

Explorations in the Desert: The Photographic Collection of George and Agnes Horsfield

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Introduction

Deep in the bowels of UCL's Special Collections facility are 24 boxes of photographs and negatives from the 1920s and 1930s. Ostensibly a collection of RAF aerial survey photographs taken of various archaeological sites in the Middle East, the boxes also contain a wealth of material belonging to husband and wife archaeologists George Horsfield and Agnes Conway. Although history has not remembered the Horsfields in any major way, they were part of a world that has fascinated generations of people, one immortalised in popular culture through films such as *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *The Mummy* and *The English Patient*.

The material in the Horsfield collection, distributed over two boxes of the larger collection, consists of hundreds of small personal photographs, with some letters, postcards and excavation notes. It is not indicated separately on the catalogue of RAF material, or on the boxes themselves. Dr Peter Parr, former lecturer in Levantine Archaeology at the Institute, stated that the Horsfield material was in the Institute's collections when he came to UCL in the early 1960s. It is still unclear exactly how the Horsfield collection came to be part of the RAF aerial survey material and how the entire collection came to be at UCL (P. Parr, pers. comm.). This report provides an introduction to one of the Institute's obscure collections, and sheds light on its potential significance. The material in this collection provides a valuable insight into the social and political world of British interests in the Middle East during the inter-war period and is uniquely relevant in light of recent military activity in parts of Britain's former Mandate Territory.

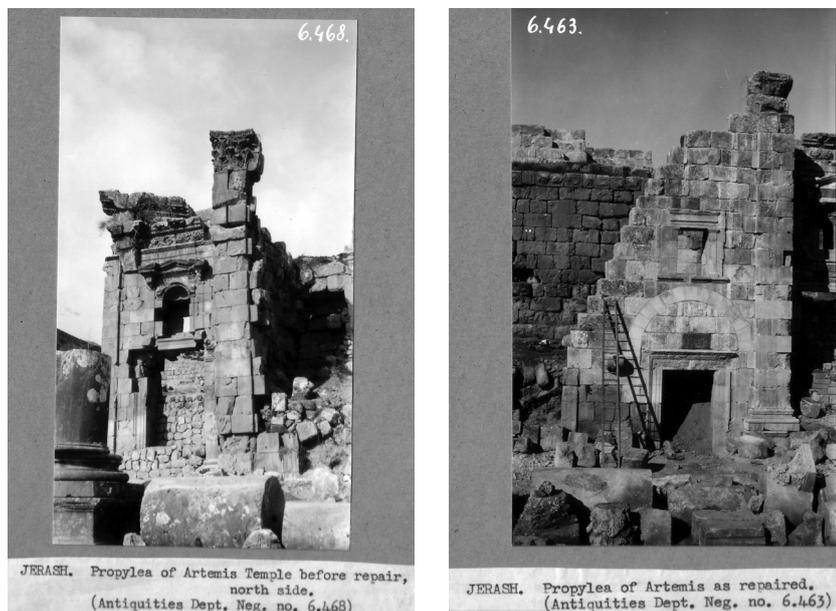
The Horsfields

George Horsfield excavated at Petra in the 1920s and in 1924 he began work at the citadel in Amman, Transjordan, moving on to Jerash, Transjordan in 1925. He met Agnes Conway for the first time in 1926, and began to dig with her at Petra three years later, where they discovered artefacts in tombs and refuse dumps (McQuitty 1997: 90). They married in 1932, and settled in Jerash for the next four years (Wilkinson 2006). Horsfield was the Director of Antiquities of Transjordan during this period, and oversaw repair and conservation work on some of the ancient sites in Jerash (McQuitty 1997: 90) (Figs. 1a and Fig. 1b). He excavated several sites in the area whilst in this post, working as part of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem with the American Colony in Jerusalem and the French École Biblique (Council for British Research in the Levant 2006).

Many of the sites George Horsfield excavated were the remains of the Nabataean civilisation. The Nabataeans were nomadic merchants and huntsmen from Arabia who

established the centre of their empire at Petra (Graf 1997: 82). The Horsfields dug at Petra between 1929 and 1936 with William Foxwell Albright (Geraty and Willis 1986: 6). The Nabataeans flourished from the late Hellenistic to early Roman period and their kingdom was annexed by the Roman Empire in 106 AD. During the height of their civilisation, Nabataean merchants controlled trade routes between Arabia and Syria. They traded mainly incense and spices, and established connections with traders in the Far East and the Mediterranean (Graf 1997: 83-84).

