while his attention to costume aligned with the popular interest in ethnography that existed during this period. The widely held theory that it was possible to identify and isolate ethnic types framed a complex array of ideas surrounding national character that emerged during the age of Empire. Based on developments in ethnographic and anthropological study and natural history, ethnic types were recognised through physical and racial, as well as moral and social characteristics. References to types were common in literature and the popular press, and were also employed to define people from Western cultures and societies. Jeanette Hoorn noted that they often appeared in relation to Australian 'white men, especially bush workers'. Paintings, illustrations and photography became vehicles for the dissemination of the Victorian belief in racial hierarchies, and were a means by which information on different cultures could be documented and recorded. Art reflected and facilitated the establishment of racial ideas, as well as reiterating aspects of social and cultural order.

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In the decades leading up to Australia’s federation, portraiture reinforced Australia’s conception of a national type consisting of strong, healthy and virile young Anglo-Celtic men and women. Streeton’s friend and mentor, Roberts, one of the pre-eminent portraitists of his time, was integral to this process. Among the many commissioned society portraits he completed in the 1880s and 1890s was a grand three-quarter-length portrait of a young, raven-haired woman wearing a sumptuous pink gown with rich contrasting fabric at the sleeves, collar and bustle.\(^{11}\) This portrait, *Australian native* 1888 (Plate 5.1), was later described by Roberts’s biographer, Humphrey McQueen, as ‘an assertion of the vitality of the coming Australian race’\(^{12}\).

The work incorporates strong Whistlerian aspects, such as its restricted colour range; concentrated tones; flatness; and the flourishes of tall, ornamental grass in the background. Although the portrait itself is very much that of an individual, conveying a distinct likeness and character, the generality of the title is comparable to those Streeton later employed for his Cairene figures. This suggests that Roberts considered his subject as a type—a native-born Australian of Anglo-Celtic origin. Anne Gray has identified the subject as the 17-year-old contralto, Ada Crossley.\(^{13}\) Fifteen years after the painting’s completion, Crossley was labelled by Wellington’s *Evening Post* as ‘an Australian native’—a term common among colonials, who used it in reference to Australian-born Anglo-Celtic nationals.\(^{14}\) Roberts’s explorations of that which constituted a type continued throughout the following decade, as he turned to Indigenous Australians as subjects. The highly finished *Australian native* presents a significant counterpoint to these later works, which suggests that the artist employed ‘different styles of painting for different races’.\(^{15}\)

Roberts painted at least 13 figure studies of Aboriginal and Islander Australians between 1889 and 1895, eight of which were catalogued by the artist as a ‘Series of Aboriginal studies and types’. Produced in Yulgilbar, a cattle property in northern New South Wales,  

\(^{13}\) A. Gray et al., *Face*, 2010, p.52  
\(^{14}\) ‘Miss Ada Crossley’, *Evening Post*, volume LXVI, issue 121, 18 November 1903, p.5  
\(^{15}\) J. Hoorn, *Australian pastoral*, 2007, p.177
and on a journey to the Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait Islands, these paintings formed a record of a race that Roberts believed was dying out.\textsuperscript{16} He displayed the attributes of the amateur ethnographer, recording the cultural practices of the people through his art, collecting and writing. Boarding the ketch, \textit{Jessie}, on 25 July 1892 in Sydney, Roberts worked as a crewmember on the journey to Cape York. The majority of the head studies from the series were completed during this trip, along with a pencil sketch of a family group, \textit{Study of natives} c.1892, and a watercolour depicting a ceremony associated with a wedding, performed at night on Mer (Murray Island) (Plate 5.2). In a further three full-length watercolour figure studies donated to the British Museum by Roberts in 1922 (Plates 5.3 to 5.5), the artist recorded in detail the ceremonial costumes from the Nagir and Mount Adolphus Islands. Roberts also donated to the museum a group of 17 ethnographic objects that he had collected from the Torres Strait, including combs, ear ornaments and needles for making fishnets.

In a four-part essay published in \textit{The Argus}, the artist included in-depth descriptions of the characteristics of the people, as well as the customs and ceremonies he witnessed. He was interested in the variety of racial types he encountered on this trip, writing that he had seen ‘something of this extra-littoral Australia, whose inhabitants, speaking more or less different languages and differing more in type from the mainlanders as the islands lie further south’.\textsuperscript{17} In an extended passage, he provided a description of the groom, Kudub, from the wedding ceremony on Mur:

A good-looking young man, quite a swell, of slender build and well-proportioned, the face of the strongly marked Jewish type so noticeable here. His hair is a mass of wonderfully closely-woven fuzz, rising straight from the forehead to about four inches, then gradually decreasing in thickness as it follows the contour of the head down to the neck ... the hair behind the right temple is woven [with] a dozen feathers, making a rosette of a black centre of the hair itself; then coming the fluffy white feathers, the red tips stand out free, at even intervals all around. The septum of the nose, like that of all the men, is pierced for the pencil-like piece of white shell; that has gone out of fashion, and he doesn’t seem to like to wear it, and the matter is not pressed.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} This was a commonly held view amongst non-Indigenous Australians during this period. See Woollacott, A., “‘All That Is the Empire, I Told Myself’: Australian Women’s Voyages “Home” and the articulation of Colonial Whiteness”, 1997, pp.1017-1018; See also L. Astbury, \textit{Sunlight and shadow}, 1989, pp.198

\textsuperscript{17} T. Roberts, ‘Going North II’, \textit{The Argus}, 19 November 1892, p.4

\textsuperscript{18} T. Roberts, ‘Going North II’, 1892, p.4
Roberts’s attention to costume, bodily decoration and facial features signals an ethnographic concern that was in line with the cultural understandings (and misunderstandings) maintained by the majority of non-Indigenous Australians of the day.

Throughout the 1890s, Roberts painted a further series of 23 informal full-length, standing portraits, entitled ‘Familiar faces and figures’. He did this with the aim of creating a representative gallery of notable non-Indigenous Australian types. While the Aboriginal works were created as a document of a passing race, the fashionable identities of Sydney and Melbourne were constructed as representatives of the new Australia, on the eve of its federation. The modestly sized panels depict musicians, theatre personalities, a pastoralist, business and military men, and politicians. They reveal Roberts’s dedication to producing a record of Australian character as a compliment to his iconic images of masculine labour, such as *A break away!* 1891 and *The golden fleece* 1894.19

The 23 panels were exhibited as a set in Sydney in 1900, and were positioned as a response to the socio-political and cultural energy of the period, as Australia moved towards federation. They formed part of the artist’s strategy of promoting ‘home grown’ culture, and revealed the British-born artist’s pride in his adopted country.20 The works project spontaneity, with lively brushstrokes of often thinly applied pigment that left the wood grain of the un-primed panels to show through as the mid-tone. The neutral background also produces a floating effect, whereby the figures seem to exist within their own space. Most of the panels were made from cedar that may have previously been used for bolts of cloth or for doors.

The group shared similarities with portraits by James Abbott McNeill Whistler and Édouard Manet, and the caricatures of Leslie Ward, while the concept of a gallery of representative figures likely stemmed from 12 portraits by George Frederick Watts, shown at Melbourne’s centennial exhibition over the summer of 1888 to 1889. Providing a model

for Roberts, the portraits formed part of Watts’s ‘Hall of Fame’, which consisted of well-known British personalities who were selected for their intellectual power and vision. These included political leaders and military heroes, and figures from the arts, such as poets, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning; and artists, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Walter Crane. Streeton was certainly familiar with Roberts’s portrait series, which, in 1896, hung as a group in the artist’s studio in Sydney. Though Streeton produced a small number of works on cedar panel, including *Pastoral* 1894 (Plate 5.6), *Decoration* c.1890s (Plate 5.7) and *Cupid* c.1890s (Plate 1.8), the two full-length female figures, *Belinda* (or *A lady of the period*) 1894 (Plate 5.8) and *Scheherazade* 1895 (Plate 1.1), are the closest Streeton came to Roberts’s style of representation, before beginning work on his Eastern types.

Roberts’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and his portraits of urban identities differed in both approach and execution. The former series positioned him as ethnographer, while the latter echoed the work of Aestheticist portrait painters and was motivated by the idea of creating a gallery of notable non-Indigenous Australians to be enjoyed and reflected upon by generations to come. While completing his Indigenous studies in northern Queensland, Roberts dutifully recorded information about his subjects, inscribing the name and age of each man on the watercolours he donated to the British Museum. Names or generic descriptions were used for titles of other paintings of Indigenous people that he completed. However, Roberts’s Indigenous works could not easily be read as portraits by contemporaneous viewers, as the sitters were not generally characterised as individuals. During the late nineteenth century, popular definitions of portraiture not only required a likeness, but also, even more fundamentally, presupposed the portrayal of individual identity. An exception may be the painting, *Aboriginal head—Charles Turner* 1892, although this work depicts only a disembodied head.

The ‘Series of Aboriginal studies and types’ presented the subjects as a type to be described and classified, in a way not seen in the ‘Familiar faces and figures’ series. When both groups were exhibited at the Society of Artists gallery in Sydney in 1900, a reviewer for the

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Sydney Morning Herald wrote that 'Mr Roberts is offering at 100 guineas a collection of 23 character paintings on panels'. These paintings of 'well-known people', a number of which were listed in the article, were described as being 'full of life and individuality'. The focus given to this series is in contrast to the brief comment that follows: 'many aboriginal heads should also be noted'. For the critic, the Indigenous subjects were an afterthought.

The paintings in the ‘Familiar faces and figures’ series were understood to be portraits of recognisable Australians. By contrast, Roberts’s Indigenous subjects, like Streeton’s Cairo figures, were often so removed from their cultural or geographical context that, when they were exhibited at various times in Sydney and Melbourne, neither critics nor the public responded to them as individuals. This distance between creation and reception was exemplified in 1907 when art critic, Frank Myers, in an examination of Streeton’s decorative figures, wrote in the Lone Hand that Streeton had read well in the ‘real and virile stuff, “The Arabian Nights”’, and had successfully portrayed ‘his Ali Baba, Haroun Alrashid, scherzerades [sic]’. Meyers’s slippage between the literary Orient and the ‘real’ one that Streeton painted during and after his journey to Cairo reinforced an aesthetic, rather than ethnographic, reading of the figure studies, and their ability to express the Cairene type as distinguished from the portrait genre.

A Porter and a Knife Grinder

Cairo was a cosmopolitan city in 1897. However, Streeton’s representations of the local Cairene population were homogenising, and avoided any signs of modernity or European influence. While there was a significant number of ethnic and cultural groups living and working within Cairo—including people from Greece, Italy, France, Britain, Abyssinia, Armenia and Syria—Streeton’s tendency was towards selective generalisation, meaning he pictured only traditionally dressed ‘Oriental’ subjects. He also focused his creative energies on depicting men and women of the lower classes, largely due to their accessibility. Like many tourists of the period, Streeton had extensive interaction with porters, staff in hotels

22 Sydney Morning Herald, 14 November 1900, p.5
23 F. Myers, ‘Arthur Streeton’, Lone Hand, 1 July 1907, p.307
and cafés, and cab drivers, which presented him with a stock of figure subjects.\textsuperscript{24} Though Streeton's 'Personal narrative' and letters document exchanges with a perfume dealer and the Assyrian lawyer, Tabet Bey, the distinction between the people depicted by Streeton and those that appear in his written reflections suggest his preference for painting the itinerant workers who populated the streets and bustling passageways of the bazaars.\textsuperscript{25}

'\textit{Hassan the porter} c.1897 (Plate 5.9) exemplifies Streeton's method of imaging the Egyptian type. In this oil painting, the subject is represented in a full-frontal pose wearing slippers and a skull cap, or small turban, and the traditional dark blue \textit{galabiya}, also known as an '\textit{eree}', which was commonly worn by men of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{26} Though it is possible that this was one of the many blue-clad porters of Port Said, it is more likely that he was from Cairo, where porters were a common sight in the western region of the city favoured by tourists. Furthermore, Streeton would have had more time to work up a sketch of this figure once he had reached his destination in the Egyptian capital. Via the influence of Roberts, it is possible to trace a visual lineage from this work to portraits completed by Whistler in the 1880s. Roberts had become familiar with Whistler's work while living in London, and would certainly have witnessed the prevalent influence of Aestheticism in portraiture at the time.\textsuperscript{27}

Streeton's inclination towards the decorative and poetic found fertile ground in his friend Roberts's panel paintings from the 1890s, and there are distinct similarities in the handling and placement of the figure in the work of these three artists. Like Streeton's '\textit{Hassan the porter}, Whistler's \textit{Arrangement en couleur chair et noir [Arrangement in flesh colour and black: portrait of Theodore Duret]} 1883 (Plate 5.10) sets a simplified figure study against a

\textsuperscript{24} 'When Australian voyagers went ashore at Colombo or Durban or any of the other ports en route, their interactions with local people were almost entirely with vendors of goods or services or employees of hotels and restaurants. Even before disembarking, they encounter vendors in small boats eager to sell fruit or souvenirs. On shore they hired rickshaw “drivers” and dealt with merchants at a great variety of stalls and shops, as well as waiters or other hotel staff when they stayed in hotels overnight. Australians’ interactions with local vendors and employees were structured by axes of difference that included race, class, sex, and colonizer/colonized.' A. Woollacott, "'All That Is the Empire, I Told Myself': Australian Women’s Voyages "Home" and the articulation of Colonial Whiteness", 1997, p.1012
\textsuperscript{25} A. Streeton, 'Personal narrative'
\textsuperscript{26} E. Lane, \textit{An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians}, 1860, pp.32-34
\textsuperscript{27} See H. McQueen, 'A golden age: Tom Roberts and the arts of Spain', 2007, p.22
flat backdrop, focusing the viewer’s eye on the smooth articulation of costume and decorative accents. The Orientalist, art critic and collector, Theodore Duret, is posed as the urbane gentleman in the sartorial uniform of formal evening dress, with a lady’s pink domino and fan positioned as vehicles for ornamentation within the composition’s arrangement. Though Whistler worked on the portrait over an extended period, the finished painting ultimately shares similarities with the style of rapid sketch embraced by Streeton in the 1890s. Both ‘Hassan the porter and Arrangement en couleur chair et noir reveal a concern for the placement of the subject and a reduction of compositional elements in order to allow atmosphere and effect to hold forth. While a hint of shine on Hassan’s forehead suggests the heat of the sun, he is located against a neutral background, without any signifiers of the social or geographic context of his occupation.\footnote{The work is held in a private collection, and only a poor reproduction is currently available. It is possible that the background is similar to that of the Egyptian drink vendor (Plate 5.20), that bears suggestions of stone work, but does not feature the architectural detailing of the other two drink sellers discussed in this chapter (Plate 5.18) and (Plate 5.19).}

Narrative and contextual detail are sidelined in favour of a formalist approach.

The distinctly visible lower classes became a common subject for artists and commercial photographers who wanted to provide a credible ‘authentic’ image of life in the Eastern city. Such representations may be divided into two groups by using the categories set out by Ayshe Erdoğdu in her study of Ottoman types in nineteenth century photography: dynamic and static. Dynamic compositions often included figures practising a trade, while static compositions were more generally employed for the depiction of ethnic subjects in the studio context, and commonly featured one or more rigidly posed models.\footnote{A. Erdoğdu, ‘The Victorian market for Ottoman types’, History of photography, vol. 23, no. 3, autumn 1999, p.269} ‘Hassan the porter conforms to the definition of a static composition, while, of Streeton’s group of single, posed figures, the oil painting, The knife grinder, Cairo (Plate 5.11), is the only known work showing a dynamic figure engaged in work.

This combination of static and dynamic is repeated in the commercial photographs that Streeton collected, which contain scenes of active labour, such as women washing clothes, and men and women collecting water in goatskins and jars (Plates 5.12 and 5.13). Other
images show men posed more rigidly, with their camels at the pyramids or in front of their shops in the Khan al-Khalili (Plate 5.14 and 5.15). In two photographs, women are depicted in full-length standing poses that are more closely aligned to Streeton’s painted figure studies (Plates 3.7 and 5.16). This limited range of imagery echoed a trend that was also identified in photographs from Ottoman Turkey, where, according to Erdogdu, ‘sales catalogues of major studios in Istanbul [included] no representations of even traditional Ottoman artisans, whose products were valued in the West and who would, one assumes, have been of some interest there’.  

The knife grinder, Cairo differs from other figure studies completed by Streeton in that it shows the subject actively practising his trade. While he did not include any details of the location or setting of the trade’s execution, the artist did faithfully describe the costume and tools of his subject. Operating a pedal powered grinding wheel, Streeton’s knife grinder wears yellow leather slippers; a white galabiya with wide pants, called sserval, that reach his mid-calf; and a loosely gathered vest secured at the waist with a belt. A white turban, known as an ammama or amana, is wrapped in a coil around a red tarbush. In 1898, the writer for The Court provided an extensive description of the variations of headdress worn by men in Cairo, noting that the diverse cultural groups in the city could be distinguished by ‘their dress or the colour of their turbans’. The ‘turbans of the Copts are blue, those of the Jews yellow’, ‘white is the general Moslem colour’ and the ‘red fez or “tarboosh” is almost universal—sometimes worn alone or with the turbans wound round the lower edge, the red top forming the center’.

