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THE CRESWELL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE AT THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD

In a codicil to his will, dated 27 March 1973, Sir Archibald Creswell bequeathed all his photographic negatives both in England and Egypt to the Department of Oriental Art at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. On 4 July 1975 the gift arrived at the Royal Naval Dockyard, Portsmouth, the negatives having been packed by Her Majesty's Consul and his staff in Cairo and shipped by favor of the Royal Navy aboard HMS *Abdiel*, which was returning home after Suez Canal clearance operations. This was surely a fitting escort for the ammunition from Creswell's "arsenal" — the term he used to describe his photographic studio, as Mrs. Gloria Karnouk has reminded us.

The Ashmolean Museum received some 2,400 unboxed negatives, about 1,000 of which were glass, ranging from 16 × 12 inches to quarter plate in size, with the balance in plastic varying from full to quarter plate with some non-standard sizes also included. In addition to these loose negatives, the archive included 55 cloth-bound books, each with a theoretical capacity of 100 half-plate negatives in numbered sleeves. Not all the books were full, but some sleeves contained as many as 4 negatives. Sadly, there was no catalogue available and the previous index system for the negatives was not with them, though the books were labeled and their contents listed by monument. Also included was a batch of miscellaneous prints, both published and unpublished, for which there was not always an accompanying negative. In fact, by the time of its receipt, the archive was already missing many negatives, especially from among those used for the 1969 edition of *Early Muslim Architecture*.

Nonetheless, an archive of some 7,000 negatives, many of them very fragile, posed a formidable task in cataloguing, storage, and conservation. Over the next ten years, with the valued assistance of Christopher Gandy and a series of postgraduate students, all save 87 of the loose negatives were given a basic identification and matched with their plates and figures in the Creswell volumes where appropriate. The prints were mounted on foolscap card, stored in boxes, and added to

prints from Creswell's unpublished negatives of the latter Mamluk architecture of Cairo, which had been sent to the Ashmolean by Dr. Christel Kessler earlier that decade. There was also a policy of printing up the archive, giving priority to other unpublished material, but this was severely restricted by financial considerations.

It is excellent news, therefore, that from the summer of 1989, thanks to the enlightened generosity of the Barakat Trust, work on the archive has begun afresh. Since then, the plan of campaign has been to put brief identifications of all the loose negatives onto the Department of Eastern Art's data base, and at the same time have them printed and the prints stored in transparent sleeves in ring binders. In this way Creswell's photographs are gradually becoming visually accessible in Oxford, and complementary to Mrs. Karnouk's work in Cairo.

When received, the loose negatives were in no order, and in view of the numbers involved were necessarily accessioned as they stood and identified later. The advantages of eventually being able to sort and search through them on computer will thus transform the usability of the archive.

Another aspect of the project is the assessment of the condition of each negative as it is printed by the Museum's Photographic Department. Although there are no funds available at the moment for restoration, this is particularly important for the glass plates which, despite being stored in controlled conditions, are in some cases beginning to show the effects of age. At the time of writing (February 1990), some 1,000 of the negatives have been processed, but the funds in hand will not run to completing the work and making it generally available as a research archive and teaching aid. However, the project is at least underway.¹

For art historical purposes as well as in the interests of conservation the dating of negatives is also a concern. In this respect I am very much indebted to Mrs. Jeanne Brown, the Librarian of the Creswell Library in Cairo, and her assistants Kate Bennison and Soad Saada, who, from his passports, have painstakingly put to-



Creswell taking photographs at the mosque of Ibn Tulun. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.)

gether as close a chronology as possible of Creswell's travels between 1923 and 1966.

With regard to Creswell's working methods, including his photography and photographic archive system, Mrs. Karnouk has provided fascinating insights in her article on the Creswell Library. I regret, however, that I do not have a reference to the equipment that accompanied him between July 1919 and May 1920 when, as In-

spector of Monuments in General Allenby's military administration of Occupied Enemy Territory, he traveled through Syria and Palestine measuring and photographing monuments from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt. As Robert Hamilton has noted, in ten months he traveled five thousand miles by army transport, horse, and donkey and took 960 photographs, besides making 20 measured drawings and 300 pages of



Creswell's cameras. (Creswell Archive, Creswell Library, Cairo.)

notes.² The care and logistics (and no doubt the brawn of others) involved in transporting such massive amounts of glass plates, delicate cameras, and other photographic impedimenta must have been prodigious and added a certain piquancy to every shot!

In the note on photographs in his introduction to volume 1 of *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, Creswell says:

I am often asked what camera and lenses I use. I have two cameras: (i) a Contessa Nettel (Stuttgart), 13 × 18 cm., with a Zeiss double Protar, 18 cm., and a supplement giving 15 and 13 cm. focus when required, and a wide-angle Protar of 9 cm.; (ii) a Sinclair mahogany camera, 18 × 24 cm., with a Zeiss Tessar, 24 cm., a Goerz Dagor of 30 cm., and two wide-angle Protars of 18 and 14 cm.³

Mrs. Brown has also provided a list and photographs of Creswell's cameras and equipment still housed with his library in Cairo. These include a Sinclair London Box Camera plus three double plate holders; a Contessa Nettel Camera, adjustable, plus a set of Zeiss lenses (644612 and adapter f = 14 cm., NR 531197 f = 35 cm., NR 514376 f = 29 cm.); 3 yellow filters, adaptors and a click wire (all in a leather bag); a Zeiss Tele-Negative f = 7.5 cm. no. 323838, f = 21 cm. no. 383187 LESS AR

1:4,5 and a lens adapted to a Zeiss Tele-tubus III no. 3546 (in a wooden box) and a black tube box plus yellow filter.

As a teacher, Robert Hamilton has noted Creswell's limitations: "Creswell was not a born teacher; his lectures consisted largely of readings from his own books or articles, replete with facts but too magisterial to encourage in a totally inexperienced audience any inclination towards independent inquiry."⁴ However, once behind the camera he became a born communicator. His hawk-eyed attention to detail and devotion to perfection, best exemplified by the meticulous care with which he repeated shots with slight variations, as where the shadows are seen to lengthen at the Bab al-Futuh — quite apart from the nerve and athleticism he must have displayed in achieving many of the results — have left us with a record which, though also magisterial, is often a rich source of revelation. It is sincerely to be hoped, therefore, that eventually it may be accessible for the inspiration of students and scholars alike. In the meantime, I trust "The Captain" would be pleased that the Department of Eastern Art, though necessarily keeping his powder dry for the present, is at least priming the grenades for future use at the redoubts of Islamic architectural history.

Creswell Photographic Archive
Ashmolean Museum
Oxford, England

NOTES

1. In May 1990, the Barakat Trust generously granted further funding towards work on the archive.
2. R. W. Hamilton, "Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, 1879–1974," in *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 60 (1974), pp. 7–8; reprinted in this volume, below p. 132.
3. K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1952), pp. ix–x.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 13; reprint, below p. 135.