

# **A HISTORY OF ART IN ANCIENT EGYPT.**

## **A HISTORY OF ART IN ANCIENT EGYPT**

**FROM THE FRENCH OF GEORGES PERROT, PROFESSOR IN  
THE FACULTY OF LETTERS, PARIS; MEMBER OF THE  
INSTITUTE AND CHARLES CHIPIEZ.**

**ILLUSTRATED WITH FIVE HUNDRED AND NINETY-EIGHT ENGRAVINGS IN  
THE TEXT, AND FOURTEEN STEEL AND COLOURED PLATES.**

*IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.*

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## **PREFACE.**

M. Perrot's name as a classical scholar and archæologist, and M. Chipiez's as a penetrating critic of architecture, stand so high that any work from their pens is sure of a warm welcome from all students of the material remains of antiquity. These volumes are the first instalment of an undertaking which has for its aim the history and critical analysis of that great organic growth which, beginning with the Pharaohs and ending with the Roman Emperors, forms what is called Antique Art. The reception accorded to this instalment in its original form is sufficient proof that the eulogium prefixed to the German translation by an eminent living Egyptologist, Professor Georg Ebers, is well deserved; "The first section," he says, "of this work, is broad and comprehensive in conception, and delicate in execution; it treats Egyptian art in a fashion which has never previously been approached." In clothing it in a language which will, I hope, enable it to reach a still wider public, my one endeavour has been that it should lose as little as possible, either in substance or form.

A certain amount of repetition is inevitable in a work of this kind when

issued, as this was, in parts, and in one place<sup>[1]</sup> I have ventured to omit matter which had already been given at some length, but with that exception I have followed M. Perrot's words as closely as the difference of idiom would allow. Another kind of repetition, with which, perhaps, some readers may be inclined to quarrel, forced itself upon the author as the

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lesser of two evils. He was compelled either to sacrifice detail and precision in attempting to carry on at once the history of all the Egyptian arts and of their connection with the national religion and civilization, or to go back upon his footsteps now and again in tracing each art successively from its birth to its decay. The latter alternative was chosen as the only one consistent with the final aim of his work.

Stated in a few words, that aim is to trace the course of the great plastic evolution which culminated in the age of Pericles and came to an end in that of Marcus Aurelius. That evolution forms a complete organic whole, with a birthday, a deathday, and an unbroken chain of cause and effect uniting the two. To objectors who may say that the art of India, of China, of Japan, should have been included in the scheme, it may be answered: this is the life, not of two, or three, but of one. M. Perrot has been careful, therefore, to discriminate between those characteristics of Egyptian art which may be referred either to the national beliefs and modes of thought, or to undeveloped material conditions, such as the want or superstitious disuse of iron, and those which, being determined by the very nature of the problems which art has to solve, formed a starting point for the arts of all later civilizations. By means of well-chosen examples he shows that the art of the Egyptians went through the same process of development as those of other and later nationalities, and that the real distinguishing characteristic of the sculptures and paintings of the Nile Valley was a continual tendency to simplification and generalization, arising partly from the habit of mind and hand created by the hieroglyphic writing, partly from the stubborn nature of the chief materials employed.

To this characteristic he might, perhaps, have added another, which is sufficiently remarkable in an art which had at least three thousand years of vitality, namely, its freedom from individual expression. The realism of the Egyptians was a broad realism. There is in it no sign of

that research into detail which distinguishes most imitative art and is to be found even in that

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of their immediate successors; and yet, during all those long centuries of alternate renaissance and decay, we find no vestige of an attempt to raise art above imitation. No suspicion of its expressive power seems to have dawned on the Egyptian mind, which, so far as the plastic arts were concerned, never produced anything that in the language of modern criticism could be called a creation. In this particular Egypt is more closely allied to those nations of the far east whose art does not come within the scope of M. Perrot's inquiry, than to the great civilizations which formed its own posterity.

Before the late troubles intervened to draw attention of a different kind to the Nile Valley, the finding of a pit full of royal mummies and sepulchral objects in the western mountain at Thebes had occurred to give a fresh stimulus to the interest in Egyptian history, and to encourage those who were doing their best to lead England to take her proper share in the work of exploration. A short account of this discovery, which took place after M. Perrot's book was complete, and of some of the numerous art objects with which it has enriched the Boulak Museum, will be found in an Appendix to the second volume.

My acknowledgments for generous assistance are due to Dr. Birch, Mr. Reginald Stuart Poole, and Miss A. B. Edwards.

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# INTRODUCTION.