Inscribed ‘Sketch / Cairo’, it is likely that this direct, vigorously executed painting was completed in situ. There is evidence that Streeton took an interest in viewing certain crafts and trades in Cairo. In an article that he wrote about smell, which was published in The

31 E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, pp.33-36
32 Galabiyas were often white in the summer months, while winter saw darker colours such as grey, green, olive, blue, tan or striped fabrics.
33 ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, pp.132; The Court description follows that of Edward Lane, who describes, ‘turban of red, white or yellow woolen shawl or piece of cotton or muslin wound round a taboosh’. E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, pp.33-36
Argus in 1931, Streeton recalled ‘A workroom in a Cairo slum, where fabric stretch[ed] brightly in all directions, the colour of parrots [giving] forth a fearful stench, probably from the dyes being used’. Although the energetic application of a brown iron oxide pigment creates a dramatic effect of light and shade in the background, the closely cropped composition isolates the subject from his social and geographical context. The knife grinder is distilled into a pared-down description of occupation. Costume and prop alone indicate his culture, class and vocation. As in ‘Hassan the porter’, Streeton’s positioning of the figure against a minimal backdrop recalls Roberts’s portraits from the ‘Familiar faces and figures’ series, as well as Lily Stirling c.1890 and Madame Pfund 1887—which are both in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. In these two works, the use of a closed, shallow space and restricted palette focuses the viewer’s gaze on the figure alone.

The effect of such compositional devices emerges through comparison of Streeton’s The knife grinder, Cairo with An Egyptian fellah in a sugarcane field, winter of 1872-73 1876 (Plate 5.17), by fellow Australian, Robert Dowling. In both the oil painting and its watercolour study, Dowling employed a detailed landscape to ground the figure, providing the viewer with a greater degree of information about the Egyptian fellah’s location and way of life. A field of high, ripe sugarcane rises behind the figure like a theatrical backdrop. As this was one of the country’s primary winter crops, information may also be gleaned as to the season in which the original study for the work was completed.

Dowling, like Streeton, also focused attention on the subject’s costume. The fellah, or rural peasant, is posed front-on before the artist, wearing a long galabiya, with an indigo jacket draped over his shoulders. The Court writer made close observations of rural dress, describing coats of ‘all colours, but more generally blue, pale or half dark, with often the square, loose, outer robe of striped or patterned camel’s hair’, such as the one worn by Dowling’s subject. As this subject was probably painted in winter, both garments would

34 A. Streeton, ‘Smells! Records of a sensitive organ’, The Argus, 2 May 1931, p.6
35 E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, p122. The sugar industry in Egypt began in 710 AD and Egyptians were the first to establish the refined sugar production, exporting the crop to Europe from the ninth century. Sugar cane is the main source for refined sugar and the sole source for the molasses industry in Egypt. It is also consumed fresh or crushed into a popular juice, known as aseer asab. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the sugar industry flourished, with the first of 16 sugar factories built in 1850.
36 ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, pp.132
have been made from wool, rather than the lighter linen or cotton alternatives preferred in warmer months. His head is covered with a red length of fabric, known as a \textit{shaal}, wound to create a turban, and he stands in slippers, smoking a long pipe, known as a \textit{shibuk} or \textit{ood}.

While Streeton shared Dowling’s concern for accuracy in the costume of his figure studies, he favoured lightly described gestures—such as the suggested rise of a minaret or the calligraphic sweep of a carved wall—over dense background detail. Streeton employed such decorative devices in a series of works depicting Cairene drink sellers.

\textbf{Egyptian Drink Sellers}

Streeton produced at least six known paintings of drink sellers, which were completed in both watercolour and oil between 1897 and 1898. The practical experience of working in Cairo’s urban environment in order to represent these subjects necessitated a certain level of social and cultural engagement. However, such experiences did not offer ideal working conditions. Artists throughout the nineteenth century who chose the bazaar or city street as their subject complained of the traffic, dust and pressing crowds.\textsuperscript{37} In his \textit{Bulletin} letter, Streeton wrote that ‘the alley was choc-a-block all the time—hundreds of Arabs standing around’.\textsuperscript{38} In his ‘Personal narrative’, he recalled:

\begin{quote}

The pressure of the Arab crowd made matters stiflingly hot, so rising suddenly I threw down my sketch and looking around me I pulled off my coat and vest: the Arabs stood
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} Though transit had become increasingly easier with the widening of streets and the opening up of access through the \textit{harat} (residential quarters) during the latter part of the nineteenth century, Constance Fenimore Woolson wrote that in the older parts of the city, ‘some of [the streets were] not more than three feet broad, opening into and leading out of each other, unpaved, dirty, roofed far above, where the high stone houses end, with a lattice-work of old mats.’ C. Fenimore Woolson, \textit{Menton, Cairo and Corfu}, 1896, p.183; The Scottish artist David Roberts, writing to his daughter in the winter of 1839, complained that ‘[t]he narrow, crowded streets make it difficult to do drawings, for in addition to the curiosity of the Arabs, you run the risk of being squeezed to a mummy by the loaded camels, who, although they are picturesque in appearance, are ugly customers to jostle.’ D. Roberts cited in M. Rodenbeck, \textit{Cairo}, 1998, p.171; In a 1927 catalogue for an exhibition of his works at Sydney’s Macquarie Galleries, Lionel Lindsay, similarly wrote: ‘I am afraid the good public little guesses what powers of concentration the painter must possess, who traversing the world, essays to paint in its streets and market places. The Orient is notoriously difficult to work with … The painter must gamble with the light, keep his impressions clear, and concentrate upon the problems of his subject, as if it were alone and undisturbed’. L. Lindsay, \textit{Exhibition of French and Italian landscapes}, The Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 1927, p.3

\textsuperscript{38} A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
back rapidly and watched. I sat down and resumed my sketching and they all smiled and closed again like flies.\(^{39}\)

R. Talbot Kelly similarly wrote of being ‘surrounded by a crowd, while heat, dust, and flies try your patience to the utmost’. He warned, ‘If you are of a nervous or irritable disposition, do not attempt street work in Cairo’.\(^{40}\) He did concede that the crowd ‘perhaps completely blocking your view, is only attracted by curiosity, and bears you no ill-will. The people are good natured souls, and usually regard the painter as a “magnoon”, or kind of harmless lunatic, who is not to be taken seriously’.\(^{41}\) As a way of avoiding such inconveniences, the British painter suggested an alternative that Streeton almost certainly followed: ‘Of course the artist need not always be placed as to be liable to such disturbance. Almost any shopkeeper will give you accommodation, while in the native café you are sure of a welcome and undisturbed freedom for work.\(^{42}\)

Though tourists were often advised to avoid ‘Arabian’ or ‘native’ cafés by the popular guidebooks, in his ‘Personal narrative’, Streeton recalled visiting the ‘Café Splendid’ with the Assyrian lawyer, Tabet Bey.\(^{43}\) By escaping the bustling ‘Arab crowd’ that he encountered on the Cairo street, Streeton came upon one of the most enduring subjects in his Orientalist oeuvre.\(^{44}\) In a rare descriptive note recorded in one of his Cairo sketchbooks, Streeton wrote of ‘Sitting at [a] native café overlooking old deserted water canal: all Mahomedans—order lemonade & after drinking see the man with the skinful of water going off to make it into café & lemonade’.\(^{45}\)

\(^{39}\) A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
\(^{40}\) R.T. Kelly, \textit{Egypt}, 1903, pp.30-31
\(^{41}\) R.T. Kelly, \textit{Egypt}, 1903, p.30
\(^{42}\) R.T. Kelly, \textit{Egypt}, 1903, p.32; The idea of working in the native shops of cafés was also taken up by Walter Tyndale, who described one incident of working in such a space: ‘I stared on a subject... of an old house built alongside and overhanging an entrance to a mosque. A little coffee-shop under an archway, on the opposite side of the Street, made an excellent point of vantage from which I could do my work without attracting too much attention.’ W. Tyndale, \textit{An artist in Egypt}, 1912, p.17
\(^{43}\) A. Streeton, ‘The Pasha’s Surprise’, ‘Personal narrative’
\(^{44}\) A. Streeton, ‘With Signora Bozzetti’
\(^{45}\) Cairo sketchbook B, Streeton family papers; The 1898 edition of Beadeker notes that ‘The Arabian Cafés of which there are upwards of a thousand at Cairo, are small and dirty, and hardly worth visiting. Coffee in the Arabian style is easily obtained elsewhere’. K. Baedeker (ed.), \textit{Egypt}, 1898, p.24
By the late nineteenth century, the exotic profession of water seller or drink seller was well known in Europe, representing a traditional, pre-industrial way of life, and often serving a nostalgic role. Itinerant drink sellers were particularly popular subjects for both Orientalist writers and artists, who celebrated their bright costumes and took pleasure in differentiating the array of vendors selling sweet refreshments. In *A story of Cairo*, Lane-Poole, described:

>a sound like the tinkling of baby cymbals [informing] you that the sherbéty is going round, with his huge glass-jar slung at his side, from which he dispenses (to the unwary) sweet sticky drinks of liquorice juice or orange syrup in the brass saucers which he clinks un-ceasingly in his hand.47

In *Egypt and the English*, Douglas Sladen also observed that the ‘water-sellers and lemonade-sellers incline to costume, and have splendid brass vessels of fantastic shapes’.48

Much was written about the variety of water carriers and drink sellers, and how they could be distinguished by their costume and vessels. In 1903, Kelly wrote:

>Cairo is a dusty place ... [thus] one of the most important street trades is that of the water-carriers, and of these there are several grades. First the ‘sakka’, who dispenses unfiltered water from his goat-skin—a most laborious trade, as the pay is small and a skin of water weights very heavily.49

Edward Lane noted that the ‘sakka’ collected water from the Nile or drew the Nile waters that flowed into a canal, as water from wells was often ‘brackish’.50 Among Streeton’s collection of commercial photographs is a scene of men filling their goatskins on the riverbank, which was published by G. Lékégian and Co., Cairo (Plate 5.13). This was most likely the kind of drink seller encountered by Streeton in the café. Another water carrier was the ‘“khamali”, who, carrying his earthen jar upon his back, very dexterously pours the

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46 H. Edwards (ed.), *Noble dreams, wicked pleasures*, 2000, pp.154-155
47 S. Lane-Poole, *The story of Cairo*, 1902, p.3
48 D. Sladen, *Egypt and the English*, 1908, p.353
49 R.T. Kelly, *Egypt: painted and described*, 1903, p.17
50 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.327
filtered water over his shoulder into the little brass cups he carries'. This profession is represented in Streeton’s *Street scene in front of a mosque* c.1898 (Plate 4.17). Lane also mentioned these water carriers, though he described them as ‘hemalees’, noting that the porous clay cools the water through evaporation.

There was also the *susi* or ‘“sussi”, whose terra-cotta pot contains liquorice-water, or a drink made from prune juice’. Lane remarked that the seller of *erk-soos*—the bitter liquorice infusion—has a ‘red earthen jar of the liquid on his left side, partly supported by a strap and chain, and partly by his left arm: the mouth having some leaf (or fibres of the palm-tree) stuffed into it. He also carries two or more brass or china cups, which he knocks together’. The final grade, mentioned by Kelly, was the:

‘sherbutli’, or seller of lemonade and sherbet. The latter is really a fine picturesque figure, partially enveloped in a bright red apron and carrying in a sling a huge glass bottle, the spout of silvered copper being surmounted by a ‘cradle’ containing a large piece of ice. The greenish lemonade, in which float half lemons, seen through the light-coloured glass looks very refreshing; and, with the eye of the artist, it is his custom to have his drinking bowls of china coloured bright blue.

The drink seller that appears in a photograph attributed to Streeton (Plate 3.35)—and later reproduced in a watercolour (Plate 5.18) and an oil painting (Plate 5.19)—is most likely a *sherbutli* or *sharabat* seller. Sherbet originated as an Eastern drink of fruit juice and

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51 R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, p.18; The *hamal* in Turkey is a porter or man who can be hired to carry anything on his back.
52 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.327
53 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.331
54 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.331
55 R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, p.18; Walter Tyndale also described drink sellers moving through the streets: ‘Through the motley crowd passes the brightly garmented lemonade-seller, tinkling his brass cups; his rival, who retails licorice-water, seems more in demand; one, carrying a heavy pitcher with a long brass spout, invites the thirsty ones to partake of the charity offered them in the name of God. ‘Sebeel Alhâh yâ atchan,’ he drones out at stated periods. He is less often met at markets than at religious festivals, and he is paid by some visitor to the tomb of a saint to distribute the water as a thank-offering.’ W. Tyndale, *An artist in Egypt*, 1912, pp.3-4
56 Somewhat problematically, the writer for *The Court* described the sherbet seller ‘carrying his earthenware jar with a long strait spout, containing water flavoured with orange blossom or grape juice’. ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.132; This possible confusion in the descriptions of the drink sellers suggests that the subject of Streeton’s *Egyptian drink vendor* (Plate 5.20) is either a *sharabat* seller or a vendor of the liquorice infusion described by Lane. On 15 October 1990, Karim Sharaf, a Cultural Affairs Officer from the Embassy of the Republic of Egypt, Canberra, wrote to the National Gallery of Canberra writing that the original title of
water, and was often referred to by tourists as lemonade. There were various kinds of sherbets, which were created by mixing water and sugar with lemons, violets, mulberry, sorrel, raisins, liquorice root or locust tree.

It is unsurprising that Streeton painted so many drink sellers of various saccharine concoctions, given their variety of costumes, which would have appealed to his Aestheticist sensibility. Having frequently featured in travellers’ sketchbooks and paintings, the recognisable props of the drink seller, such as the flywhisk, tray and clinking beakers, also appear in Streeton’s paintings. Clearly fascinated by the different garments and vessels, he considered the drink sellers an opportunity to create a series of decorative compositions.

_Egyptian drink vendor_ (Plate 5.20) is most likely a liquorice seller, who stands barefoot and in profile, unlike Streeton’s other images of drink sellers and the porter, who are viewed front-on. His face, which is composed in warm browns, is highlighted with a daub of blue at his forehead and cheekbone, suggesting the heat beating down from above. With direct, minimal brushwork, Streeton described the vendor’s ensemble of a white shirt or tunic and pants; a pinkish-grey, pinstriped, collared waistcoat; and a red apron with vertical yellow stripes. This appears to be standard garb for the profession. The _Court_ writer noted that ‘you often see the water carrier, in short, full tunic and trousers’.57 Streeton’s figure also wears a turban wound around a red tarbush, and carries a large terracotta vessel on his left side, strapped over his right shoulder, with a translucent stopper and brass spout. Leaning back, the vendor’s hips thrust forward to compensate for the weight of the load. His posture is highlighted by the belt around his waist, to which is fixed a brass tray that sits at his right side, carrying a small number of glasses and a cleaning cloth, while in his right hand, he holds the cymbals used to summon his customers.

The pink roses that adorn the neck of the terracotta vessel flutter to the ground—the only movement in this otherwise static scene. Roses appear frequently in Streeton’s floral arrangements of the 1930s and 1940s, and, in 1929, he penned a detailed article on the rose

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57 ‘Cairo and the Caïrenes’, 1898, p.132
He wrote that the delicate flower ‘flourishes in gardens near Cairo’, and, in his ‘Personal narrative’, he described the masses of ‘cheap flowers’ that were available in that city. The picturesque softness of the falling petals in *Egyptian drink vendor* recalls Charles Conder’s *Flowers in a vase against a background of the coastline of Mustapha, Algiers* 1891 (Plate 5.21), which made reference to *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, with the rose as a symbol of youth and fragility. The composition is dominated by a palette of rich scarlet red, chalky white and an iron oxide brown, set against a simplified background of muted pinks, greens and creams that radiate the heat of the open street. Smaller accents of a light sky blue and cobalt blue, yellow, and the pink of falling petals heighten the contrast of vibrant colour against the pale backdrop, pulling the costume into focus. There are areas of unpainted surface and a number of pinholes around the edges of the painting. Inscribed ‘97’, and with evidence of fly spots and some foreign matter, it is possible, as Mary Eagle suggested, that *Egyptian drink vendor* was painted in Cairo, even though a number of Streeton’s drink seller paintings were completed in London.

On 29 June 1898, Streeton wrote to Roberts from London, advising his friend that he would be sending ‘a small parcel of my pictures for Jim Conroy—in case there is an Exhibition coming on in Sydney—there are figure studies of Arabs etc’. Streeton asked Roberts to select frames for the works, with the instruction that if the ‘3 Drink Sellers could be placed in one frame, they would prove more attractive I believe—and stand a better chance of sale’. By framing these works as a triptych, Streeton transformed the works into a series, as Roberts had done in September 1892, when he exhibited three portrait works at the same venue. These represented ‘Church, State and the Law’, and were portraits of Cardinal Moran, Sir Henry Parkes and Sir William Windeyer, Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

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59 See B. Pearce in ‘Recent acquisitions with notes on Charles Conder’s Algerian convalescence’, *Art and Australia*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1984, p.62
60 A. Streeton artist files, Paintings and Sculpture, National Gallery of Australia; See also M. Eagle, *The oil paintings of Arthur Streeton in the National Gallery of Australia*, 1994, p.120
61 Streeton also asks of Roberts, ‘when these things are framed I'd be so glad if you’d blow the dust off the dark ones, & give 'em a coat of thin spirit varnish – I tried oil on 'em here - & find they will improve by varnishing’. A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 29 June 1898, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) *Letters from Smike*, 1989, pp.78-9
South Wales. Aestheticists, such as Whistler, also used the rhythm and impact of the series in exhibition hangs.