Agnes Conway Horsfield was the daughter of Sir Martin Conway, founder and first Director-General of the Imperial War Museum. She was a highly educated woman, with a degree from Cambridge (Wilkinson 2006). The Horsfields published many articles in archaeological journals, including *Antiquity*, *The Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*, *The Geographical Journal*, and *The American Journal of Archaeology*. They wrote articles both separately and together, and Agnes Conway is given as much credit in excavations as her husband. Kathleen Kenyon, Secretary of the fledgling Institute of Archaeology and later lecturer in Palestinian Archaeology, wrote a review of an article the Horsfields published on Petra in the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*. She notes that ‘Mr and Mrs Horsfield’s survey [of Petra] is extremely valuable’, giving Agnes Horsfield equal standing with her husband in archaeological terms (Kenyon 1939: 175). Agnes also took photographs on excavation journeys she made with her husband to document any places or finds that were discovered and explored (Glueck 1939: 417). These images today make up a valuable part of the Horsfield collection.



Figures 1a and 1b. Jerash. Propylea of Artemis before and after repair.

The Middle East During the Inter-war Period

The inter-war period in the Middle East was one of rapid change. Britain gained administrative control of Palestine and Iraq through the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, which the League of Nations formalised at the end of World War I (Alon 2004: 72). The controlled territory was known as the British Mandate, with the centre of government established in Palestine (Negev 1997: 53). The British government had previously informally allied itself with the Hashemites of Mecca, a powerful Arab family headed by Sheik Hussein ibn Ali, and in 1922 it granted Hussein's son, Faysal, the throne of Iraq (Fieldhouse 2006: 92). The land on either side of the Jordan river, known as Transjordan, came under British control in 1922 and was added to Mandate territory (Robins 2004: 13). Another son of Hussein's, Abdullah, was made king of Transjordan (Alon 2004: 73).

The British military played a predominant role in the administration of Mandate territory (Alon 2004: 73). Government officials created the Arab Legion to help maintain order (Fieldhouse 2006: 226-227). The Legion was staffed by young Palestinian men who were distributed to posts throughout the settled areas of the desert zone (Alon 2004: 75). John Bagot Glubb, known locally as Glubb Pasha, formed the Desert Patrol as raids threatened the desert areas in the late 1920s. Glubb had previously worked in Iraq, and whilst there established solid connections with local tribesmen by offering them hospitality, assistance and a welcoming atmosphere (Alon 2004: 76). He began training Bedouin Desert Patrol men in Transjordan in 1932 (Ripinsky 1975: 295). These men became a fixture in the area during this period, policing the roads through the desert (Negev 1997: 53).

Archaeology in the Middle East

Administration in the Mandate territory included overseeing the exploration of ancient sites. A Department of Antiquities was established in Palestine soon after the formalisation of the British Mandate (Negev 1997: 53). The Department implemented controls over digging by untrained amateurs. In 1923 another Department of Antiquities was established in Amman, Transjordan. Explorations and excavations in the region were administered through these offices (Geraty and Willis 1986: 5). RAF planes were used to take aerial surveys of British controlled areas, including aerial photographs of excavations (Fig. 2). The entire collection of RAF material in Special Collections includes hundreds of photographs of numerous archaeological sites in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Transjordan. George Horsfield used an aerial survey of Petra in his excavations of the site (P. Parr, pers. comm.).

Discussion

Despite their age, the photographs in the Horsfield collection are in good condition, especially those mounted on cardboard. Agnes Horsfield meticulously recorded place names and dates on most of the photographs, which is of great use to anyone attempting to research this collection. Many of the photographs have "Antiquities Department Neg. No." written on the front, whilst others are credited to the American Colony in Jerusalem. The close working relationship between the British and American archaeological communities in Transjordan is clearly indicated by the fact that the Horsfields

included American Colony photographs amongst those of the Department of Antiquities. This relationship is demonstrated again in the articles co-authored by the Horsfields and Dr Nelson Glueck of the American School of Oriental Research (Glueck 1939: 416). In addition, a series of photographs show the Horsfields working with Pere Raphael Savignac of the École Biblique in Jerusalem (A. Horsfield 1943: 74). George Horsfield and Pere Savignac excavated a Nabataean site at Wadi Rumm called the Sanctuary of Allat (Geraty and Willis 1986: 6). The images depict excavations at the Sanctuary, as well as finds made there.

