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978-1-108-07471-1 - A Brief Account of the Researches and Discoveries in Upper Egypt, Made under the Direction of Henry Salt, Esq.: To which is Added a Detailed Catalogue of Mr Salt's Collection of Egyptian Antiquities

Giovanni D'Athanasi

Excerpt

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

Domestic history of the author—Colonel Missett takes him to Alexandria—Recommends him to Mr. Salt, who employs him as interpreter—Obliged to quit Alexandria on account of the plague—Perform quarantine at Boulak—Salt resolves on exploring Upper Egypt—Belzoni's introduction to Salt—His expedition into Egypt—Head of Young Memnon—Belzoni's disappointments, and the author's account of their cause—Second expedition, which the author accompanies—Commence excavations at the Temple of Karnak—Proceed on towards Nubia—Temple of Aboo Simbel—Thebes—Gourna—Tombs of the Kings—Belzoni projects an excursion to the Pyramids—Manœuvres to obtain consent of the Pacha—Entrance to the second Pyramid discovered—Salt's claim to the honours of the discovery vindicated against Belzoni, whose veracity is impeached.

I SHOULD never have thought of laying before the public the slightest account of my adventures and proceedings during my sojourn in Upper Egypt, and more especially in the celebrated Thebes, but for the oft-repeated suggestions of several English travellers, who urged me to do so.

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2 DOMESTIC HISTORY OF THE AUTHOR.

Since I have at length undertaken the task, I will, before going further, briefly relate a few of the circumstances connected with my parentage, and the place of my birth.

Lemnos, an Island in the Egean Sea, as fertile as it is unfortunate, is my birth-place. In the capital of the same name I first saw the light. My parents were of the middling class of people. My father had long been living at Cairo, where he carried on a small trade. When I was in my tenth year I expressed a wish to go and join him there, but my mother opposed the proposition, fearing that if I once left her she would never see me again. As, however, I did not cease from daily tormenting her with my importunities; she at length consented to my embarking on board a ship which was about to sail for Alexandria. It was on the 7th of August, 1809, that I quitted my native place, and on the 11th of September following I arrived at Cairo.

The 11th of September was to me a day of astonishment and delight. Accustomed as I had hitherto been in my own country to see very few people, my senses were bewildered on finding myself placed, as if by enchantment, in the midst

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INTRODUCTION TO MR. SALT. 3

of a town in which there were so many thousand inhabitants.

After residing about a twelvemonth with my father, I went in company with a merchant to Ennos, where I remained two years, during which time I regularly attended a school; but I did not learn much. At the end of the above period I returned to Alexandria, and from thence to Cairo, where I had the happiness of embracing my mother and my brothers, whom my father had sent for to join him there, not being able to go to Lemnos himself on account of his commercial engagements.

I remained with my family until the year 1813. In the early part of March in that year I went out to service in the establishment of Colonel Missett, the Consul-General of Great Britain, who was then at Cairo; and on the 13th of that month I accompanied that gentleman to Alexandria, where Mr. Salt, the new Consul-General had just arrived.

Colonel Missett being about to remove to Italy in order to take the baths at Pisa, enquired of me with paternal kindness whether I chose to accompany him to Europe or preferred returning to Cairo with Mr. Salt. I reflected upon the matter

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PLAGUE AT ALEXANDRIA.

for a short time before replying to him, but it was not long ere my spirit reverted to Cairo, where were my affectionate mother, my father, and my brothers, whom I was desiring anxiously to see again; and with tears in my eyes I answered him that I could not make up my mind to part from my relations. Colonel Missett approved of my sentiments, and did not fail to recommend me to Mr. Salt, begging him to employ me as interpreter in Arabic and Turkish, and assuring him that I should prove very useful to him.

As the plague had already commenced its ravages, we quitted Alexandria, travelling by land, and towards evening we arrived at Rosetta, where Mr. Lentz, the British agent, had already exerted himself to get ready the necessary arrangements for our passage by the river to Cairo;—so that the day after our arrival at Rosetta we went on board, accompanied by Mr. Lentz, who was to direct us to a place called Ali Hamat, where was encamped with some thousands of his troops, Toussoun Pacha, son of his highness Mohammed Ali. On our arrival here the Pacha received us with military honours, causing us to pass between two lines of soldiers extending the whole way from the bank of the river to the tent,

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QUARANTINE AT SUBRA.

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which we speedily entered under a salute of twenty-one guns.

After the usual compliments had passed, we resumed our journey, and at the end of eight days reached Subra, where Mohammed Ali had instituted a quarantine on account of the plague, which had broke out with such vigour that upwards of six hundred men a day fell under it. Mr. Salt ordered me to go and seek Mr. Bogoz, the chief interpreter of his highness, and to tell him to make the Consul-General's compliments to his master ;—which mission I executed with every possible precaution not to come in contact with any person. Mr. Bogoz went into the garden where his highness was, and having announced to him the arrival of his friend the Consul-General of Great Britain, communicated to him the complimentary message I had given him. At the expiration of about a quarter of an hour the interpreter returned to me with the counter-salutations of his master, and told me that his highness's house at Boulak was at our service for the purpose of performing quarantine, adding that we should be better accommodated when we got into the town. I lost no time in reporting to Mr. Salt all that the interpreter had told me.