Enclosed with a letter from Streeton to Roberts was a diagram showing the three drink sellers arranged left to right—‘Red one’, ‘Pale blue one’, ‘Dark blue one’—to be framed in ‘dark brown or oak green’. In the ‘Art Society of NSW 19th annual exhibition’, which opened on 8 September 1898, alongside ‘Hassan the porter’ and other Cairo scenes, hung *Egyptian drink vendors* (Plate 5.22), with the three figures in one frame, as requested, and listed with a price of 21 pounds. It was previously thought that the National Gallery of Australia’s *Egyptian drink vendor* (Plate 5.20) was part of this group; however, an illustration of *Egyptian drink vendors* that accompanied the *Sydney Mail* review reveals that it is, in fact, a different work. Though further details and the current location of this triptych are currently unknown, it is possible that it was the ‘Water Carriers, Cairo’, exhibited at the National Gallery of South Australia from 7 May 1919. The work was on loan from the South Australian pastoralist and watercolour collector, Peter Waite. If this is the case, it follows that the triptych was painted in watercolour, and exhibited as one of five watercolours by Streeton in the Adelaide show, including another Cairo subject, ‘A Nile sunset’ (possibly *Bank of the Nile*—Plate 4.16).

Drink sellers were shown in other exhibitions, including the ‘Loan exhibition of the works of Arthur Streeton’, at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, held over the summer of 1931 to 1932. ‘The water carrier’ (possibly *A seller of drinks, Cairo*—Plate 5.19) was shown together with three other Egyptian scenes, two views of Naples, and the artist’s

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62 In contrast to Streeton’s Cairo figures, Roberts’s subjects are portraits of the individual. In the case of *Sir Henry Parkes* 1892, only the sitter’s face and substantial white beard are depicted against a rich black background, which focuses the viewer’s attention on the strength of the former prime minister’s character and his piercing gaze.

63 M. Eagle, *The oil paintings of Arthur Streeton in the National Gallery of Australia*, 1994, p.120

64 A. Layman, ‘The Art Society’s exhibition’, *Sydney Mail*, 17 September 1898, p.698 (p.19)


66 *The Advertiser*, 7 May 1919, p.6; Peter Waite owned 31 watercolours, and a small number of oil paintings by Arthur Streeton, collected between 1896 and 1907. When Streeton left for London via Cairo in 1897, ‘Waite gave him a sum of money to assist him, said to be £100’. J. Waite Morgan, *The premier and the pastoralist: William Morgan and Peter Waite*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 2011, p.101; This is the only other record of Streeton exhibiting multiple Orientalist subjects as a triptych.
decorative response to *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayám*. In 1944, the ‘Arthur Streeton memorial exhibition’ was held at the National Gallery of South Australia. This exhibition included ‘Seller of drinks’ (*A seller of drinks, Cairo*) with the date 1893 and ‘Street scene, Cairo’ (*Cairo street*—Plate 3.1) with the date 1898, which were both listed as belonging to R.O. Paul, Esq. It also included the watercolour, ‘Nile sunset’ (possibly *Bank of the Nile*) with the date 1898, which then belonged to ‘Misses Waite’. The ‘Streeton memorial exhibition’, held at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1945, again showed the two oils, although they were then listed as belonging to Dr W.O. Paul, and the ‘Seller of drinks’ had the alternative title, ‘The water carrier’, in brackets. It was given the extended title, ‘A seller of drinks, Cairo’, in the 1997 *Orientalism* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The oil painting formed part of a suite of three works depicting the picturesque vendor, which also included the photograph attributed to Streeton (Plate 3.35) and watercolour (Plate 5.18).

Moving through the narrow passageways of Cairo, the peripatetic vendor in the photograph wears a striped *galabiya* covered by an apron with three horizontal bands, and holds glass flasks, a ceramic dish and a large glass jar with an ornate brass stopper. In his left hand, he adroitly grasps, with one finger, a long flywhisk used to protect his sweet liquids. The subject of the oil painting maintains the same centred stance as the vendor in the photograph—facing the viewer. To accentuate the decorative verticality of the composition, Streeton made specific changes to certain elements of the vendor’s costume. In the photograph, the apron has bands running horizontally across the lower edge as a border, whereas the painting features vertical stripes. These verticals are echoed by the minaret and narrow passage of blue sky. The indeterminate background, possibly including the striped exterior wall of a mosque, was painted after the figure, followed by details such as the flywhisk, Streeton’s signature and an Arabic inscription of the name ‘Muhammad Ali’. Although it is signed, the work appears unfinished, with pencil underdrawing clearly evident. This was a habit adopted by both the Australian Impressionists and Aestheticists.

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67 The *Seller of drinks* is incorrectly listed in both catalogues with the date 1893.
(Egyptian drink vendor) 1897 (Plate 5.18), is the watercolour version of *A seller of drinks, Cairo* (Plate 5.19), and, together with the photograph (Plate 3.35), maps the artist’s process of image development. It is possible that Streeton painted the watercolour from the photograph in order to experiment with the colours to be used in the similarly sized oil painting. However, given the number of other watercolours in the Cairo group, he would also have seen it as a legitimate work in its own right. The subject was initially drawn in pencil then finished in watercolour, with white bodycolour used for the simple doubled arcs that Streeton employed to indicate birds flocking around the minaret.

As in the oil painting, the stripes in the watercolour subject’s apron run vertically, rather than horizontally. Four wide bands are marked in transparent strokes of red, while three slightly smaller bands have been left unpainted. The *galabiya* worn by the drink seller in the oil is a purple grey with narrow pale yellow stripes, while, in the watercolour, it is yellow and has narrow orange stripes. Although there are light pencil gestures near the figure’s left hand, where the top of the flywhisk would have been in the watercolour, the prop that features in both the oil painting and the photograph is left out of this composition. In both iterations, the sweet liquid that swills in the bottom of the glass vessel is painted in red. In the watercolour, the red liquid appears tinged with the green of the glass; however, in the oil painting, the division between the blocks of blue and red is less convincing. The figure’s right hand in both works remains unresolved, which suggests that Streeton was working from the photograph he had taken, where the hand is not clearly visible. Streeton also did not successfully capture the harsh contrast of light and shade on the figure’s face, which, in the photograph, is cut off above the eyes. This was likely a result of the amateur photographer’s error in not correctly framing the subject.

While direct tonal brushwork placed emphasis on colour, Streeton used a light similar to that found in the landscapes he completed in inland New South Wales in the 1890s. This 68 Streeton pared down certain details within the watercolour, likely indicating he was working from the small photograph. The paper is not taken from either of the two known travel sketchbooks, differing in both weight and dimension. Though it is possible that the drink seller who posed for the photograph also posed for a pencil and watercolour sketch, it is likely that both the watercolour and the painting were completed once the artist arrived in London, in the second half of 1897. The watercolour is signed lower right hand corner ‘A Streeton 97’.

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68 Streeton pared down certain details within the watercolour, likely indicating he was working from the small photograph. The paper is not taken from either of the two known travel sketchbooks, differing in both weight and dimension. Though it is possible that the drink seller who posed for the photograph also posed for a pencil and watercolour sketch, it is likely that both the watercolour and the painting were completed once the artist arrived in London, in the second half of 1897. The watercolour is signed lower right hand corner ‘A Streeton 97’.
clear brightness floods the oil painting from above, dramatising the subject, with sharp shadows rendered in blues and browns. Streeton removed the heavy darkness that appears in the background of the photograph, contributing to the heightened sensation of white heat in this work, and providing space for such decorative inclusions as the birds and the calligraphic detailing behind the figure in the watercolour version. The architectural motif in the background, a minaret rising above one of Cairo’s many mosques, is not a specific identifier of location, but rather a generalised, yet evocative, symbol of the Orient. The Ottoman-style conical upper structure of the minaret has not been faithfully rendered, with the small knob-shaped finial a summary version of the crescent moon of Islam. The background is simplified and flattened, in contrast to the rich colours of the figure’s exotic costume that seem to vibrate upon the very surface of the work.

The oil painting, *A seller of drinks, Cairo*, unlike the watercolour, bears the inscription, ‘Muhammad Ali’ in Arabic, located to the right of the figure, below the flywhisk. This script is articulated with a lighter, finer stroke than the artist’s signature, which is on the left side of the figure, with the brush likely to have been held almost vertically in relation to the support. Although it is possible that Streeton may have known the name of this sitter, it is difficult to determine whether the inscription was in fact the actual name of the subject or a fictional means by which the artist sought to claim authenticity and assert his connection with his sitter. In B.F. Tobin’s examination of the difference between colonial portraits and the study of types, he argued that portraits ‘imply an empowered subject’, while types are often either unnamed, or are given fictional names that seem to stand for a relationship between the artist and the sitter. Titles that cited a subject’s name (whether real or fictional) personalised the work, and gave the anonymous, potentially unknown sitter an appealing sense of identity, validating the viewer’s belief in the artist’s contact with them.

In the case of Streeton, alongside the inscription found in *A seller of drinks, Cairo*, at least

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70 Islamic teaching on the representation of figures meant that it was often very difficult to secure sitters for portraits in the Middle East and North Africa, and the restrictions related to proprietary on women meant that female sitters were especially hard to come by.
three works were titled with names: Fatima Habiba (Plate 5.23), ‘Hassan’ the porter (Plate 5.9) and Ottoman Ali, breadseller (location unknown). 

The gold and black frame for the oil painting includes four cartouches, one located on each side, with large calligraphic text employed for ornamental effect. While we do not know who selected the frame, or indeed when it was paired with the work, Streeton was certainly interested in the aesthetic possibilities of Arabic calligraphy. He described the script that decorates the interior of Sultan Hasan Mosque as ‘large & simple like the handwriting of God’. In one of his Cairo sketchbooks, he also included a small experimentation with calligraphic script, most likely an unschooled interpretation of Arabic, within a box in the lower left corner of a page featuring a drawing of a minaret (Plate 5.24). In the case of A seller of drinks, Cairo, it appears that the name belongs to the drink seller, although it is possible the name was employed purely as a testament to the artist’s connection with his subject. At no time does ‘Muhammad Ali’ appear to have been used as a title for the work, with both the watercolour and oil versions of the subject given generic titles.

During a period that saw the championing of ‘art for art’s sake’, generic titles were common. In 1908, art critic, Paul G. Konody, suggested that the custom of revealing a sitter’s identity was discarded in French exhibition catalogues because reference to individuals deflected from aesthetic appreciation of the works. Similarly, Australian painters, such as Roberts, George W. Lambert and Max Meldrum, used general or poetic titles, rather than the sitter’s name, in order to direct attention away from the subject, and towards the portrait as an autonomous work of art. While Streeton titled a portrait of a child descriptively in the case of Orange, blue, and white (Portrait of Keith) 1889, he generally used the names of his subjects as titles in the few portraits he completed in the 1890s, including Mrs W.H. Read 1890, Professor Marshall-Hall 1892, and Ned Hogan 1896.

71 ‘Ottoman Ali’ is here referred to as a bread seller. The name is probably fictional as another reference to ‘Ottoman Ali’, which appears in Streeton’s Bulletin letter, with the name given to the driver of the victoria cab Streeton hires on his journey around the city. A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’; Streeton also refers to an ‘Ottoman Ali’ in a letter to Walter Barnett: ‘I was reminded at once of the persistent pitiful face of Ottoman Ali when he found we were off him etc—Do you remember he was a bit miserable one day & told us that his wife (aged about 17 or 18 & pretty harty & healthy no doubt) had deserted & left him’. A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, early 1898?, Barnett letters

72 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’

Streeton's use of descriptive titles or potentially fictional names in his Orientalist works was much more likely to relate to a sense of colonial superiority that was common among tourists in the late nineteenth century. This probably influenced his decision to designate titles with less regard for the identity of the sitter. Commercial photographs of types in North Africa and the Middle East were often given similar generic titles, some with captions, which classified the subject according to race or occupation, such as 'A water seller' or 'Une danseuse Arabe'. Although this aligned with nineteenth century ethnographic practices and their physiognomic lineage, Rebecca J. DeRoo maintained that while 'Physiognomy used physical features as a guide to individual character and class ... ethnic type categories take individual subjects and their clothing to represent an entire race'.

In the production of superficial images that represented local colour for a Western audience, such generic labels erased social interaction, and stripped society and culture of their complexities and history.

'Photographie Artistique': Photography and the Type

The creation and reproduction of cultural stereotypes was expedited by the development of photography and the increased accessibility of commercial photographs and postcards for sale in major cities and tourist destinations. By the 1890s, a number of photographs and postcards that were available in Cairo depicted men and women understood to be representative in terms of their physical appearance and occupations. Such stock images influenced Streeton's own representations of the people of Cairo.

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76 D. Gregory, 'Scripting Egypt', 1999, p.145
78 Though the repetition of specific subjects in tourist photography generated stereotypes, which in turn became the recognisable and legible images consumed by the West, there was a belief during this period that the photograph represented empirical truth, acting as 'witness'. Michael Hayes writes that though photographic representations of types were viewed as artistic, they also projected an authority based upon scientific discourses that 'recorded and constructed cultures and artifacts', in the fields of anthropology and ethnography, where the medium was used to measure and define characteristics of race. Photography was also able to assist in defining the coloniser's sense of self at the same time as imaging the environment of the 'other'. The photograph of the type thus becomes a commodity; a cultural artifact purchased as an aide-
technologies and the diversity of photographic subjects developed at a time when markets in Europe, Australia and America were seeking out illustrations of non-Western cultures. Ayshe Erdoğdu noted that European photographers and studios based in major non-Western capitals, such as Istanbul and Cairo, responded by producing images of people in sales catalogues, specifically classified as ‘types’. 79

Together with other subjects in Streeton’s collection of commercial photographs, such as the views of ancient Egyptian sites and historic streetscapes, the Egyptian type was part of a canon of Orientalist photography. 80 His collection is a mediated group of images, and the conscious process of selecting scenes and subjects reflected how the artist wanted to document and represent Egypt and its people. 81 The photographs presented a way of recording aspects of Cairo and its people not necessarily for a more thorough understanding of the region and its culture, but for their aesthetic and picturesque qualities. Nancy Micklewright argued that this pattern of collecting ignored particular themes common in Orientalist photography, such as modern urban landscapes; personal photographs produced for or by non-Western residents; and photographs commissioned by, or produced for, the Ottoman Empire. 82

These themes did not appear in Streeton’s collection of commercial photographs, though among the photographs attributed to the artist there are views of the modernised streetscapes of the European quarters. In his collecting, he instead conformed to popular taste and purchased the picturesque views and figure subjects that were of more interest to him as an artist (and perhaps more readily available). For Streeton, these were both mementos and the basis for the oil and watercolour paintings that he completed in London. A number were labelled ‘Photographie Artistique’ or ‘Atelier Spécial de Peinture’, and were produced specifically for the Orientalist market. Urban views and landscapes provided mémoire or as a substitute for a lived experience of the East. See M. Hayes, ‘Photography and the emergence of the cruise: rethinking the representational crisis in colonial photography’, 2002, p.176

81 It is possible that the collection held by Streeton’s grandson, Oliver Streeton, is incomplete: It is difficult to confirm that individual photographs have not been left in various studios or homes, been gifted or destroyed since their acquisition as a group in 1897.
backdrops for studio paintings by artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme and Rudolf Ernst, while images of men and women engaged in work populated scenes as decorative flourishes or characters set out in a timeless tableau.

Streeton’s collection of photographs encompasses images of people pursuing their daily activities, posed with props that indicate their vocation, rather than studio-based palace or harem fantasies. Many of his albumen prints are from the studios of G. Lékégian and Co.; Pascal Sebah; and Bonfils. They were most likely purchased in Cairo, as the subject matter is almost exclusively Egyptian, rather than being a mixed assortment of ‘Orientalist’ images from across the North African or Middle Eastern regions. In contrast to the architectural photographs of ruins and urban landscapes discussed in Chapter Three, the number of photographs of people in Streeton’s collection is comparatively limited. There are five picturesque views of men and women collecting water and washing clothes on the banks of the Nile, produced by G. Lékégian and Co., and two agricultural vignettes by Bonfils. There are no images of the modernised labour force or the Ottoman-Egyptian elites who wore European dress. Factory workers, children attending school, Cairenes in Western garb or tourists exploring city streets are also absent, as these aspects of social change were not popular with the tourist market that sought out representations of an exotic and timeless Orient. Different photographers repeated similar themes, and, like the postcards from Algeria examined by DeRoo, they ‘reflect the interests of the commercial tourism industry … and appeal to viewers because they reinforce bourgeois attitudes about race, work and gender’.  

Examined alongside the commercial photographs he collected, the snapshots attributed to Streeton share both similarities and differences. The artist’s full-length photograph of a drink vendor is a summation of vocation, as represented by the subject’s costume and vessel. As with two full-length photographs of women in Streeton’s collection of

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83 Nancy Micklewright found a similar pattern in her study of the albums of collected commercial photographs of Lady Brassey: ‘There were no views of Egyptian bureaucrats in European dress going to work, no views of wealthy Egyptian women dressed in Parisian fashions having tea, no people at work in factories, no children at school, no indication of the tremendous social changes under way in Egyptian society in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. The only exception is a photograph which shows Egyptian soldiers in parade uniform.’ N. Micklewright, A Victorian traveler in the Middle East, 2003, p.98

commercial images—*Mere et enfants* (Plate 5.16) and *Une danseuse Arabe* (Plate 3.7)—this is not a portrait of an individual. There is little indication that Streeton sought to collect further information about his subject, other than perhaps the type of drink sold, and possibly his name. However, unlike the commercial examples, the photograph documents a specific time and space—one of engagement between the artist/tourist, and the subject/vendor. It is a moment of contact between these two men, even though they are distanced by their experiences of culture, class and religion. It is also likely that the drink seller was a willing participant, who stood still long enough for the photograph to be taken without the blur of movement.\(^85\)

Streeton's photograph may be located within a particular canon of ethnographic representation. Such images were first found in costume albums, including those commissioned by Western ambassadors who had worked in the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century. In these albums, figures were presented without individual markers or identifiable character traits.\(^86\) For example, the dragomans (interpreters) pictured in these albums 'serve to signify the concept of a generic dragoman with the standard costumes', as do Streeton's drink sellers. They are stereotypes, 'changing little from one to the next'.\(^87\)

Aykut Gürçağlar noted that a small number of dragomans—members of a wealthy and prestigious social strata of Ottoman Istanbul—had the opportunity to readdress such depictions through the commissioning of portraits, generally prior to the nineteenth century when the status and occupation of the Ottoman dragoman changed:

The dragoman portraits are larger paintings executed in oil on canvas, and they were probably intended to be hung by the dragoman in the house. The costume books present a stereotyped watercolour designed as a small painting to fit the pages of an album. The commissioned portrait presents a figure whose identity is known and uses text to support and confirm this identity, whereas the costume albums feature anonymous figures whose professional signs are expressed in simplified stereotypes.\(^88\)

\(^{85}\) Hotels such as the Shepheard's, where Streeton had his mail sent while in Cairo, advertised a service to develop photographic plates on the spot. In the case of the Shepheard's this was most likely undertaken at Hayman and Co, located next door. See K. Baedeker, *Egypt*, 1898, pp.27-28; The photograph of the drink seller may have been developed in Cairo or later in London, it is likely that the oil painting and watercolour were completed in London.