Wadi Rumm was also the site of a Desert Patrol Police Post. The Horsfield collection contains several photographs of the post, a large group of white tents in the middle of the wadi. Another series of photographs contains images of the Desert Patrol police posts at various sites in Transjordan. Men of the Arab Legion guarded the posts and the images provide an eloquent view of British power in the desert (Figs. 3 and 4). Some images depict Bedouin men holding machine guns mounted on armoured vehicles, presumably British. Others show groups of Bedouin sheiks gathered together taking advantage of Glubb Pasha's hospitality. The relationship between the Bedouin tribes and men like Glubb Pasha has been outlined above. The photographs constitute an evocative picture of Anglo-Arabian relations during this period.

The Horsfields used Desert Patrol posts as stopping places on their journeys to various sites. In 1932 during their journey to Kilwa, the site of a Nabataean village that

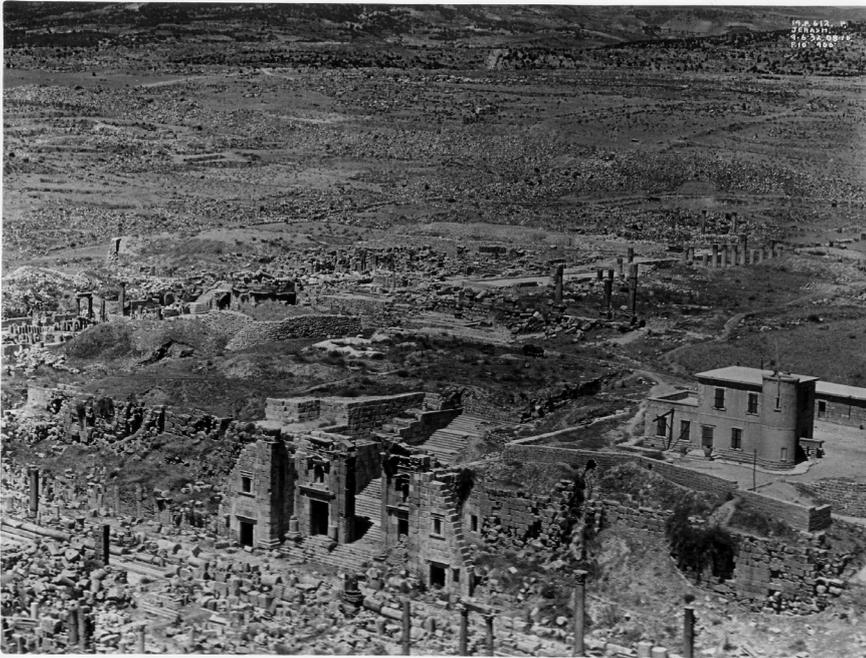


Figure 2. Aerial photo, Jerash.



Figure 3. Desert Patrol Cars.

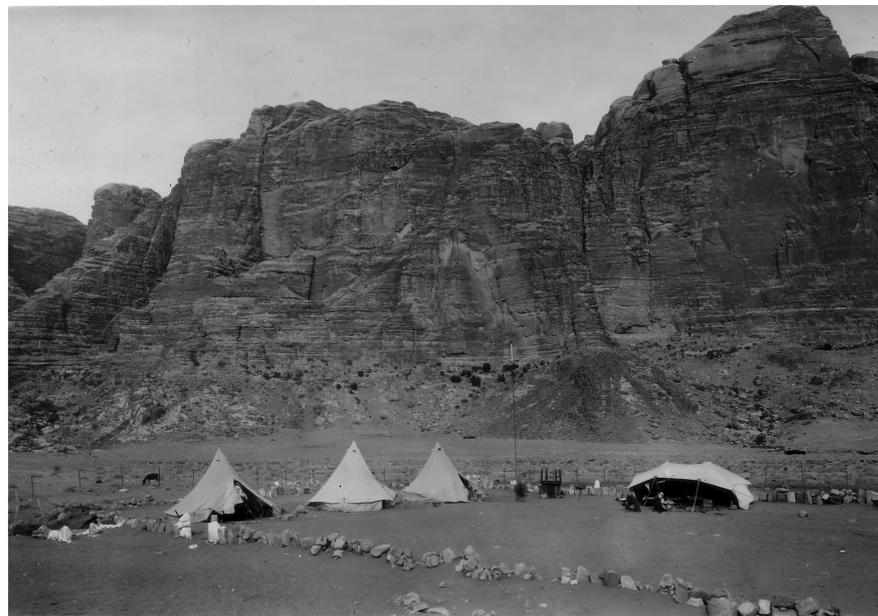


Figure 4. Jebel Rumm Police Posts, 1932.