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We then left the place, and in a short time arrived at Boulak, where we landed all our luggage, and the next day shut ourselves up in quarantine.

As soon as the disorder began to abate a little of its vigour we gave free access to our friends, amongst whom was Mr. Burckhardt, who always turned the conversation to the subject of the celebrated edifices of Upper Egypt, and the antiquities which were to be found there in different directions. These discourses daily excited increased ardour and curiosity on the part of Mr. Salt.

For my own part I was continually importuning his private secretary, Mr. Beechy, who was a fine young man and of promising abilities, to let me know what was the object Mr. Salt had in view in making these enquiries relative to the contents of Upper Egypt, who at length had the goodness to satisfy my curiosity, and informed me that in the course of six or eight months we should be in Upper Egypt.

One day Mr. Burckhardt came to us, accompanied by another person, and expressed a desire to speak with Mr. Salt, who on being apprised of their arrival did not keep them waiting long. After some civilities had passed on either side,

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BELZONI.

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Mr. Burckhardt introduced his companion to Mr. Salt, informing him that he was Mr. Belzoni, who had lately been employed in the service of the Pacha to direct the machine at Subra, but who in consequence of the intrigues of one Joseph Bocti, had been obliged to give in his resignation. He spoke to Mr. Salt a great deal about Mr. Belzoni, assuring him that it was a most providential occurrence which had thrown him in the way of such a man, and endeavoured to persuade him to take him into his employ and send him to Upper Egypt. Nothing of the kind, however, was resolved upon in the course of this interview, and things remained as they had been before the arrival of these gentlemen.

Some days after Mr. Belzoni returned, accompanied by his wife, who with tears in her eyes began a recital of all the hardships which her husband had suffered in the service of the Pacha. Touched at the sight of her tears, and affected at the details of the misfortunes of this family, Mr. Salt at length decided to send Mr. Belzoni into Upper Egypt, accompanied by his wife and an English servant named James.

It was thus Mr. Belzoni set out for Upper Egypt; but he was not long in meeting with

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8 BELZONI'S FIRST EXPEDITION.

difficulties in his progress, the origin of which was a very simple one, for besides the disadvantages of an impatient and intractable temperament on his own part, he had for his interpreter a drunken Copt who had served under the French during their expedition in Egypt, and who, unable long to brook the bad treatment he experienced from Mr. Belzoni, did not serve him with zeal and fidelity. That is the reason why Mr. Belzoni always met with fresh obstacles in all his enterprises;—he complains in the history of his travels of the difficulties which were thrown in his way, but I think he was wrong in doing so.

On his return to Cairo he brought with him some specimens of antiquity, and the colossal head of the Younger Memnon, which was subsequently presented to the British Museum by Messrs. Salt and Burckhardt. He related to Mr. Salt all the disappointments and all the obstacles he had met with at every step of his journey, and expressed doubts of his being able to proceed further. Mr. Salt, after listening with great attention to all that Mr. Belzoni had been telling him, resolved upon sending Mr. Beechy, his secretary, and myself as interpreter, to assist in furthering the expedition. Having completed

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THE AUTHOR JOINS HIM.

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our arrangements we set out in the month of March, 1817, and arrived at Menia at the same time with two men from M. Drouetti, the Consul-General of France, who were going to Thebes for the purpose of exploring. On seeing these two gentlemen Mr. Belzoni became furious, and would have given all he was possessed of in the world to have been able to reach Thebes that very night, and mark out all the ground, in order that M. Drouetti's men, when they arrived, might not find a neutral spot to explore, nor even place sufficient to sit down on. Such was the length to which Mr. Belzoni's ambition had driven him.

On arriving at Raramon, at the sugar manufactory, Mr. Belzoni and myself procured donkeys and set off for Thebes. At the end of five days' speedy journey, as if we had been carrying the news of the capture of some fortress which had been twenty years besieged, we arrived at the Temple of Karnak, the ancient Temple of Jupiter, with the hundred gates. There we found, much to the annoyance of Mr. Belzoni, a Dr. Maruki, who was making excavations on his own account. We remained that night at Luxor, and the next day proceeded to Gournà, which means the City of the Dead, where we purchased some pieces of

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antiquity of very little value; Dr. Maruki, who had arrived before us, having bought up the finest specimens. Moreover we should not even have found what we did to purchase, but for the custom of the Arabs of not choosing to sell at one time and to the same person, all the collection of antiquities which they happen to have; preferring rather to sell them from time to time, and to different travellers, in order that they may demand a higher price for them.

We stayed some days in this part of the country, and made some trifling excursions in the neighbourhood of Gourna and of Luxor, but Mr. Beechy not making his appearance to join us, we took a boat from Luxor and proceeded to Kina in search of him, and there we found him. The next day we went to Luxor, and there we passed our nights in the temple and our days at Karnak, where we had already commenced digging. During forty days which we spent in this place we met with nothing remarkable, with the exception of a colossal head of red granite which is now in the British Museum. Besides this we found a hand of a colossal statue of middling dimensions, and an altar of granite with six figures of Deities represented on it. This