\(^{86}\) A. Gürçağlar, 'The dragoman who commissioned his own portrait', in Z. İnankur, R. Lewis, and M. Roberts (eds.), *The poetics and politics of place*, 2011, p.213

\(^{87}\) A. Gürçağlar, 'The dragoman who commissioned his own portrait', 2011, p.212

\(^{88}\) A. Gürçağlar, 'The dragoman who commissioned his own portrait', 2011, pp.211-219
Due to differences in social status and education, the drink sellers and other itinerant workers of Cairo were not in a financial situation to follow the example set by the dragomen of Istanbul. Representations of their occupations corresponded more closely to the costume book imagery that was repeated in commercial photographs and postcards. In two postcards of Egyptian water sellers that were produced around 1910 (Plates 5.25 and 5.26), the focus is on the subject as type. As these postcards share similar compositional qualities with Streeton’s photograph of the drink seller, it is possible to identify the artist’s extension of the subject in his oil and watercolour paintings by comparison. Streeton used the type as the basis for aesthetic investigation of colour, calligraphic gesture, and a subtle poetic symbolism. While the postcards represent a predominantly ethnographic interest in costume and occupation, and a pseudo-ethnographic claim to knowledge of the people and city of Cairo, Streeton’s figures are an exploration of a decorative exotic.

Fatma Habiba: ‘Lovely ladies of the harem may spy you at their ease’

While the drink sellers, knife grinder and porter showcased the occupations of local lower class Cairene men, Streeton’s few paintings of women encompassed the veiled figure. As common objects of fascination for the city’s visitors, many Western artists and writers reduced Eastern women to symbols of the exotic, or to abbreviated gestures woven into the crowd. For example, William Makepeace Thackeray described the sensual form of Cairene women by commenting that ‘the habit of carrying jars on the head always gives the figure grace and motion; and the dress the women wear certainly displays it to full advantage’. 89 They were rarely conceived as active participants in commerce or society, with the female body instead repeatedly employed as an effective, codified marker of cultural difference.

The striking oil painting, Fatma Habiba (Plate 5.23), is a work unique in Streeton’s oeuvre. The artist depicted a close-up image of a woman’s covered head, in marked contrast to his other type paintings, such as ‘Hassan’ the porter and the drink sellers, whose full-length descriptions are more in the style of the figure studies common in postcards and contemporaneous commercial photographs. Painted during Streeton’s time in Cairo or in

89 W.M. Thackeray, Notes on a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo, 1846, p.277
the months following his arrival in London, the work locates the artist within the public
domain of a tourist prohibited from the private, unveiled space of the harem or home.

Both a negation of and vehicle for eroticism, the veil has long been associated with Western
fantasies about the restricted space of the harem and the drama of tyrannical masculine
power. While it is thoroughly visual, the veil is a rejection of representation and a means of
concealment. By focusing on the veil as subject, Streeton illustrated the mysterious Orient
through a physical manifestation of anonymity and ambiguity. Not quite looking at the
viewer, Fatima quietly peers out to the left of the picture plane, without herself being seen.
Her veil is comparable to the contemporary niqab worn by some Muslim women as part of
their sartorial hijab. Revealing only a pair of dark brown eyes, the painting permits the
feminine gaze, while resisting the voyeuristic pleasure of the onlooker, which Streeton
himself also countered by only depicting her veiled face and not her body. The artist
confronted the physicality of this potent cultural signifier, though the individual identity of
the subject is lost in this distilled vision of the Eastern woman.

*Fatma Habiba* is a captivating and somewhat unconventional depiction of an Egyptian
woman by a Western Orientalist painter, in that it does not revert to the common
stereotypes of seductress or mother. Nor does it present her engaged in the picturesque
pursuit of water collection, as were Streeton’s other female figures who populate street and
bazaar scenes; or with wares for sale in the manner of Robert Dowling’s watercolour,
*Egyptian banana seller* 1878 (Plate 5.27). The occupations of women from the lower
classes were a common theme in both art and photography. Streeton purchased at least four
photographs of women washing clothes on the banks of the Nile or collecting and
transporting water in pottery vessels balanced on their shoulders or heads. He likely
referred to these photographs for his bazaar scenes and the watercolour, *Bank of the Nile*
(Plate 3.25). The women in these iconic images are represented as hardworking, and are
often pictured with children.

Published by G. Lékégian and Co., *Mere et enfants* (Plate 5.16) is a full-length depiction of
a dark-skinned African mother, possibly Sudanese or Nubian, with two children swathed in
batik-style cloth. The scene is atypical among Streeton’s collection of commercial photographs—while the subject matter is not definitely Egyptian, it reveals at least a passing interest in the maternal figure as subject. Of the Orientalist photographs available during the late nineteenth century, dancers and harem scenes were among the most popular images of women, and Streeton’s collection contained one such image of a bare-breasted subject, *Une danseuse Arabe* (Plate 3.7). Posed against a backdrop of rich textiles, the young dancer is nude from the waist up and balances a decorative vessel on her shoulder. Schroeder and Cie of Zurich published the photograph, which followed the pattern of popular semi-pornographic imagery produced by commercial studios for the steady tourist trade.\(^{90}\)

*Une danseuse Arabe* may have evoked for Streeton erotically charged visions of the ‘concubines’ with ‘great dark eyes’, described in his ‘Personal narrative’.\(^{91}\) In his earlier *Bulletin* letter, he also wrote that close by his rooms on Waghe al-birket the ‘residence of about twenty ladies [made] it pretty lively in their rooms at night’.\(^{92}\) However, the theme of sexual adventure is perhaps most clearly conveyed in his recollections of excursions to the seedier environs of the Fishmarket (Map 2). Here the artist encountered the female entertainers that ‘lie on their stomachs, and with their heads pressed against the bars attract your attention by a certain hiss-hiss-hiss, just like adders’.\(^{93}\) On another carriage trip through the area, Streeton was joined by a female companion who was excited ‘to view these hundreds of women with dark stuff rubbed round their eyes, and spots of black about the brow and chin, reclining in the most dreadfully seductive attitudes (or otherwise)’. He noted that it ‘somewhat astonished the lady to see some of them stand up and wriggle as we passed’.\(^{94}\) The image of these women remained with the artist, who, in 1931, recalled in an article on movement written for *The Argus*, ‘The dancing of Arab women in Cairo alters not in its monotony. It somewhat resembles the gyrations of silkworm moths before the process of laying eggs’.\(^{95}\)

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90 See M. Alloula, *The colonial harem*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986
91 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’
92 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
93 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
94 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
95 A. Streeton, ‘Movement: terrestrial and otherwise’, *The Argus*, Saturday 8 August 1931, p.9
While Streeton presented his encounters with the female entertainers in the Fishmarket and the 'twenty ladies' lodged near his Waghe al-birket residence as part of the adventure of the bohemian artist in Cairo, he also claimed some knowledge of the life women lived in Cairo. In the Bulletin letter he noted that 'the Mahometan [sic] law (the Koran) says you may marry four wives and you can keep as many as you can afford'. He went on:

often the beasts choose out of their 200 women an ugly negro Nubian who is favorite, and is waited on by the dear, fair-skinned and sad-eyed Circassian woman—and if the boss doesn’t like one or a dozen, the bloody eunuch promptly strangles her and drops her down the well.

With some theatricality, he concluded that this 'silent cure and cold horror goes on throughout Cairo as I write, and will till the Sultan and Constantinople are squashed, and police are free to enter these Moslem prisons'. Not only does this passage reveal the artist’s racial discrimination, it also shows his belief that Cairene women were being held against their will and mistreated—a common Orientalist stereotype. Streeton’s view of the harem may have also stemmed from conversations he had with the Assyrian lawyer, Tabet Bey, who was very likely Christian. Tabet Bey told the artist the story of a beautiful young slave who was beheaded by a jealous ‘favorite wife’.

Streeton’s writings do not convey a balanced understanding of the role and status of women in Cairene society and culture. By reducing them to the conventional Orientalist stereotypes of femme fatale or victim, he conformed to a precedent in Western travel narratives and ethnographies that was identified by Teresa Heffernan. Heffernan concluded that, since the eighteenth century, there has been a shared sentiment that veiled Muslim women were 'oppressed, obscured, hidden, and lacking in all agency'. The ‘call for unveiling’ in order to rescue or liberate Eastern women was ‘caught up with the desire to police race, class, and national boundaries as part of a larger imperialist strategy’. When writing for an Australian audience, Streeton thus reiterated and reinforced common Western perceptions.

96 A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmer, c. October 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, p.76
97 A. Streeton, 'Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo', 1899, 'Red page'
98 A. Streeton, 'Cairo—The Pasha’s Surprise'
100 T. Heffernan, 'Traveling East: veiling, race and nations', 2011, p.157
However, not all Western travellers to the Orient bought into this storyline. Some significant figures forwarded a more optimistic vision, such as in Edward Lane’s *An account of the manners and customs of modern Egyptians*, which recognised the relative freedom enjoyed by many women who were able to move around the city, enjoy outdoor leisure activities and make visits to harems. Female travellers who were invited into the closed realms of the harem, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Henriette Browne and Mary Walker, also presented a more positive account of the daily lives of the middle to upper class Ottoman women.

There has long been a fascination with the veil, and many late nineteenth century travel writers devoted passages to this emphatic symbol of the East. The myth of beguiling odalisques, in particular, was part of a Victorian escapism that emerged as a product of an urban industrialised society. Lane-Poole, who made careful observations of the crowds that flooded the bazaar spaces, wrote of:

Sudány women closely veiled with the white *burko*, which sets off their swarthy and black eyes to advantage; Egyptian girls in blue gowns and black veils ... horrible bleared-eyed old harridans, veiled with immaculate precision, squatting in rows against the house-fronts.

Lane described veiled faces that revealed only large, black, almond-shaped eyes ‘with long and beautiful lashes, and an exquisitely soft and bewitching expression: eyes more beautiful can hardly be conceived’. He believed that the concealment of other facial features heightened this effect, ‘often causing the stranger to imagine a defective face perfectly charming’. Although Lane was drawn to the latent sensuality of the veiled figures, he also expressed his apprehension of this possible mode of deception. To be veiled is,

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101 See E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, pp.175-191
103 S. Lane-Poole, *A story of Cairo*, 1902, pp.2-3
104 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.37; Lane goes on to describe the ‘practice universal among females of the higher and middle classes, and very common among those of the lower orders, which is that of blackening the edge of the eyelids, both above and below the eye, with a black powder called “kohl.”’ Kohl was used by women for both ornament and medical properties, though Streeton’s Fatma does not seem to have followed this fashion. E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.39
105 E. Lane, *An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860, p.48
some degree, to be unseen. It is a state of both great attraction and resistance. At this time, the veil was worn as a marker of faith and cultural identity, and to protect the privacy and virtue of the woman. However, many nineteenth century Orientalists, expatriates and tourists saw it as proof of Otherness and of the inferiority of Islamic culture and society. Costume became an embodiment and eventual substitute for the exotic East and the cultural Other. As with Streeton's various figure studies, the focus on costume stripped away the individual identity of his subject, while also revealing a desire to represent knowledge of and power over the Orient.

Streeton wrote of his own encounter with the women of a harem in his untitled notes from the 'Personal narrative'. On the streets of Cairo, he was passed by a procession of wives and 'concubines' taking part in a pasha's funeral. He described 'the brass ornament fixed between their dark sad eyes' and stated that while 'holding the black veil, they [chanted] a dismal dirge'. The 'very last one of the procession' was an exception. As she moved past, she gave him 'a most energetic wink with one of her great dark eyes, & never wishing to appear rude, [he] winked back at her as vigorously as [he] possible could'. Though such an exchange would generally have been understood as both socially and culturally indecorous, it followed a familiar tone in travel literature, and was in line with the way in which Streeton represented himself as something of a ladies' man in letters to his friends during this period. The playfulness of this interaction is captured in the warm, smiling eyes of Fatma Habiba. Inscribed 'Cairo 1897', it is possible that this painting was completed in Cairo, in response to such experiences on the streets and in the bazaars.

Streeton's two sketchbooks that contain Cairo subjects do not include any drawings of drink sellers or specifically identifiable street vendors, although there are a small number of brief sketches of men and women, mainly as adjuncts to architectural studies. The

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106 It is important to note that both Muslim and Coptic Christian women wore the *niqab* at the time Streeton visited Cairo.


108 A. Streeton, 'Personal narrative'

109 'Europeans, as a rule, should never enquire after the wives of a Muslim, his relations to the fair sex being sedulously veiled from the public. Even looking at women in the street or in a house is considered indecorous, and may in some cases be attended with danger.' K. Baedeker (ed.), *Egypt*, 1885, p.26; See A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, '‘M.M. Polynesian’ on the line’, 1897
sketchbooks also contain a number of small drawings of veiled women (see Plate 5.28), which further suggests that Fatma may have been drawn from life, or painted from such rapidly completed sketches back in Streeton’s rented rooms in Cairo or in his London studio. They are brief descriptions that would not have necessitated an extended pose. While Streeton, on at least two occasions, worked from a photograph he had taken of a drink vendor, it is unlikely that the artist would have had the opportunity to photograph a posed female subject as model, and there is no evidence that such a photograph was once part of his collection.

The French artist Princess Mathilde Laetitia Bonaparte’s *A fellah* 1861 (Plate 5.29) is similar to Streeton’s *Fatma Habiba* in its close focus on the veiled figure, though it includes certain contextual details that position the subject as a rural worker, rather than a city dweller. As a female artist, Bonaparte may have encountered fewer problems gaining access to the sitter as a model, though for religious and cultural reasons, artists rarely had access to Muslim women. Both male and female painters working in Egypt and North Africa instead often used Jewish or Christian sitters, or resorted to dancers and prostitutes. A primary exception to this pattern is found in the work of a handful of women who gained access to the Ottoman harems. These include British artist, Mary Adelaide Walker, who undertook portrait commissions of Princess Fatma Sultan and her father, Sultan Abdülmecid, in Istanbul in the 1860s; and Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, who painted Princess Nazli Hanım in Istanbul from 1869 to 1870. Such opportunities were rare, and were only afforded to women who were longstanding residents of cities such as Cairo and Istanbul, or who had prestigious personal contacts. Walker was particularly aware of the unique nature of her access, which differed greatly from the experience of other Western female visitors, who Mary Roberts noted were ‘constrained by the formality of a ceremonial visit’.110

The Australian artist, Hilda Rix Nicholas, came across the problem of securing models while painting her ‘splendid types’ in Morocco.111 She found that both Muslim men and

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women were wary of representation. In a letter published in *The Studio* in 1914, Rix wrote, ‘If only one could succeed in banishing their fears—what an unending field of work there is amongst these beautiful, dignified people!’\(^{112}\) In *Fatma Habiba*, the veil itself recalls the Muslim prohibition of depicting form. Particularly in regard to the representation of the human form, Streeton and Rix violated Islamic codes of social behaviour. This was perhaps unconsciously enacted by Streeton, although his depictions of figures, particularly the veiled woman, reflected a colonial self-assurance that was enjoyed by many Western painters working in Egypt and elsewhere in the region.