George Horsfield had discovered the year before, they stopped at three police posts along the way. Agnes Horsfield wrote that Glubb Pasha loaned the archaeologists an “8 cylinder Ford Desert Patrol Car...with armed Badawin in native kit beneath their khaki overcoats....They went ahead picking out the route and caring for us like hosts” (A. Horsfield 1943: 71). One large image, labelled “Traffic difficulties in the Transjordan desert near the Hedjaz border” shows a group of Bedouin Patrolmen helping to push the Horsfields’ car out of the sand (Fig. 5). This image, if not of this particular journey, certainly helps to illustrate the relationship between the military, the Bedouin people and archaeologists at this time. Further research is necessary to determine whether the Bedouin Patrolmen helped with the excavations in addition to guiding the Horsfields through the desert.

The Horsfield collection also constitutes a photographic record of some of their excavations and surveys. The excavations at Wadi Rumm have been discussed above. The Horsfields’ explorations at Kilwa, Transjordan (now part of Saudi Arabia) are part of the collection as well (P. Parr, pers. comm.). There are photographs of the rock-carvings that the Horsfields found at Kilwa which feature prominently in several of their articles. One image in particular, labeled “best ibex” (Fig. 6) on the photograph, shows a “wounded ibex with blood streaming from his mouth” (G. Horsfield et al. 1933: 385). Nelson Glueck, the Horsfields’ companion on the Kilwa journey, describes the ibex as “faithfully and artistically rendered...the gracefulness and beauty of the delicate animal...have been caught and imprisoned in the lines on the stone...” (Glueck 1939: 420). Proper documentation of finds was clearly important, as archaeologists sought opinions on finds from other archaeologists, and used photographic evidence to back up their claims. The Horsfields’ visit paved the way for a more intensive excavation conducted by a team of German archaeologists led by Leo Frobenius at the site two years later (Glueck 1939: 417).



4. Traffic difficulties in the Transjordan desert

Figure 5. Traffic Difficulties.

Conclusions

This collection can be explored in many different ways, and the examples given in this article are merely a sampling of the material available. The Horsfields used some of the images in the collection to illustrate their scholarly articles. Some images are closer to tourists' photographs, as they depict archaeological sites in the area. Whether or not the pictures of those archaeological sites were documentation of excavations is yet to be determined. A closer examination into other archaeologists excavating in Transjordan during the time would prove useful, as it will illustrate the world in which the Horsfields lived. Their social circle constituted an international community of fellow scholars who shared expertise and advice.

The relationship between archaeology and the government during the inter-war period was close and is clearly demonstrated through the connections of the Horsfields to Glubb Pasha. The ease with which the Horsfields were able to travel between excavation sites enabled them to unearth evidence of ancient civilisations that have enhanced our knowledge of the past. Some of the Horsfields' finds remained in Transjordan, but many were shipped to England for further study. They are now in the collections of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge (P. Parr, pers. comm.). An exploration of the larger implications of archaeological work in this area would shed light on the history of collection in the British Empire during this period.

The Horsfield collection demonstrates the complex social and political world of British Mandate territory in the 1930s. The British helped to establish the royal families of Jordan and Iraq in the early 1920s whilst maintaining administrative and military control over the area. The British military presence in Iraq at this moment is trying to help establish an administrative and governmental system in the wake of the previous government's destruction. However, in another sense, there is again an occupying military force in the area, one not necessarily welcomed by all of the communities and peoples who live there. The 2003 looting of the Iraq Museum, initially created by Brit-



Figure 6. Kilwa, Best Ibex.

ish archaeologist Gertrude Bell in 1923, has brought the archaeology of this area into the news. Artefacts from pre-Islamic civilisations, some gathered by archaeologists like the Horsfields and their contemporaries, are being destroyed by followers of fundamentalist Moktada al-Sadr (Rich 2006). The Horsfields excavated to find traces of an ancient past and their material represents the pieces of a more recent history, which is, in turn, relevant today. The fragments of a moment in time are here in this collection. The next step is to gather them up and fit them together.

Acknowledgments

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