## I.

The successful interpretation of the ancient writings of Egypt, Chaldæa, and Persia, which has distinguished our times, makes it necessary that the history of antiquity should be rewritten. Documents that for thousands of years lay hidden beneath the soil, and inscriptions which, like those of Egypt and Persia, long offered themselves to the gaze of man merely to excite his impotent curiosity, have now been deciphered and made to render up their secrets for the guidance of the historian. By the help of those strings of hieroglyphs and of cuneiform characters, illustrated by paintings and sculptured reliefs, we are enabled to separate the truth from the falsehood, the chaff from the wheat, in the narratives of the Greek writers who busied themselves with those nations of Africa and Asia which preceded their own in the ways of civilization. Day by day, as new monuments have been discovered and more certain methods of reading their inscriptions elaborated, we have added to the knowledge left us by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, to our acquaintance with those empires on the Euphrates and the Nile which were already in old age when the Greeks were yet struggling to emerge from their primitive barbarism.

Even in the cases of Greece and Rome, whose histories are supplied in their main lines by their classic writers, the study of hitherto neglected writings discloses many new and curious

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details. The energetic search for ancient inscriptions, and the scrupulous and ingenious interpretation of their meaning, which we have witnessed and are witnessing, have revealed to us many interesting facts of which no trace is to be found in Thucydides or Xenophon, in Livy or Tacitus; enabling us to enrich with more than one feature the picture of private and public life which they have handed down to us. In the effort to embrace the life of ancient times as a whole, many attempts have been made to fix the exact place in it

occupied by art, but those attempts have never been absolutely successful, because the comprehension of works of art, of *plastic* creations in the widest significance of that word, demands an amount of special knowledge which the great majority of historians are without; art has a method and language of its own, which obliges those who wish to learn it thoroughly to cultivate their taste by frequenting the principal museums of Europe, by visiting distant regions at the cost of considerable trouble and expense, by perpetual reference to the great collections of engravings, photographs, and other reproductions which considerations of space and cost prevent the *savant* from possessing at home. More than one learned author has never visited Italy or Greece, or has found no time to examine their museums, each of which contains but a small portion of the accumulated remains of antique art. Some connoisseurs do not even live in a capital, but dwell far from those public libraries, which often contain valuable collections, and sometimes—when they are not packed away in cellars or at the binder's—allow them to be studied by the curious.<sup>[2]</sup> The study of art, difficult enough in itself, is thus rendered still more arduous by the obstacles which are thrown in its way. The difficulty of obtaining materials for self-improvement in this direction affords the true explanation of the absence, in modern histories of antiquity, of those laborious researches which have led to such great results since Winckelmann founded the science of archæology as we know it. To take the case of Greece, many learned writers have in our time attempted to retrace its complete history—England, Germany, and France have each contributed works which, by various merits, have conquered the favour of Europe. But of all these works the only one which betrays any deep study of Greek art, and treats it with taste and

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competence, is that of M. Ernest Curtius; as for Mr. Grote, he has neither a theoretic knowledge of art, nor a feeling for it. Here and there, indeed, where he cannot avoid it, he alludes to the question, but in the fewest and driest phrases possible. And yet Greece, without its architects, its sculptors, and its painters, without in fact its passion for beautiful form, a passion as warm and prolific as its love for poetry, is hardly Greece at all.

Much disappointment is thus prepared for those who, without the

leisure to enter deeply into detail, wish to picture to themselves the various aspects of the ancient world. They are told of revolutions, of wars and conquests, of the succession of princes; the mechanism of political and civil institutions is explained to them; "literature," we are told, "is the expression of social life," and so the history of literature is written for us. All this is true enough, but there is another truth which seems to be always forgotten, that the art of a people is quite as clear an indication of their sentiments, tastes, and ideas, as their literature. But on this subject most historians say little, contenting themselves with the brief mention of certain works and proper names, and with the summary statement of a few general ideas which do not even possess the merit of precision. And where are we to find the information thus refused? Europe possesses several histories of Greek and Roman literature, written with great talent and eloquence, such as the work, unhappily left unfinished, of Ottfried Müller; there are, too, excellent manuals, rich in valuable facts, such as those of Bernhardt, Baehr, and Teuffel; but where is there, either in England, in France, or in Germany, a single work which retraces, in sufficient detail, the whole history of antique art, following it throughout its progress and into all its transformations, from its origin to its final decadence, down to the epoch when Christianity and the barbaric invasions put an end to the ancient forms of civilization and prepared for the birth of the modern world, for the evolution of a new society and of a new art?