The figure of the veiled women caught the imagination of other Australian travellers, including the Australian writer for the *Court*, who visited Cairo at around the same time as Streeton. In her article, published one year after Streeton’s arrival in the city, she provided a detailed description of the costume worn by women of the lower classes, such as *Fatma Habiba*:

[They] wear a dark dress and a black veil. This is fastened on just below the eyes by a band, from which it hangs by three cords. The band is often decorated with gold, silver, and coloured stars, or other designs, and passes round the head just above the forehead. In the case of a married woman the thread which holds the veil to this band in the centre is decorated with three empty cotton reels more than anything else; this rests upon the forehead and top of the nose. The veil is of thin crepe-like material about 10in. wide and 4ft. long. It quite covers the lower part of the nose, mouth, and chin; it is doubtless a great protection from the two great discomforts of the east—dust and flies. Over the head is worn a large square of dark material. One edge is placed on the top of the forehead, and is allowed to fall down to the back and over the shoulders. It is then lifted on the arms and held by the left hand to the breast. If a man too curiously gazes at this quaint, human chrysalis the edges of this garment are drawn closer, and so the face is entirely concealed. The higher class of women vary this costume by adopting richer material and less somber colours.\(^{113}\)

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\(^{112}\) H. Rix, ‘Sketching in Morocco: a letter from Miss Hilda Rix’, 1914, p.41

\(^{113}\) ‘Cairo and the Cairenes’, 1898, p.132; Constance Fenimore Woolson also took great pains describing the particularities of costume. She noted that young women of the upper classed usually wore a ‘dress is a long gown of very dark blue cotton, a black head veil, and a thick black face veil that is kept in its place below they eyes by a gilded ornament which looks like an empty spool.’ C. Fenimore Woolson, *Mentone, Cairo and Corfu*, 1896, p.180; R.Talbot Kelly adds further differentiations between the garments worn by women of the upper and lower classes, noting that ‘Women of the middle and lower classes instead of the expensive “hubarah” substitute the “milayeh,” a similar garment made of cotton, dyed a grey-blue and edged with a broad indigo border. The veil, called “burko-u-arusa” (or bridal veil), instead of being muslin [as for upper classes], is made of a kind of coarse crape, ornamented at the edge with embroidery or gold beads, while over the nose is worn a curious ornament of brass or gold, which is the distinctive mark of the married state.’ R.T. Kelly, *Egypt*, 1903, p.28
Edward Lane, who similarly dedicated much time to the particularities of dress, confirmed many of these details. From the contemporaneous Court description of costume and veiling practices, certain conclusions can be drawn about Streeton’s subject. As she is wearing a horizontally ridged brass ornament that is connected by a black thread over her nose, it is likely that she is married. The lack of kohl around her eyes and ornamentation on the costume may indicate a costume of the lower classes. The burko, or face veil, was a long rectangular strip of white muslin for those of the upper classes, with women of the lower classes wearing black cotton or crepe. Fatma’s burko is modelled in black and brown tones, with subtle undulations of drapery visible in the line of Streeton’s brush. Below the small rise that indicates the continuation of the nosepiece beneath the material, there is also a hint of ornamental embroidery, which is articulated in calligraphic sweeps of black oil paint. Over her bronzed forehead, a band of brilliant blue fabric sits below a further band of black that covers her hairline, though Streeton has revealed a section of dark brown hair, as the head veil, known as a tarhah, slips back and up to create a compositional apex. The public costume of lower class women also consisted of wide cotton or linen pants, known as tshalvar or shintijan, which were worn under a blue linen or cotton dress called a tob sebleh, or a full-length woman’s kaftan, called a yelek.

In speaking of the women of the Maghrib, the English painter, Henry Blackburn, wrote, ‘Veiled beauties are interesting, sometimes much more interesting for being veiled; but it does not serve our purpose much to see two splendid black eyes and a few white robes’. Streeton challenged this assertion by employing the woman’s eyes as the focal point of the work. However, the very depiction of a veiled woman as a subject suggests his disinterest in portraying the individual. Although telling in its details, without context or narrative, Fatma’s veil is a summary gesture that speaks for her gender, culture and religion. The

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114 See E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, pp.29-42
115 The burko was often ornamented with false pearls, gold coins, flat metal ornaments or chain tassels. E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, pp.48-49; Also known as al-burqu
116 A yelek is lined, with the neck open to chest and buttoned or laced along side seams for shaping, with a side slit over trousers. Women would wear a shirt under the yelek, and a djubbeh or binnish, a cloth overcoat with wide sleeves, on top. In Alexandria and Cairo, women would also wear the melaya luf, a large rectangular cotton wrap worn for modesty and warmth; See E. Lane, An account of the manners and the customs of the modern Egyptians, 1860, pp.45, 47
117 H. Blackburn, Artists and Arabs: or, sketching in sunshine, Estes and Lauriat, Boston, 1878, p.74
approach is direct, with the work’s strength coming from the contrast of the iconic pyramidal shape of the veil against an unresolved chalky background of pinks and whites. The form was originally sketched in pencil, though the artist tightened and reshaped the areas of black, creating a more definite angle. For the late nineteenth century audience, she would have functioned as an emblematic embodiment of all Cairene women—mysterious and exotic, yet seemingly legible to the Australian artist who did not have access to the private sphere of the Egyptian home.

Fatma is a compelling subject, and the compressed arrangement of visual elements increases the intensity of the portrayal. Locating her at the very surface of the picture plane, Streeton draws out the decorative values of form, blocked colour and flatness. The immediacy of the image necessitates the viewer’s direct engagement with the subject, though close cropping and a lack of spatial depth recalls Streeton’s description of the ‘lovely ladies of the harem [that] spy you at their ease’ from the ‘beautifully carved projecting windows with wee little openings’. The Western tourist’s desire to access the East is heightened by aspects of the region’s inaccessibility. The tourist is halted by small laneways and closed gates, while other markers of privacy are clearly expressed by such common motifs as the harem and veil. *Fatma Habiba* embodies this desire, and this refusal. Understood in relation to Streeton’s small output of earlier Australian portraits and Cairene figure studies, a change can be seen in the language of representation employed by the artist in this painting. Although the abrupt composition draws the viewer into the space of the sitter, the veil itself represents a palpable distance between the painter-traveller, Streeton, and the private, contained city of nineteenth century Cairo. With only her dark eyes and a glimpse of brown skin revealed, Fatma is performing race through her costume, silently.

**Exhibiting the East**

During his first months in London, the bright eyes of the veiled woman and the colourful costumes of itinerant workers sustained Streeton’s interest in an exhibition of Eastern pictures. However, the Orientalist work did not deliver the market triumph in London for

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118 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
which the artist had hoped. Streeton felt the impact of Cairo both on his health and economic situation as early as June—writing to Barnett that he had ‘invested too much in Egypt’—and in a letter to his friend Delmer, penned in October 1897, Streeton’s enthusiasm for the exhibition of Egyptian works had begun to wane.\(^{119}\) He was ‘pale and melancholy’ and sought to stave off the ‘dreadful loneliness’ he had begun to feel as a consequence of the rebuff he suffered at the hands of the galleries and dealers around London.\(^{120}\) Largely an unknown artist, Streeton did not have success raising interest in his show, nor were his Cairo works hung at the Royal Academy or Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours exhibitions, where his painting companion, Walter Brookes Spong, had shown his own ‘Cairoan’ subjects.\(^{121}\) As it was for numerous Australian travellers arriving in London before him, it would likely have been a shock when Streeton recognised his diminished status as an outsider from the colonies. He wrote:

> They didn’t know me etc—never seen me before and it required considerably more push or influence or running around than I could bring to bear upon them—so the Exhibition didn’t come off … (why I haven’t had a good merry time with claret since I was in Cairo).\(^{122}\)

This somewhat detached sentiment was reiterated in a letter written to Mr Langton on 17 March 1898, in which he regretted not being able to use his influence to secure an exhibition, as he was ‘quite an utter stranger here’.\(^{123}\)

Streeton’s bid to establish his reputation in London through his Cairo works came to nothing. His letters indicate that, on various occasions from 1897 to 1899 (and possibly later), the artist dispatched small groups of paintings, including some Egyptian works, to

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\(^{119}\) A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, June 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.73

\(^{120}\) A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmer, c. October 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, pp.74-76

\(^{121}\) “The many friends in Sydney of Mr. W.B. Spong will be glad to hear that the hanging committee at the Royal Academy have done him the honour of accepting two of his pictures, and to further show their appreciation of his work have placed them both “on the line”. As in the case of Mr. Spong’s pictures in the Institute Painters in Watercolour the subject of his Academy canvases are, if I may coin a word, “Cairoan”.’ *The Advertiser*, 31 May, 1898, p.5

\(^{122}\) A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmer, c. October 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.75

\(^{123}\) A. Streeton, letter to Mr Langton, 17 March 1898, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.76
his Melbourne dealer, Jim Conroy. However, in his correspondence with Roberts, Streeton appeared self-conscious about sending tourist pictures, blaming the quantity and quality of his output on his poor health while in Cairo. Streeton's tone had changed, and the excitement and energy of earlier correspondence was gone. In a letter to Roberts, dated 29 June 1898, he explained that an acquaintance that had travelled with him on the Polynesien was returning home with a group of works for exhibition:

To-day [illeg.] Harper (sister of Mrs Molyneux) leaves England for Sydney & takes a small parcel of my pictures for Jim Conroy—in case there is an Exhibition coming on in Sydney—they are figure studies of Arabs etc & are not worth 2d a piece to me in London ... I think they are [more] interesting than the last I sent out ... I was in poor health in Egypt—and snatched what I could there.

The letter reveals Streeton's desire to sell the paintings that had not found a place in the London market. He was in need of money: 'I want cash so will not let em [sic] go cheap—I've written Jim the prices'. However, he implored his friend to check over the figures and reduce them if the Australian market necessitated it.

Streeton's Oriental output received a far more positive reception in Australia. In the 'Art Society of NSW 19th annual exhibition' of 1898, Streeton exhibited five Egyptian subjects: Egyptian drink vendors (catalogue 51), The spice bazaar (catalogue 96), Ottoman Ali, breadseller (catalogue 100), The Citadel, Muhammad Ali (catalogue 101) and 'Hassan' the porter (catalogue 102). When reviewing the show, A. Layman wrote in the Sydney Mail, 'Mr Arthur Streeton brightens the exhibition with some charming sketches taken during his recent course through Egypt. His skill as a colourist is well shown in nos 51, 101 and

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124 For example, a group of paintings that included scenes of Cairo and Naples was sent back to Jim Conroy in October 1897. Streeton stated that there were plans to send Egyptian paintings as 'those are the right sort & Conroy says send out others too – he can sell them for me ... so I'm doing a little to some of the sketches of Napoli and Cairo & shall post some out—Jim Conroy might even mount a little show of a dozen in Sydney'. A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett letters.


126 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 29 June 1898, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.), Letters from Smike, 1989, p.79; Mrs Harper travelled on the Polynesien with Streeton on his way to London. She travelled first class with the Barnetts. See A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 'M.M. Polynesian 'on the line', February 1897.


102'. 129 A critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald* praised Streeton’s ‘clever studies of water carriers, porters and other inhabitants of Egypt—strongly drawn and richly coloured’. 130 The *Daily Telegraph* critic wrote that:

Mr Arthur Streeton’s Cairo sketches are a considerable source of strength. They are slight but remarkably clever and full of interest. At a glance one can see that, like the artist he is, he has gone for the local atmosphere rather than a transcript of any particular spot. 131

In England, Streeton was an unknown artist, and it is likely that gallery owners and dealers saw nothing distinctive in his Oriental subjects, which were commonly explored by British artists of the period. However, in Australia, his established reputation led to the sale of works, as well as favourable reviews by newspaper critics.

This eventual success back home was likely due to Streeton’s ability to speak of and for the desired Orient—both imagined and real. Streeton’s subjects fitted the mould of recognisable cultural types, and were imbued with the inherent authenticity and credibility of the painter-traveller. On the other hand, as decorative figure studies, they were later read as characters drawn from the *Arabian Nights* and thus appealed to audiences who sought the exoticism of the literary East. 132

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130 ‘Art Society’s exhibition: second notice’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1898, p.4; See also ‘Art Society’s exhibition, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September 1898, p.6  
This thesis advocates a broadening of the art historical literature on Arthur Streeton to encompass a detailed response to his Orientalist oeuvre. While previous scholarship has largely sidelined the effect that Streeton’s journey to Cairo in 1897 had on the artist and his output, the importance of this first period of travel overseas was recognised by his contemporaries. In 1943 an unnamed writer memorialised Streeton in a pamphlet on his Dandenong paintings, following the artist’s death on 1 September that year:

For thirty years he worked in varied scenes and climes ... let us follow Arthur Streeton across the globe, from city to city, from country to country, from triumph to triumph ... We see him painting on the banks of the Nile ... then on the crescent bay of Naples—then England is reached.¹

Streeton is pictured as a young painter-traveller, capturing the majesty of the foreign and exotic as he worked ‘on the banks of the Nile’. The writer presents Streeton’s journey to London, through Egypt and Italy, as an essential component of the artist’s biography. Though perhaps most closely associated with Australia’s Impressionist landscape tradition, at the time of his death, Streeton’s reputation was also defined by explorations beyond Australian shores.

That Streeton keenly felt the impact of this period of travel is demonstrated in the first passages of his ‘Personal narrative’, with which this thesis began. The exotic environs of the Cairene bazaar were used to frame these unpublished recollections of his life’s work. In the opening lines of the introduction to these memoires, drafted sometime between 1919 and the 1930s, Streeton declared with fervour that he ‘bowed before the beauty of Grand Cairo’. The narrative that followed invited the reader into the small shop of a perfume dealer in the Muski bazaar, visited by the artist with his painting companion, Walter

Brookes Spong. The shop summoned Streeton’s experiences of a distant land, visited as a young man on his way to London. Interwoven with stories spanning the artist’s career, the episodes detailing Streeton’s adventures in Cairo reveal a playful and adventurous traveller who was energised by the aesthetic possibilities of his surroundings.

In the ‘Personal narrative’, as in Streeton’s earlier Bulletin letter, there was a tension between the sense of cultural distance the artist experienced through his position as a tourist of the Empire, and his level of engagement with the people who populated Cairo’s streets, marketplaces and popular sites. These travel narratives form a significant part of his Orientalism. They not only represent his self-perception as a tourist within the Empire, and the special status he assumed as a painter-traveller, but also hint at the complexity and scope of colonial contact during the late nineteenth century. In this thesis, the ‘Personal narrative’ and Bulletin letter have been used to map the artist’s movements around the Eastern city, and locate many of the sites and subjects depicted in his works. An awareness of the spaces in which Streeton moved locates the artist within a socio-geographically complex city, during a period of increasing tourism in Egypt under British administrative control.

On his first return visit to Australia in 1907, Streeton recognised the relationship between the Cairo he had experienced and his homeland. In a letter to Tom Roberts, he described Sydney’s ‘undulating shore lines & luxurious languor of expression’ as ‘semi-Eastern’. As in Sydney, where Streeton painted numerous views of the glistening blue harbour and beaches, Cairo provided the artist with an opportunity to produce a body of work in response to a city. Such an opportunity would again arise when Streeton travelled to Europe a decade later, following his marriage to Nora Clench. The couple honeymooned in Venice in 1908, returning again the following year. The Venetian paintings and watercolours produced in these years reveal similar aesthetic pursuits to the Cairo street scenes and architectural studies. As he had been in Egypt, Streeton was concerned with the effect of brilliant light as it carved out the details of ornamental façades. He had developed a visual

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2 A. Streeton, ‘Introduction’
vocabulary to engage with the complexity of the urban spaces that confronted him, establishing his presence within the city’s landscape.

Like other urban centres, nineteenth century Cairo had seen modernising developments implemented in order to cater for changes in industry, trade, social movements and technology. From the perspective of any traveller to the city during this period, it would have appeared a worksite of modernisation, with streetscapes, roads, rail lines and amenities all undergoing change. However, depictions of these changes in Orientalist art were rare. Streeton’s paintings and watercolours likewise captured an abbreviated view, almost completely editing out the presence of foreigners and modernity in an attempt to portray the exoticism and beauty of the East. Although he was known to have worked in the Frankish Sharia al-Muski region, there is no visual representation of the European facilities that were then present. Markers of contemporary commerce used by those living in the Western part of the city, such as post offices, banks and even the glass-fronted shops of tobacconists and tailors, were excluded.

Streeton’s depiction of the tourist trade, which formed a significant part of the city’s economy by the end of the nineteenth century, was extremely limited. Despite the fact that tourists were certainly a visible presence within the Egyptian capital, they only ever featured in one of Streeton’s Orientalist compositions—the watercolour, Sphinx 1897. While tourists and horse-drawn victorias appear in his amateur photographs of the Azbakiya region, Streeton’s paintings and sketches of streetscapes and marketplaces were inhabited only by the local men and women he would portray as types in his ethnographic figure studies. Though these urban environments of Cairo were heterogeneous spaces, with people from varying social and cultural backgrounds partaking in the daily hustle and bustle of the streets and bazaars, Streeton almost exclusively depicted them as homogeneous and populated by ‘Oriental’ subjects. The local Cairene was represented as a generalised decorative motif within a picturesque urban landscape.

The effect that this urban landscape had on the artist was evident not only in the number of works he produced in response to the Cairene streets and bazaars, but in the collection of
commercial photographs depicting architectural and archaeological sites that he amassed during his stay. In this thesis, the previously unexplored influence of photography on Streeton’s Orientalist paintings has been addressed through analysis of both the photographs that Streeton himself took in Cairo, and those purchased from commercial vendors. By identifying where photographs were used as the basis for artworks, this study has established their importance in shaping and recording Streeton’s experiences of Egypt and its inhabitants. Streeton’s photographic pursuits were an important part of his project to represent Cairo, and when examined in relation to his paintings and drawings of figures, they demonstrated how the photographic medium presented a system for understanding the development and dissemination of Orientalist types.

While providing a record of the various occupations pursued by the Cairene men and women he encountered, Streeton’s figure studies also reveal the artist’s desire to capture the aesthetic possibilities of costume. Formalist concerns took precedence over any engagement with the language, customs or religion of the people. As in Australia, he remained preoccupied with the picturesque, and celebrated the colour and exoticism of his subjects with the aim of creating small, enchanting and marketable pieces. Although there was little engagement with the individual character of each sitter, Streeton’s figure studies fit the mould of recognisable cultural types, imbued with the inherent authenticity and credibility of the artist’s first-hand experience of Cairo.

The magic of an Eastern exotic, untarnished by the realities of global travel and colonialism, encouraged the market for Orientalist pictures. Western conceptions of the landscapes and people of the Orient were often founded upon beguiling tales of ruthless decadence and mysterious harems, with the assumption that the cities of North Africa and the Middle East were timeless and unchanging—immune to the mechanisms of modernity. Following his Impressionist inclination away from dominant narratives, Streeton worked in a manner that presented viewers and potential buyers with an accessible, picturesque token of the East. Streeton sought subject matter that was readily available as he strolled through the Egyptian city with his sketchbook and stool. He swiftly captured ethnographic detail as a summary motif, with his primary focus being the decorative and ornamental. For the
Western viewer—his audience and market for these works—Streeton’s evocations of Cairo communicated what was generally understood to be an ‘authentic’ experience of the city.

Streeton’s Return to the Imagined Orient

On 4 June 1897, Melbourne newspaper, The Sun, reported that the ‘latest letters received from Mr. Arthur Streeton give vivid pictures of Cairo and his enjoyment amid the relics of ancient art and civilization’.

Following his stay in Egypt, the artist was set to embark on the final leg of his journey to London. Streeton travelled to Naples with the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company from Alexandria. Sketches and watercolours of the Italian port city, Pompeii and Vesuvius provide a record of the artist’s stay.

On the coast of the Mediterranean, Naples was a popular tourist destination at the end of the nineteenth century, tempting the peregrine with an alluring mix of the foreign and familiar. As with Cairo, visitors viewed the city as charming and timeless, though they were often critical of its more modern elements, which were seen to exist in opposition to the picturesque nature of the historical site. For Australians such as Streeton, on the other hand, it often marked their first contact with Europe.

After arriving in Britain by ship, Streeton set about establishing a ‘little studio’ at Russell Square in Bloomsbury and visiting a tailor to have suits made. In a letter to his friend and travelling companion, Walter Barnett, the artist described his new premises, made homely by a ‘lump of Coolgardie Quartz’ from Western Australia, Barnett’s photographic portrait of Sir Henry Parkes, poetry books and Streeton’s ‘Egyptian work’. By October, he had settled into a studio at Joubert Mansions on Kings Road in Chelsea—a borough popular with artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite and Aestheticist movements.

4 The Sun: The Society Courier, 4 June 1897, p.12
5 A. Streeton, ‘Personal narrative’; Thomas Cook ltd., Cook’s tourists’ handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the desert, 1897, p.88
7 A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 22 June 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) Letters from Smike, 1989, p.73
In London, Streeton initially developed compositions based on sketches and photographs of Egypt, many of which were sent back to Australia for exhibition and sale. Though he would never pursue Orientalist subject matter in any sustained form, Streeton returned to Egyptian subjects in later years. In the decade following his journey to Cairo, Streeton produced an oil painting and watercolour that took the narrative poem, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, as subject. Positioned between the real and imagined Orients, these works reveal a transitional exploration of this Orientalist text, and the reverberating effect that the urban spaces and people of Cairo continued to have on the artist. The impact of Streeton’s journey to Egypt also extended beyond this literary Orientalism. *The Arthur Streeton catalogue* records the paintings ‘Cairo’ (cat. 1009) and ‘Old Cairo’ (cat. 1078), with the dates 1929 and 1933, respectively. As these works and their specific subject matter have not yet been conclusively identified, care must be taken when speculating about their role within Streeton’s oeuvre. However, as with Streeton’s visual representations of the *Rubáiyát*, their existence indicates the enduring resonance of the East. For the artist, who fashioned himself as cosmopolitan bohemian, returning to the Orient in his writings and artistic output facilitated an engagement with the identity of poetic adventurer in the Byronic tradition.

It is valuable, in this Postscript, to consider Streeton’s return to the literary Orient via the *Rubáiyát*, in comparison to the work of Tom Roberts and Conder. Their engagement with Orientalist texts indicates the popularity of such subjects among those artists who had been most closely associated with Impressionism in Australia. In the case of Roberts, the subject matter, which was drawn from an *Arabian Nights* tale, was challenging in terms of both execution and expression. His briefly explored Orientalism was likely a response to a perceived market for such works in the European art capitals, and he persevered for a number of years until he secured the painting’s hanging at the Royal Academy. Conder exhibited his Algerian work with a private dealer in Paris. His approach was more nuanced than Roberts’s rigidly choreographed scene, with the compositions referencing the

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8 Streeton also completed an illustration of a harem scene, published in *St Paul’s Magazine*, February 1898: ‘St pauls who took a drawing of the harem having an airing at Helouan, Eunich in red fez in foreground & an article to go with it for £2.2.0 first job for the papers and not paid—’. A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, early 1898, Barnett letters

200
Rubáiyát conveying a melancholic engagement with the theme of life’s journey from dawn until dusk, explored through the poem’s narrative.

‘Old Omar Khayyam’

A solo exhibition of Streeton’s work was held at the Upper Hibernian Hall in Melbourne during his brief return to Australia in 1907.\(^9\) In preparation for the show, Streeton packed a number of oil paintings and watercolours and sailed back to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 27 January. Streeton exhibited four Orientalist works: two oil paintings, ‘A page from Omar’ (*Allegory from ‘Omar’*—Plate 6.1) and ‘Old Cairo’ (possibly *Old Cairo*—Plate 3.11); and two watercolours, ‘The spice bazaar, Old Cairo’ (possibly *The spice market, Cairo*—Plate 4.2) and ‘The mosque, Cairo’ (not conclusively identified). A ‘Melbourne lady’ writing for the *Australian Town and Country Journal* singled out this latter work, maintaining that the watercolour ‘prominently’ showed Streeton’s flawless perspective.\(^10\) She also noted that throughout the exhibition there were works that conveyed an ‘Eastern brilliancy’:

> Each picture has a living, breathing individuality. As a colorist, I should say that among modern painters Streeton stands at the top … he has seen it all, and he has painted what he has seen with rare fidelity, and so the variety is wonderful.\(^11\)

In contrast, art critic Frank Myers wrote in the *Lone Hand* rather disparagingly about the exhibition, claiming that Streeton had ‘fallen to some extent a victim to the popular sham of “old Omar Khayyam”, and went about that outer court of the East with his imaginary Omar for a guide’. However, Myers was more impressed by Streeton’s depictions of Cairo’s urban spaces. He wrote that Streeton had also ‘read well in that much more real and virile stuff, “The Arabian Nights”, and did better with his Ali Baba, Haroun Alrashid, scherzerades [sic], catching ‘glimpses of the mysteries of gracious, mellowed age, and the luxurious beauty of the palms, shooting up like genii from the very desert sands’.\(^12\)

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\(^9\) A. Hall, *A catalogue of an exhibition of pictures by A. Streeton prior to his return to Europe*, Melbourne, 1907


\(^11\) Rowena, ‘Melbourne Lady’s Letter’, 1907, p.40

\(^12\) F. Myers, ‘Arthur Streeton’, 1907, p.307
drew an interesting distinction between the poetry of Oman Khayyám, made popular by Edward FitzGerald’s adaptation of the *Rubáiyát*, first published in 1859, and the *Arabian Nights*, which the critic took to be the ‘more real and virile stuff’.

Myers comfortably equated the literary Orient of the *Arabian Nights* with Streeton’s impressions of Cairo’s mosques and bazaars, and a painting after a commercial photograph of an Egyptian town. However, it appears he was not so convinced by Streeton’s visualisation of the *Rubáiyát*. This slippage between real and imagined Orients, as discussed in Chapter One, was a result of the popular belief that the *Arabian Nights* provided a valuable means of gaining information about Arab life. This was embedded in understandings of a contemporaneous nineteenth century Egypt, created by writers such as Edward William Lane, who imbued his annotated translation of the tales with ethnographic weight. The *Rubáiyát* and, by extension, Streeton’s treatment of the poem as subject, was another case entirely.

Omar Khayyám was a Persian mathematician, astronomer and poet, first introduced to Western readers by FitzGerald at a time when the popularity of Romantic poetry remained a significant influence on the arts. The eccentric English poet and writer was a friend of William Makepeace Thackeray and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. He began learning Persian from Professor Edward Byles Cowell in 1853, and it was Cowell who five years later brought the verses to FitzGerald’s attention. Each of the quatrains, or *rubáí* in Farsi, originally stood as a poem in itself. FitzGerald combined them to produce a longer text. He organised the *rubáí* into the classical rhyme of iambic pentameter and, in a number of cases, merged, manipulated or completely reconfigured quatrains. He also altered stanzas from one edition to the next, with certain *rubáí* changing dramatically from the first edition to the fifth. This process of translation and moulding brought forth through the lyrical narrative themes of living life for the day, fate, mortality, memory and oblivion and repeated the imagery of spring, roses, wine and dust. Emphasis was placed on the pleasure of the senses, with a hedonistic call to enjoy the bounty of nature and savour the fleeting moment.

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13 See E.W. Lane, *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*, 1860

202
The intellectuals and artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite and Aestheticist movements in Britain, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, George Meredith, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, became enthusiasts of the *Rubáiyát*. Rossetti was the first of the group to encounter FitzGerald’s version, in 1861, when it was sold for one penny as a remainder at a bookstore. In 1872, Morris and Burne-Jones produced an illuminated manuscript of the poem as a special gift for Burne-Jones’s wife, Georgiana. The Belgium-born printmaker, Frank Brangwyn, also completed a number of colour illustrations that were published in editions of the volume dating from 1906. The work’s popularity grew as reviews were published, and debate ensued over the merits of the translation. By the end of the century, it had become a significant and widely popular poem in Victorian literature, with adherents boasting their ability to quote stanzas in the same way that they would quote Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, John Keats or Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Streeton produced two works inspired by Omar Khayyám: *Allegory from ‘Omar’ (A page from Omar)* c.1905 (Plate 6.1) and *Sixtieth quatrain of the Omar Khayyam* c.1905 (Plate 6.2). In 1905, Streeton exhibited *Allegory from ‘Omar’* at the Royal Academy in London. The work was described by a critic as depicting ‘Three figures of beautiful women, with flowing hair, [who] stand in an almost golden light’. The two women located at the centre of the stage-like composition are dressed in voluminous swirling gowns of transparent red and gold, and move through a shadowy wood. Three figures in classical robes retreat into the darkened sides of the canvas. The soft curve of low-hanging clouds echoes the elaborately curled layers of the women’s costume, set in the gentle blush of a muted light. While the subject may loosely link in sentiment and atmosphere to the poetic narrative of the *Rubáiyát*, the landscape, costumes and light convey a picturesque Arcadia.

Listed in *The Arthur Streeton catalogue* with the incorrect date of 1906, and titled ‘Rubaiyat’, the painting is described as oil ‘upon a gilt canvas’ and measuring 30 x 20

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15 *Allegory from Omar* is recorded in the Royal Academy records as exhibited 1905, item 514. Streeton’s address listed as Chelsea Art Club, Chelsea, S.W., *Royal Academy of Arts 1905-197: a dictionary of artists and their work in the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts*, Wakefield, England, 1982, vol.4, p.93
16 ‘Australian artists in London’, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 June 1905
inches (approximately 72 x 61 centimetres). The catalogue also noted that it was ‘hung on
the line’ in the Royal Academy’s yearly exhibition, and was owned by Streeton’s friend
Theodore Fink.\footnote{A. Streeton (ed.), \textit{The Arthur Streeton catalogue}, 1935, p.120} The work was exhibited in Melbourne in 1907 with the title ‘A page from
Omar’, and priced at £78.15.0. By 1918, it was in the possession of Fink, who loaned it to
the \textit{Exhibition of Australian art} in Sydney that year with the title, ‘Decorative landscape’.
The subtitle of the work, as stated in \textit{The Arthur Streeton catalogue}, imperfectly quoted the
twenty-second quatrain from FitzGerald’s first edition:

\begin{quote}
And some of us the loveliest and the best,
That Time has from his rolling Vintage pressed,
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.\footnote{A. Streeton (ed.), \textit{The Arthur Streeton catalogue}, 1935, p.120}
\end{quote}

Streeton produced a pencil sketch, \textit{In memoriam—old friends} 1941, that also quoted this
quatrain, to mark the passing of ‘Melba, Marshall-Hall, Lambert, Longstaff’ (Plate 6.3).

Streeton’s submission of \textit{Allegory from ‘Omar’} to the Royal Academy in 1905 may well
have been motivated by his knowledge of the popularity of Orientalist works and exotic
themes in the European cultural capitals. By this time, both the \textit{Arabian Nights} and
\textit{Rubáiyát} were ever-present evocators of the East, and though the appeal of the exotic had
begun to wane by the end of the nineteenth century, Streeton’s friend and mentor, Roberts,
also turned to the imagined Orient while in London. In the same year that Streeton
exhibited his \textit{Rubáiyát} painting, Roberts engaged more fully with the themes of the
\textit{Arabian Nights} in \textit{The sleeper awakened} c.1905–1913 (Plate 1.20).

The title of the oil painting was taken from one of the \textit{Arabian Nights} tales, alternatively
referred to as ‘The story of Abon Hassan the wag’. In a letter to Frederick McCubbin, dated
23 October 1905, Roberts wrote of the project:

\begin{quote}
I told you in my last [letter] of starting that subject, from the Arabian nights done in the
sketch club years ago. It’s always been my dream to do it and after a lot of doubting and
reading and thinking it got started, and the pleasure is really splendid; it’s looking a bit
\end{quote}
puzzling to me today and yesterday but until then it seemed quite good, so I’ve put it away for a while. Have had good luck with some of the models and costumes—an Eastern authority is to come along and have a look at me (what ho!).

The work took a number of years to complete, with its first draft initially rejected in 1907. It was finally exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1913. In 1912, Roberts had written to McCubbin relating that he was beginning work on the Arabian Nights subject again and, in March 1913, once the work was hung, he recalled the problems he had completing it:

You will smile surely for up goes my ‘Sleeper awakened’. I’ve been having great fun with it … It’s very little value—I know the whole business is old fashioned & out of date … The general colour is agreeable—it’s simplicity that ain’t there … That setting a subject on to a canvas to look as if it just came there—that’s the problem. (It isn’t brilliant painting).

Roberts toiled over the painting, particularly in trying to capture the expression of movement. Like Streeton, he was not adept at working on imagined compositions. However, there is a sense that Roberts saw its completion as a significant accomplishment. Although the subject matter was ‘old fashioned & out of date’, it was a rite of passage for an Australian artist working in England. Humphrey McQueen would later note that the artist’s ‘pursuit of [the work’s] oriental subject tells us as much about Roberts’ notion of his place in art as do his shearing pictures’. While it was a divergence from his heroic landscapes and stately portraits, the work conformed to the grand figurative tradition. The years spent on the painting are an indication of the artist’s desire for success at the Royal Academy, and his belief that the Oriental subject matter might ultimately secure a hanging.

While Streeton’s use of Orientalist subject matter may have similarly influenced his decision to submit Allegory from ‘Omar’ to the Royal Academy exhibition in 1905, his bid

19 T. Roberts, letter to F. McCubbin, 23 October 1905, La Trobe Library MS 8187
22 ‘I’ve learnt much on it: what one can do in painting even in losing, in modifying, in losing your model & getting or trying to get the idea. To place 2 or 3 figures on a canvas, in a way other than putting 'em up together & painting them, is a big problem, & when you get 'em hopping around on their pink toes & one can scarcely do a touch direct from life, it's “wot o!”’ T. Roberts, letter to F. McCubbin, 26 March 1913, pp.71-72
for recognition in London may have also driven him towards the ‘decorative’ approach evident in this painting. In a 1910 article in the *Brisbane Courier*, which recounted news from the London publication, *The Studio*, the author highlighted developments in Streeton’s art making since leaving Australia:

> When at last he arrived in London he had considerably widened his outlook, and had begun very definitely that evolution in his practice which has produced such remarkable results during the last 10 years ... he began quite perceptively to feel the influence of stylists in painting, and under this influence he became conscious that he possessed decorative instincts, which, as yet, he had hardly attempted to develop.\(^{24}\)

The article’s reference to the artist’s ‘decorative instincts’ may be understood in relation to the decorative oil paintings and watercolours Streeton produced in the years following his arrival in London, and also to his own identification as a decorative artist. In a letter to his friend Barnett in 1897, Streeton had enthused, ‘if I become known in London it will be by a series of decorations ... I may cause a demand & have an Exhibition entirely of decorations’.\(^{25}\) When writing a short time later to Frederick Delmer, Streeton referred to ‘a little decorative picture of Ariadne’ he had recently commenced, and in a 1902 letter to McCubbin, Streeton praised Conder’s ‘exquisite colour decorations’.\(^{26}\)

Streeton’s use of such terminology may be linked to the French, *décoration*.\(^{27}\) The decorative aesthetic in France took hold in the 1890s, and was most closely associated with the artists of the Nabis, who included Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis. Streeton’s references to ‘decorations’ and the ‘decorative’ were indicative of its broadening popularity in Britain and Australia, most likely through its connection to Whistlerian Aestheticism. Prior to the negative connotations that were often ascribed to it during the twentieth century, *décoration* summoned the role of the decorative within art as an extension of its status within the decorative arts.

\(^{24}\) “Bon Ami”, *The Studio*, 1910, p.10

\(^{25}\) A. Streeton, letter to W. Barnett, 6 October 1897, Barnett letters

\(^{26}\) A. Streeton, letter to F. Delmer, c. October 1897, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.74; A. Streeton, letter to F. McCubbin, January 1902, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) *Letters from Smike*, 1989, p.89; The title ‘Decoration’ or ‘A decoration’ was used by Australian artists including Streeton, Conder, Sydney Long, Lionel Lindsay and Adrian Feint.


206
Both the Nabis and the Aestheticists drew inspiration from Oriental sources, including Japanese art, which provided a model for reconciling arts and crafts through the decorative use of pattern, form, line and colour. The appealing ornamental aesthetic of Japonisme stimulated artists to experiment with screens and fans. Often painted as designs in watercolour on silk or paper, fans had been embraced by French artists, Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Camille Pissarro, Bonnard and Denis; and the American artist, Robert Locher, who exhibited a selection of ‘decorations painted on silk’ in 1918. In his 1940 interview with Streeton, Basil Burdett noted the artist’s display of a painted silk fan by Conder.