To this question our neighbours may reply that the *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst* of Carl Schnaase<sup>[3]</sup> does all that we ask. But that work has one great disadvantage for those who are not

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Germans. Its great bulk will almost certainly prevent its ever finding a translator, while it makes it very tedious reading to a foreigner. It must, besides, be very difficult, not to say impossible, for a single writer to treat with equal competence the arts of Asia, of Greece, and of Rome, of the Middle Ages and of modern times. As one might have expected, all the parts of such an extensive whole are by no means of equal value, and the chapters which treat of antique art are the least satisfactory. Of the eight volumes of which the work consists, two are devoted to ancient times, and, by general acknowledgment, they are not the two best. They were revised, indeed, for the second

edition, by two colleagues whom Herr Schnaase called in to his assistance; oriental art by Carl von Lützow, and that of Greece and Rome by Carl Friedrichs. But the chapters in which Assyria, Chaldæa, Persia, Phœnicia, and Egypt are discussed are quite inadequate. No single question is exhaustively treated. Instead of well-considered personal views, we have vague guesses and explanations which do nothing to solve the many problems which perplex archæologists. The illustrations are not numerous enough to be useful, and, in most cases, they do not seem to have been taken from the objects themselves. Those which relate to architecture, especially, have been borrowed from other well known works, and furnish therefore no new elements for appreciation or discussion. Finally, the order adopted by the author is not easily understood. For reasons which have decided us to follow the same course, and which we will explain farther on, he takes no account of the extreme east, of China and Japan; but then, why begin with India, which had no relations with the peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean until a very late date, and, so far as art was concerned, rather came under their influence than brought them under its own?

The fact is that Schnaase follows a geographical order, which is very confusing in its results. To give but one example of its absurdity, he speaks of the Phœnicians before he has said a word of Egypt; now, we all know that the art of Tyre and Sidon was but a late reflection from that of Egypt; the workshops of those two famous ports were mere factories of cheap Egyptian art objects for exportation.

Again, the first part of Herr Schnaase's work is already seventeen years old, and how many important discoveries have taken place

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since 1865? Those of Cesnola and Schliemann, for instance, have revealed numberless points of contact and transmission between one phase of antique art and another, which were never thought of twenty years ago. The book therefore is not "down to date." With all the improvements which a new edition might introduce, that part of it which deals with antiquity can never be anything but an abridgment with the faults inherent in that kind of work. It could never have the amplitude of treatment or the originality which made Winckelmann's *History of Art* and Ottfried Müller's *Manual of Artistic Archæology* so

successful in their day.<sup>[4]</sup>

Winckelmann's *History of Art among the Ancients*, originally published in 1764, is one of those rare books which mark an epoch in the history of the human intellect. The German writer was the first to formulate the idea, now familiar enough to cultivated intelligences, that art springs up, flourishes, and decays, with the society to which it belongs; in a word, that it is possible to write

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its history.<sup>[5]</sup> This great *savant*, whose memory Germany holds in honour as the father of classic archæology, was not content with stating a principle: he followed it through to its consequences; he began by tracing the outlines of the science which he founded, and he never rested till he had filled them in. However, now that a century has passed away since it appeared, his great work, which even yet is never opened without a sentiment of respect, marks a date beyond which modern curiosity has long penetrated. Winckelmann's knowledge of Egyptian art was confined to the *pasticcios* of the Roman epoch, and to the figures which passed from the villa of Hadrian to the museum of Cardinal Albani. Chaldæa and Assyria, Persia and Phœnicia, had no existence for him; even Greece as a whole was not known to him. Her painted vases were still hidden in Etruscan and Campanian cemeteries; the few which had found their way to the light had not yet succeeded in drawing the attention of men who were preoccupied over more imposing manifestations of the Greek genius. Nearly all Winckelmann's attention was given to the works of the sculptors, upon which most of his comprehensive judgments were founded; and yet, even in regard to them, he was not well-informed. His opportunities of personal inspection were confined to the figures, mostly of unknown origin, which filled the Italian galleries. The great majority of these formed part of the crowd of copies which issued from the workshops of Greece, for some three centuries or more, to embellish the temples, the basilicas, and the public baths, the villas and the palaces of the masters of the world. In the very few instances in which they were either originals or copies executed with sufficient care to be fair representations of the original, they never dated from an earlier epoch than that of Praxiteles, Scopas, and Lysippus. Phidias and Alcamenes, Pæonius and Polycletus, the great

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