After 1893, Conder had become increasingly preoccupied by fan decorations, and influenced both Streeton and Thea Proctor to explore this decorative medium. Streeton completed a number of fan compositions, including a watercolour on silk, *The blue Orient fan* c.1921 (Plate 6.4). In the work, Streeton depicted a reclining lady of the harem surrounded by swathes of dark blue gauzy fabric and Eastern details, such as an ornate hanging lamp and *narghile*. The fan design is garlanded with a decorative border of pearls, and the tracings of fine golden lacework surround nine green gems studded across the upper arc. The influence of Conder’s ‘exquisite colour decorations’ is certainly apparent. When working in London and Paris in the early 1890s, Conder responded to the popularity of Aestheticism, establishing his reputation as a decorative artist. His paintings and illustrations depicted delicate landscapes, maidens captured in dream-like states, and sexual intrigues played out by elegant men and women in courtly costumes framed within ornate interiors.

Conder, who had acquired an edition of the *Rubáiyát* in 1892, may have also been influential in Streeton’s decorative engagement with this popular Orientalist text. After leaving Sydney for Europe in 1890, Conder, affectionately known as ‘K’, remained in

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30 A. Galbally, *Charles Conder*, 2002, pp.112-113
contact with Streeton. It is possible the text was mentioned in their correspondence from this period. In a letter written years later to a mutual friend, John Rothenstein, Streeton said of Conder: ‘Though of the same age he seemed thirty years my senior in knowledge of humanity and worldly affairs: he knew all about Browning, Carlyle, Herrick, and The Rubaiyat’. For Streeton, it was significant that his friend was well read, and his specific reference to the poetry of Omar Khayyám indicates the value Streeton placed on the text.

Six years prior to Streeton’s journey, Conder had himself left for North Africa. In December 1891, Conder sailed to Algeria to stay at the Ottoman villa, Parc de Fontainbleu, in coastal Mustapha on the Eastern outskirts of the capital, Algiers. The ceramic artist, Comte Henri da Vallombreuse, owned the villa. Upon arrival, Conder wrote to William (Will) Rothenstein:

Here one feels quite in Australia again, even the old remembered gum trees have been transplanted and summer reigns; they say its winter anyhow its spring. There is a long line of almond trees budding in the garden and a pearly sea behind underneath all rows of white Bengal roses. It’s a delightful place and quite equal to one’s expectation the house is white inside and out and was once the abode of a Pasha and his thousand wives even in my room there is the inevitable chamber of the thousand and one nights where the favourite sleeps.

The reference to the Arabian Nights and evocation of the Pasha’s harem highlighted the exoticism of Conder’s Oriental abode, just as Streeton’s mention of the ‘lovely ladies of the harem’ had when describing his jaunts in Cairo five years later.

Conder produced three paintings during his four months in Algeria, each with subject matter taken from within the estate of the Parc de Fontainbleu. His ability to explore the

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32 See A. Galbally, Charles Conder, 2002, pp.89-95
33 C. Conder, letter to W. Rothenstein, December 1891, A. Galbally and B. Pearce, Charles Conder, exh. cat., Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2003, p.115
34 A. Streeton, ‘Letter from 9 Waghe-el birghet, Cairo’, 1899, ‘Red page’
35 The villa was around three kilometers beyond the city limits of Algiers. In the 1880s it was separated from Algiers by market gardens and wood. The French were attracted to the places built by the Ottomans along the coastline: ‘These extravagant structures satisfactorily fulfilled French fantasies of ‘Araby’ and were much sought after by them as winter holiday venues’. A. Galbally, Charles Conder, 2002, p.90; In a letter to C. Rothenstein, 11 February 1892, Conder gives his reason for not taking a trip into the desert with da
landscape of Mustapha was restricted by his ill health, as he was very likely suffering from the aches and disfiguring lesions and rashes of the secondary stage of syphilis—a disease he had contracted at the age of 19 while living in Australia.\textsuperscript{36} In March, Conder and Will Rothenstein held a joint exhibition at the gallery of dealer Père Thomas on the Rue Maleshorbes, Paris.\textsuperscript{37} Conder exhibited his Algerian works, ‘Almond Trees in Blossom’ \textit{(Fruit trees in blossom, Algiers 1892—Plate 6.5)}, and ‘Moonlight in Algiers’ \textit{(Moonlight at Mustapha 1892—Plate 6.6)}, alongside ‘drawings inspired by the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám’.\textsuperscript{38}

In his 1893 ‘Paris letter’, written for \textit{The Studio} magazine, Will Rothenstein described \textit{Fruit trees in blossom, Algiers} as ‘curiously beautiful in conception’. In a wistful tone, he continued: ‘Omar himself might have lazed away a day in those gardens’.\textsuperscript{39} The almond orchard that forms the main subject of the work came into bloom during spring, at the end of Conder’s stay. The showering blossoms, a motif used by Conder on a number of occasions—including the earlier oil on cardboard painting, \textit{Herrick’s blossoms} c.1888, which was exhibited in the landmark ‘9 by 5 impression exhibition’—expressed the artist’s consciousness of fading youth and the effect of his illness.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} In a letter to Roberts, Streeton written: ‘This evening just received letter from dear old K from Algers [sic]—he is there with a friend—Paris he says pulled down his health & his pocket a bit—would like to see his work. I’m afraid his flesh is against him a good bit—poor old K & the girls—really they are a nuisance somehow & no woman was even Shakespeare or Wagner or Michelangelo’. A. Streeton to T. Roberts, early May 1892, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) \textit{Letters from Smike}, 1989, p.48. By early February, before his return to Paris, the artist was well enough to partake in what he termed ‘Algerian pleasures’. C. Conder, letter to C. Rothenstein, 11 February 1892. A few weeks later Conder wrote on a letter on notepaper with photogravure of Arab woman, he was ‘not unconscious of her personal charms … Your lovesick eyes must not roll on her. Mine never do. Health wont stand it … I cannot tell you much of Algiers but will when I go there at present I have spent a good deal of my time on my bed as I got much worse.’ C. Conder, letter to W. Rothenstein, 23 February 1892, William Rothenstein Papers, A. Galbally, \textit{Charles Conder}, 2002, p.91

\textsuperscript{37} The gallery space was recommended to the two artists by Henri Toulouse-Lautrec.

\textsuperscript{38} A review in \textit{L’art Français} noted that the Algerian works displayed an ‘infinite delicacy in originality’, though ‘in paleness they are the limit of what is permissible.’ \textit{L’art Française}, cited in U. Hoff, \textit{Charles Conder}, Lansdowne Australian Art Library, Melbourne, 1972, p.57; See also A. Galbally, \textit{Charles Conder}, 2002, p.91


\textsuperscript{40} The title refers to Robert Herrick’s verse, ‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may’, and the theme of making the most of a youth which would soon disappear was one that Conder would have been more than aware of as he suffered through his illness at Mustapha.
Flowers in a vase against a background of the coastline of Mustapha, Algiers 1891 (Plate 5.21) also depicted falling petals, drawing upon Omar Khayyám’s repeated reference to the rose as a symbol for youth and fragility:

quatrain thirteen:

Look to the Rose that blows about us—'Lo, Laughing', she says, 'into the World I blow: At once the silken Tassel of my Purse Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw.

quatrain seventy-two:

Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose! The Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close! The Nightingale that in the Branches sang, Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows?41

While Streeton painted many flowers studies in his later years, none would convey the poetic depth that Conder achieved in Flowers in a vase. A warm, golden sunlight gildes the edges of the scene, and the vast expanse of the villa’s terrace vibrates with yellows, pinks and creams. A Whistlerian Aestheticism is implicit in the work’s pale, shimmering palette and high horizon. The ornamental purple shadows extending across the foreground reference a Symbolist aesthetic, with the man clad in a white galabiya an embodiment of the artist’s poetic reverie. The contemplative silence of the individual is repeated in Moonlight at Mustapha, in which a near transparent, white robed figure moves across a landscape that dissolves into watery blues. In the Rubáiyát, the moon evokes the ethereal and melancholic, and, for Conder, moonlight became an emotional vehicle to express his experience of debilitating illness:

quatrain seventy-four (first edition):

Ah, Moon of my Delight who knows't no wane, The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again: How oft hereafter rising shall she look Through this same Garden after me—in vain!

41 See also B. Pearce ‘Recent acquisitions with notes on Charles Conder’s Algerian convalescence’, 1984, p.62
In Streeton’s *Sixtieth quatrain of Omar Khayyám*, a male figure, perhaps analogous to Conder’s, is positioned in the foreground wearing a burgundy *galabiya* and blue turban. He stands among the shadowy outlines of pots arranged at his feet, and is embraced by a golden-winged angel who curves an arm around the man’s neck, while rather implausibly holding a pottery vessel, balanced upon his shoulder. This small watercolour, created as a private gift, is more literal in its interpretation of the *Rubáiyát* than Conder’s oil paintings, which were produced for exhibition. A comparison of the works reveals a confidence in the latter artist’s handling of the themes of loss and the ephemeral nature of life’s pleasures.42

Streeton’s scene illustrates the quatrain inscribed on the top left corner of the work:

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And lately thro the Tower door agape
Come shining thro the dusk an angel shape
bearing upon his shoulder a vessel and
He bid me taste of it and twas the grape
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The version of the quatrain quoted by Streeton differs from FitzGerald’s translation, which is in fact the forty-second, rather than the sixtieth, as the work’s present title incorrectly suggests. The most significant change is from the context of the tavern to the tower in the first line.43 The original source from which Streeton worked is unknown. While it is not possible to confirm whether the artist himself made this change, it gave Streeton the opportunity to heighten the exoticism of the setting. His inclusion of the ‘angel shape’ is a somewhat obvious illustration of the second line of the quoted text. In the poem, the angel represents the blessing of the gods on the man who enjoys the bounty of nature and values the sweetness of the fleeting moment. By contrast, the wandering figure in Conder’s *Moonlight at Mustapha* conveys a more deeply felt interpretation of the poem’s broader narrative, which encouraged the reader to revel in the spoils of the present and the beauty of the rose before time turned them both to dust.

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42 Conder had also illustrated his own volume of the poems, an 1891 edition. The front and back pages were decorated in colour, with further pen and ink illustrations throughout the book. This volume was then gifted to Dugul MacCroll, who in turn set about making plans for Conder to illustrate the poems as part of a commercial venture, though these plans came to nothing. A. Galbally, *Charles Conder*, 2002, pp.112-3
43 In the first edition it reads: ‘And lately, through the Tavern Door agape,/ Come shining through the Dusk an Angel Shape/ Bearing upon his shoulder a Vessel, and/ He bid me taste of it, and ’twas - the Grape!’
The background of the work is primarily constructed from watercolour washes of dark green and brown, with a slash of yellow light running diagonally down from the upper right corner. Pencil underdrawing is visible beneath the veils of translucent colour around the minarets and angel. The heavy handling of the darker pigments creates a murkiness that, together with the awkwardness of the figures, signals a clear distinction between this imagined composition and the more effectively described scenes painted from life while the artist was in Cairo, or worked up from sketches or photographs after his arrival in London.

In contrast to the 1905 painting exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Sixtieth quatrain of Omar Khayyám draws more directly from the figurative elements present in Streeton’s travel pictures. The work represents a transition from an imagined to a real vision of the Orient, with the view through a window rendered as a locatable scene, recalling the artist’s presence within the city of Cairo almost a decade earlier. On the right side of the composition, an ornate arch opens to a view of the twin minarets of the Mosque Madrasa of Sultan Mu’ayyad Shaykh. These crown the Bab Zuweila, which is loosely described in diluted red and yellow pigment against washes of blue. The scene was a favoured subject for Streeton, who produced two earlier watercolours of the same gateway, *Cairo [Bab Zuweila]* (Plate 3.22) and *Street scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila]* (Plate 3.23), as discussed in Chapter Three.

The watercolour was dedicated to Nora Clench, most likely prior to their marriage in 1908. According to the artist’s grandson, Oliver Streeton, Nora had a great enthusiasm for the Rubaiyat, and the biographer, Volkhard Wehner, noted that ‘the Streetons owned a fine copy of the Rubayyat, and both loved it and read it regularly’. This is substantiated by the fact that, in 1932, the catalogue for the ‘Exhibition of paintings by Arthur Streeton’,

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44 The watercolour is initialed, signed and dedicated along the lower edge of the sheet from the left. The inscription on the lower right hand side of the page is only partially legible, appearing as ‘To N / CLE / From AR / STR’. It should read ‘To Nora / Clench / From Arthur / Streeton’, but the side of the image has been cut away, presumably to fit into a frame. The date is unclear, though it appears to read ‘1909’. This is again only partially legible and is unlikely given the formality of the inscription and the fact that Streeton uses only Nora’s maiden name. Streeton met the Canadian-born professional violinist Esther Leonora (Nora) Clench in 1899, and they later married on 11 of January 1908 at the London Registry Office.

organised by the Fine Art Society, included a supplementary listing of ‘Colour Designs, by Mrs Arthur Streeton, illustrating the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam’.

Although Streeton was, like Conder, certainly well versed in the *Rubáiyát*, he employed decorative imagery that was much more superficial in nature. While his return to a literary Orient signalled the influential weight of Orientalist texts—even at the onset of the twentieth century and the modern age—the works lacked the sustained engagement of Conder’s Algerian paintings. Nor were they imbued with the vitality and vigour of the paintings, watercolours and sketches associated with his journey to Egypt in 1897. However, *Allegory from ‘Omar’* and *Sixtieth quatrain of Omar Khayyám* did clearly demonstrate the continued lure of the Orient for Streeton, and his desire to maintain a fashionably poetic and literary artistic identity.

The Tale’s End

Ten years before Streeton produced the work inspired by the *Rubáiyát* that would be hung ‘on the line’ at London’s Royal Academy, he made his first gesture towards the East with another representation of an imaginary Orient, *Scheherazade* 1895. This decorative figure study on panel introduced Orientalism within the artist’s oeuvre.

This thesis has shown the degree to which Streeton explored Orientalism across the span of his artistic life—in his paintings, watercolours, sketches and photographs of archaeological sites, Islamic architecture, and the bazaars and people of Cairo. The project of defining Streeton’s Orientalism is important not only because it demonstrates the effect both imagined and real Orients had on Streeton’s oeuvre, but also because it establishes a point of transition between the local and familiar of Australia, and the foreign and unknown of the countries that lay beyond its shores. When Streeton embarked on his first journey overseas in 1897, he left the bush scenes and harbour views upon which he had established

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46 For example, in a review of George Lambert’s *The empty glass (Flower piece)* 1930, Arthur Streeton suggested the oil painting of fruit, flowers, a top hat and a gentleman’s white gloves, an empty glass held by a lady’s gloved hand and a champagne bottle, ‘may derive its title from the “Rubaiyat” or not, but it is symbolic of the fullness of life and enjoyment’. A. Streeton, ‘Art exhibitions: works by George Lambert’, *The Argus*, 29 May 1930, p.11
his reputation as an artist in Australia. Travelling by way of Egypt and Italy, he sought the cosmopolitanism of London—an artistic hub at the very centre of the Empire.

Through addressing a lacuna in the art historical literature dealing with Streeton’s life and artistic output, this thesis has identified the Orientalist paintings, drawings and photographs as a distinct group, set between Streeton’s Impressionist work in Australia and his period of artistic development in London. In Streeton’s later English landscapes, there is an identifiable change in palette and paint application, signalling the influence of British artists such as John Constable, W.M.W. Turner, and Wilson Steer, as well as seventeenth century Dutch landscape painters, such as Jacob van Ruisdael, who triumphed in their portrayal of the effects of light and the moods of nature. Streeton’s awareness of these influences was expressed in a letter to Roberts, written in the year after his arrival in London:

I feel convinced that my work hereafter will contain a larger idea and quantity than before—After seeing Constable Turner Titian Watts & all the masters ... I’m evolving & should I return I’d never paint Australia in exactly the same way—by Gad I’ll do one or two great things if I get out there again—I know more now—& would touch it more poetically.47

While the London years have been identified as clearly affecting Streeton’s artistic practice over an extended period, with the artist adapting his interpretations of light and atmosphere to suit this new environment, the role of the body of works produced during, and in response to, his journey to Cairo has not previously been appreciated or understood. This thesis shows that the effect of the journey on Streeton was much more than might be suggested by the brevity of his two-month stay in Egypt. Cairo signalled the artist’s first significant experience of being a foreigner in a strange land. He responded to this stimulus by creating a body of work that codified an urban environment dominated by monumental architecture and bustling bazaars, and engaged with the ethnographic figure as ‘type’. Whereas certain themes he developed would continue, such as his concern for capturing grand urban architecture, others, such as the ethnographic figure, would never be repeated.

47 A. Streeton, letter to T. Roberts, 28 June 1898, A. Galbally and A. Gray (eds.) Letters from Smike, 1989, p. 78
Streeton’s Cairo works were inflected by an Aestheticist preoccupation with pattern and form, and enhanced by his ability, as an Impressionist, to capture light and atmospheric texture.

The tale began with Streeton looking towards the East of the *Arabian Nights* and then leaving his country of birth for the first time in search of adventure and an international career. It has traversed the resulting visual and written representations that form Streeton’s Orientalist oeuvre. As well as being justly recognised for his Australian bush and harbour scenes, and for the work he completed in Venice and as a war artist in France, Streeton is now recognised for contributing the first response to Egypt by an Australia-born career-artist, and the only Impressionist vision of Cairo within the field of Orientalism in Australia.
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216
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219


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232

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Map 1

A Azbekiya Gardens  
B Sharia al-Muski  
C Khan al-Khalili  
D Mosque al-Azhar  
E Bab Zuweila  
F Citadel  
G Sultan Hasan Mosque  
H Muhammad Ali Mosque  
I Qasr al-Nil Bridge
Map 2

A  Sharia al-Muski

B  Bristol Hotel

C  Midan al-Khaznedar

D  Shepheard's Hotel

E  Opera House

F  Azbekiya Gardens

G  Sharia Wagh al-Birket

H  Cook's Offices

I  Fishmarket
Plate 1.1
Arthur Streeton, *Scherazade* 1895, oil on cedar panel, 58.2 x 39.4 cm,
National Gallery of Victoria, The Joseph Brown Collection
Plate 1.2
Mayor's fancy dress ball published 3 September 1877, wood engraving:
The Illustrated Australian News, Melbourne

Plate 1.3
Robert Dowling, A Sheik and his son entering Cairo, on their return pilgrimage to Mecca 1874,
oil on canvas, 139.3 x 244.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, presented by a committee of gentlemen 1878
Plate 1.4
Robert Dowling, *Street scene, Cairo* c.1874, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 45.6 cm
National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1976
Plate 1.5
Etienne Dinet, *The snake charmer (Le charmeur de vipers)* 1889, oil on canvas, 175.6 x 180.4 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1890
Plate 1.6
Sir Edward John Poynter, *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* 1890, oil on canvas, 234.5 x 350.5 x 20.5cm (framed), Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1892

Plate 1.7
Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Odalisque, woman of Algiers* 1870, 122.6 x 69.2 cm, oil on canvas
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection
Plate 1.8
Arthur Streeton, *Cupid* c.1890s, oil on wood panel, 91.4 x 24.4cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, bequest of John Robertson 2004
Plate 1.9
Charles Conder, *Hot Wind* 1889, oil on board, 29.4 x 75.0 cm, National Gallery of Australia, acquired with the assistance of The Yulgilbar Foundation 2006

Plate 1.10: Arthur Loureiro, *The Spirit of the Southern Cross* 1888, oil on canvas, 168.0 x 136.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased 2003

Plate 1.11: Arthur Loureiro, *The Spirit of the new moon* 1888, oil on canvas, 168.1 x 136.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased 2003
Plate 1.12
J.W. Waterhouse, *Circe individiosa* 1892, oil on canvas, 180.7 x 87.4 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, purchased 1892
Plate 1.13
Arthur Streeton, ‘What thou amongst the leaves hast never known’ (or A bush Idyll) 1896, oil on wood, 54.3 x 31.5cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Dr Joseph Brown 1991
Plate 1.14
Arthur Streeton, *Sydney Harbour: a souvenir* c.1897, oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 64.9 x 40.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962
Plate 1.15
Arthur Streeton, *Ariadne* 1895, oil on wood panel, 12.7 x 35.4 cm
The Estate of the late Stuart Johnston, Sydney

Plate 1.16
Arthur Streeton, *Oblivion* 1895, oil on canvas, 56.2 x 11.5 cm
Sheila and Bill Hughes Collection, Perth
Plate 1.17
Tom Roberts, *Seated Arab* c.1883-84, oil on canvas, 45.9 x 30.9 cm, private collection
Plate 1.18
Tom Roberts, *An Eastern princess* c.1893, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 51.0 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1966

Figure 1.19
Tom Roberts, *A study of Jephthah's daughter* (1899), oil on canvas, 76.5 x 50.7 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1899
Figure 1.20
Tom Roberts, *The sleeper awakened* c.1905-13, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown

Plate 2.1
P. Lacour, *M.M. Le Polynésien* c.1900, postcard
Plate 2.2
Arthur Streeton, *The Sphinx* 1897, watercolour on paper, dimensions unknown, private collection
Plate 2.3
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: reclining girl] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.4
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: woman with scarf] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]
Plate 2.5
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: ship scene with iron chains] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.6
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: ship scene with figures] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 2.7
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: funeral scene and attempted suicide] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]
Plate 2.8
Richter and Co., Napoli, *Bristol Hotel – Cairo (Egypt.): finest situation in the centre of the town* c.1940s, colour postcard, 9 x 14 cm, Famous University of Regina Archives

Plate 2.9
unknown photographer, *[Arthur Streeton with fellow tourists in front of the Sphinx and Pyramids]* 1897, albumen photograph, 19.9 x 26.0 cm, Streeton Archive

(detail)
Plate 2.11
J. Dozay (attrib.), [Tourists and guides before the Sphinx and Pyramids], details unknown

Plate 2.12
unknown photographer, [Tourist and guide before the Sphinx], details unknown
Plate 2.13
Arthur Streeton, *The Sphinx, Egypt* c.1897, pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 33.0 x 22.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel’s, Melbourne, 4 November 1981
Plate 2.14
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook B: Sphinx] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]
Plate 2.15
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Bonaparte before the Sphinx (Oedipus)* c.1867-68, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 137.0 cm, Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument

Plate 2.16
William Simpson, *The Emperor of Austria ascending the Great Pyramid* 1869, 22.1 x 28.0 cm, pencil and watercolour on paper, Victoria & Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Shell International and the Friends of the V&A
Plate 2.17
William Simpson, *Heliopolis, as it is* 1878, pencil, watercolour and body colour, 37.3 x 26.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Shell International and the Friends of the V&A
Plate 2.18
David Roberts, *The Valley of the Kings: Entrance to the Tombs of the Kings*, 1838, watercolour on paper, 63 x 83 cm, Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Néerlandais, Paris
Plate 3.1
Arthur Streeton, Cairo street (previously Street scene, Cairo and The Mosque of Imam el-Shafei) 1897, oil on prepared canvas mounted on laminated paperboard, 33.4 x 17.1cm, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, Gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965
Plate 3.2
Arthur Streeton, *Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Blue Mosque and Bab Zouwaleh* 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 3.3
G. Lékgjan, *Bab-Zouwaleh* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.1 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.4
Arthur Streeton, *The Princess Theatre and Burke and Wills’ statue* 1889, oil on wood panel, 21.5 x 16.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased through the National Gallery of Victoria Foundation with the assistance of The Hugh D.T. Williamson Foundation, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2005

Plate 3.5
Arthur Streeton, *The railway station, Redfern* 1893, oil on canvas, 40.8 x 61.0 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Lady Denison 1942

Plate 3.6
Arthur Streeton, *Circular Quay* c.1893, oil on wood panel, 13.9 x 63.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979
Plate 3.7
Schroeder and Cie, *Une danseuse Arabe* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.5 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.8
Arthur Streeton, *Temple of Aphrodite, Phylae*, 1898, watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 41.6 cm, private collection

Plate 3.9
G. Lékégian, *Phylaé (Temple du Hathor Aphrodité)*, albumen photograph, 21.3 x 27.7 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.10
Bonfils, *Village Arabe au bord du Nil* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.11
Arthur Streeton, *Old Cairo* c.1898, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm, location unknown, auctioned Sotheby’s, Melbourne, 24 November 2003
Plate 3.12
Arthur Streeton, [Colonnades, Philae] c.1898, pencil on paper, 18 x 29 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel’s, Melbourne, 7 November 1973

Plate 3.13
Arthur Streeton, [Colonnades, Philae] c.1898, oil canvas on panel, 28.5 x 44.1 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.14
Scroeder and Cie, Phylae, les Colonnes du Côté du nord et le Nil c.1890s, albumen photograph, 21.0 x 26.9 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.15
Arthur Streeton, *Sultan Hassan Mosque* 1897, watercolour over pencil on paper, 37.8 x 21.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962
Plate 3.16
John Frederick Lewis, *Exterior of the Mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo* c.1841/1851, watercolour over pencil on paper, 84.5 x 56.5 cm (framed), National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh
Plate 3.17
Arthur Streeton, (Mosque doorway) c.1897, oil on board, 55 x 31 cm, location unknown, auctioned Sotheby’s, Melbourne, 6 April 1987
Plate 3.18
W.C. Horsley, *Theological students in the university mosque, el Azhar, Cairo* 1895, oil on canvas, 127 x 102 cm, private collection
Plate 3.19
Arthur Streeton, *(The Citadel, Cairo)*, Indian ink and bodycolour on paper, 21 x 13.6 cm (sight), private collection

Plate 3.20
Plate 3.21

Arthur Streeton, Cairo [Bab Zuweila] 1897, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 24.4 cm, private collection
Plate 3.22
Arthur Streeton, *Street Scene, Cairo [Bab Zuweila]* c.1897, watercolour on paper, 63.5 x 32 cm, location unknown, auctioned Joel’s, Melbourne, 11 August 1992
Plate 3.23: Arthur Streeton, *Grand Cairo*, c.1897, pencil on paper, 34.7 x 24 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of the artist 1943

Plate 3.24: Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: Bab Zouwaleh], pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]

Plate 3.25
David Roberts, *The Gate of Cairo, called Bab-el-Mutawellee 'The Gate of Metawalea' 1843*, oil on panel, 76.1 cm x 62.8 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, given by John Sheepshanks 1857
Plate 3.26
Arthur Streeton, Cairo, 1897, watercolour on paper, 35.8 x 26.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Christie’s, Melbourne, 29 April 1997
Plate 3.27
Arthur Streeton, *Arab house builders (House builders, Cairo)* c.1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 24.2 x 13.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board 1971
Plate 3.28
Arthur Streeton, *The Ezbekiyeh Garden Cairo*, c.1897, oil on canvas board,
46 x 21.5 cm, private collection
Plate 3.29
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [Street scene, Azbakiya], 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.5 x 12.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.30
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [Street scene with camel, Azbakiya] 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 8.6 x 11.7, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.31
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), [Street scene, Azbakiya] 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.5 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.32
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *Street scene, Bab Zuweila* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 10.0 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 3.33
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), *Street scene, Bab Zuweila* 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.8 x 9.8 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 3.34
Arthur Streeton (attrib.), (Drink seller) 1897, copy photograph on silver gelatin printing out paper from existing photographic print, 11.6 x 9.6 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 4.1
Keystone View Company, A mingling of Orient and Occident: the Muski, liveliest of the real streets of Cairo, Egypt 1908, stereograph, 7.75 x 4.2 inches, Dr. Paula Sanders, Rice University
Plate 4.2
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook A: street scene with tree] 1897, pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]
Plate 4.3

Arthur Streeton, The spice market, Cairo (The spice bazaar, Old Cairo) 1897, watercolour on paper
43.4 x 18.1 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of Eva Waite 1954
Plate 4.4
William Holman Hunt, *A street scene in Cairo: the lantern maker's courtship* 1854–1861, oil on canvas, 54.8 x 34.7 cm, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

Plate 4.5
Walter Charles Horsley, *Great Britain in Egypt, 1886 1887*, oil on canvas, 122.5 x 154.9 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1889
Plate 4.6
Arthur Streeton, *Cairo [Khan al-Khalili] (Arcade in Old Cairo?)* c.1897, watercolour and pencil on paper, dimensions and location unknown, slide held in Streeton Archive.
Plate 4.7
John Frederick Lewis, *The Bezestein Bazaar, El Khan Khalil, Cairo* 1872, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 57.3 x 43 cm, Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford
Plate 4.8

Arthur Streeton, [Bazaar, Cairo] 1897, details unknown, offered to the Art Gallery of New South Wales by Mrs H.M. Dean in 1970
Plate 4.9
John Frederick Lewis, *The bazaar of the Ghureyah from the steps of the mosque of al-Ghuri, Cairo* c.1841/51, pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper, 54.0 x 37.9 cm, The Tate, purchased as part of the Oppé Collection with assistance from the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund 1996
Plate 4.10
Arthur Streeton, *Street scene, Cairo (Shop in Cairo)* 1897, watercolour on paper, 30 x 18 cm (approximately), private collection
Plate 4.11
Rudolf Ernst, The brass workers (The metal workers) c.1888, oil on panel, 61.5 x 49 cm, Dahesh Museum of Art, acquired 1996

Plate 4.12
Jean-Leon Gérôme The carpet merchant 1887, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 64.7 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Plate 4.13
Plate 4.14
Arthur Streeton, *A Street in Cairo* 1897, watercolour on paper, 44 x 23.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Deutscher-Menzies, Sydney, 15 June 2005
Plate 4.15
Arthur Streeton, Cairo 1897, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 24.4 cm, private collection
Plate 4.16
Arthur Streeton, *Bank of the Nile* c.1897, watercolour on paper, 34 x 63 cm, location unknown, auctioned Christies, Melbourne, 24 November 1993

Plate 4.17
Arthur Streeton, *(Street scene in front of a mosque)* c.1898, Indian ink and white body colour on paper, 19.2 x 12 cm, private collection
Plate 5.1
Tom Roberts, *Australian native* 1888, oil on canvas, 127.2 x 76.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased through the Joseph Brown Fund 1979
Plate 5.2
Tom Roberts, *Ceremonial dance on Murray Island, Torres Strait* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 33.1 x 48.4 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.3
Tom Roberts, *Torres Strait Islander* 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.4 x 18.0 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922
Plate 5.4
Tom Roberts, [Torres Strait Islander] 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.3 x 17.7 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922

Plate 5.5
Tom Roberts, [Torres Strait Islander] 1892, watercolour and body colour over pencil, 27.3 x 17.8 cm, British Museum, gift of the artist 1922
Plate 5.6
Arthur Streeton, *Pastoral* 1894, oil on wood, 30.3 x 60/7 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1970

Plate 5.7
Arthur Streeton, *Decoration* c.1890s, oil on cedar panel, 41.5 x 26.5 cm, private collection
Plate 5.8
Arthur Streeton, *Belinda (Lady of the period)* 1894, oil on wood panel, 66.6 x 27.8 cm, Newcastle Art Gallery, gift of Roland Pope 1945
Plate 5.9
Arthur Streeton, 'Hassan the porter (Hassan) 1898, oil on canvas, details unknown, offered to the Art Gallery of New South Wales by Mrs H.M. Dean in 1970
Plate 5.10

James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir (or Arrangement in flesh colour and black: portrait of Theodore Duret)* 1883, oil on canvas, 193.4 x 90.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1913
Plate 5.11
Arthur Streeton, *The knife grinder, Cairo* c.1897, oil on canvas on panel, 29.5 x 22.5 cm, location unknown, auctioned Du Plessis Galleries, Adelaide, 21 May 2000
Plate 5.12
G. Lékéjian, *Laveuses au bord du Nil* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 19.4 x 27.4 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.13
G. Lékéjian, *Cairo* [water carriers] c.1890s, albumen photograph, 10.0 x 13.8 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 5.14
G. Lékégian, *Caravane en repos* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 19.0 x 26.8 cm, Streeton Archive

Plate 5.15
J.P. Sebah, *Khan-el Khalili portes* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.2 x 20.9 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 5.16
G. Lékégian, *Mère et enfants* c.1890s, albumen photograph, 27.8 x 21.0 cm, Streeton Archive
Plate 5.17
Robert Dowling, *An Egyptian fellah in a sugarcane field, winter of 1872-73 1876*, watercolour on paper, 54.0 x 33.1 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 2010
Plate 5.18
Arthur Streeton, *(Egyptian drink vendor)* 1897, watercolour and pencil on paper, 42.6 x 16.6 cm, National Gallery of Australia, gift of S.H. Ervin 1962
Plate 5.19
Arthur Streeton, *A seller of drinks, Cairo* c.1897, oil on canvas on wood panel, 42.2 x 21.0 cm, private collection
Plate 5.20
Arthur Streeton, *Egyptian drink vendor (The water seller)* 1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 33.2 x 18.3cm, National Gallery of Australia, The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his father, Dr Oscar Paul 1965
Plate 5.21
Charles Conder, *Flowers in a vase against a background of the coastline of Mustapha, Algiers (The Hot Sands, Mustapha, Algiers)* 1891, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased with assistance from Katies 1982

Plate 5.22
Plate 5.23
Arthur Streeton, *Fatma Habiba* 1897, oil on canvas on paperboard, 29.0 x 27.4 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, gift of Mr and Mrs Douglas Mullins 1997
Plate 5.24
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook B: mosque and Arabic script], pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail below]
Plate 5.25
unknown creator, *Egypt, the Giza market water seller* c.1910, postcard

Plate 5.26
unknown creator, *A water seller* c.1910, mailed 1912, postcard
Plate 5.27
Robert Dowling, *Egyptian banana seller* 1878, watercolour with body colour over pencil on board, 71.7 x 50.7 cm, private collection
Plate 5.28
Arthur Streeton, [Page from Cairo sketchbook B: figure studies], pencil on paper, Streeton Archive [detail]
Plate 5.29
Princesse Laetitia Mathilde Bonaparte, *A fellah* 1861, oil and tempera on paper, 92 x 63 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes

Plate 6.1
Arthur Streeton, *Allegory from 'Omar' (A page from Omar)* 1905, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm, Mildura Arts Centre
Plate 6.2
Arthur Streeton, *Sixtieth quatrain of Omar Khayyam* c.1905, watercolour on board, 50.6 x 30.5 cm
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
Plate 6.3
Arthur Streeton, *In memoriam—old friends* 1941, pencil on paper, 34 x 25 cm, location unknown, slide in Streeton Archive
Plate 6.4
Arthur Streeton, *The blue Orient fan (Venetian fan)* c.1921, watercolour on silk on paper, 31.0 x 62.4 cm, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1973

Plate 6.5
Charles Conder, *Fruit trees in blossom, Algiers (Almond Trees in Blossom)* 1892, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 80.7 cm, Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 1963
Plate 6.6
Charles Conder, *Moonlight at Mustapha (Moonlight in Algiers)* 1892, oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm, private collection