

THE FEMALE PIONEERS BRITISH WOMEN IN EGYPTOLOGY



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Abstract

From the Roman conquest of Egypt to the resurgence of European interest in ancient cultures, women were often marginalized in history. This study aims to shift the focus onto the significant but often overlooked contributions of pioneering British women in Egyptology, portraying them as trailblazers who defied gender norms and societal constraints. Through a detailed exploration of the achievements and impacts of figures for instance, Amelia Edwards, Margaret Murray, Sofia Lane Poole, Gertrude Caton-Thompson, Rosalind Moss, and Bertha Porter, this research seeks to shed light on their enduring legacies and unique perspectives, thereby enriching the historical narrative of British Women in Egyptology. Therefore, this research delves into the historical narrative of British women in Egyptology, a field traditionally dominated by male voices and perspectives. Through a nuanced examination of their scholarly achievements, methodological innovations, and cultural impacts, this paper seeks to offer a more comprehensive and diversified narrative of the historical landscape of British Women in Egyptology.

Keywords: British women, Egyptology, pioneers, archaeology, ancient Egypt.

ملخص البحث

منذ غزو الرومان لمصر إلى عودة اهتمام أوروبا بالثقافات القديمة، كان غالباً ما يتم تهميش دور النساء في توثيق تاريخ مصر. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التركيز نحو إسهامات النساء البريطانيات الرائدات في علم المصريات، مصورة إياهن ليس فقط كأثريات وإنما كرائدات طريق تحدين الأنماط الاجتماعية والقيود المجتمعية. من خلال استكشاف مفصل لإنجازات وتأثيرات شخصيات مثل أميليا إدواردز، مارغريت موراي، صوفيا لين بول، جيرترود كاتون - ثومبسون، إن. دي جارييس ديفيس، روزاليند موس، وبرثا بورتير. وبالتالي، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على إرثهن المستمر ووجهات نظرهن الفريدة، مما يثري السرد التاريخي حول النساء البريطانيات وتأثيرهن في علم المصريات. لذا، تتعمق هذه الدراسة في السرد التاريخي للنساء البريطانيات المساهمات في علم المصريات، الميدان الذي يهيمن عليه الأصوات التقليدية والآراء الذكورية. من خلال فحص دقيق لإنجازاتهم العلمية وأساليبهم المبتكرة وتأثيراتهم الثقافية، حيث تسعى هذه الورقة إلى تقديم سرد أكثر شمولاً وتنوعاً للمشهد التاريخي للنساء البريطانيات ومساهماتهن في علم المصريات.

Introduction

To establish the characters of the study, it is crucial to grasp the definition of a pioneer as denoted in the dictionary. A pioneer is a person who is the first to study and develop a particular area of knowledge, culture, etc. that other people then continue to develop.¹ The forthcoming examination will concentrate on the pioneering women who contributed to the establishment of Egyptology as an academic discipline from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

On March 10, 1923, the London Illustrated News featured a double-page spread titled 'Men who perform the "spade work" of history: British names famous in the field of archaeology,' highlighting renowned figures like Flinders Petrie, Howard Carter, and F. L. Griffith. However, this feature, like many historical narratives of 'Great Discoveries,' overlooked the significant contributions of female archaeologists, who played vital roles in excavations in Egypt and Sudan. Women were integral members of fieldwork teams in Egypt, sharing the challenges and physical labor with the entire expedition.² Several other female pioneers in archaeology, including Gertrude Caton-Thompson, began their fieldwork on Petrie's excavations. Caton-Thompson made significant discoveries in Egyptian prehistory.³ despite scepticism from the predominantly male academic community. Collaborators like artists Winifred Brunton and Annie Quibell, although often overlooked, were vital to the success of field seasons through their dedicated efforts on-site.⁴

Historical Context

Greco-Roman writers found significant inspiration in Egypt, particularly following its integration into the Roman Empire such as Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Plutarch, Gaius Plinius Secundus, and Ammianus Marcellinus extensively documented Egypt in their works. These writings endured beyond the fall of the Western Empire, preserving knowledge of Egypt through the Dark and Middle Ages. During the Renaissance, renewed interest in these texts arose, accentuated by Egypt's restricted accessibility under Islamic rule. Medieval and early Renaissance periods mentioned key locations such as Rosetta, Damietta, and the Pyramids of Giza. The medieval favoured Old Testament references over the allure of ancient Egypt.⁵

Accounts of 19th-century Egyptian expeditions have remained popular in English literature for more than 200 years, serving as significant research focal points for scholars

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1. Hornby, A. S. (2010), 1149
 2. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102
 3. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102
 4. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102
 5. Curl, J. S. (1994), 37



in Egyptology and archaeology. These narratives offer captivating tales of danger and adventure in Egypt, a land that captivates with its mystique.⁶

Recent accounts, whether scholarly or popular, frequently rely on early 19th-century source materials to construct their stories. Given the enduring interest in Egyptian exploration during this era, it's not surprising that unpublished works from that time have been sporadically reproduced. These reproductions provide new data sources to enhance our understanding of the early phases of Egyptology. With Egyptology gaining recognition as an independent discipline, it is an auspicious time to explore the neglected works and contributions of pioneering British women in this field.⁷ By examining the forms taken by these unpublished materials and contemplating avenues for further development, we can begin to appreciate their potential to advance our understanding of Egyptology's historical evolution.

The historical portrayal of women in the documentation of Egypt's history has frequently positioned them as secondary figures, often seen in supporting roles to their Egyptologist partners, perpetuating the notion that women stand behind successful men. Women have endured marginalization in academic contexts, with their significant contributions often disregarded. While fully rectifying these historical omissions and reinstating individuals' rightful places in the records of Egyptology may pose challenges, the goal remains to enhance the narrative surrounding the discipline's history. This entails broadening perspectives, highlighting inclusivity, and duly recognizing the impactful roles played by all participants in the realm of Egyptology.⁸

To pave the way for British women in Egyptology, we must first acknowledge a crucial development in England. Amelia Blandford Edwards, renowned for "A Thousand Miles up the Nile," played a pivotal role.⁹ Inspired by her 1873-74 journey to Egypt, she sought to promote excavations.¹⁰ Initially approaching Samuel Birch at the British Museum for funding Mariette's work in Egypt, she faced uncertainty.¹¹ Mariette, leading the Antiquities Service since 1858, wielded considerable influence, overseeing excavations and establishing a museum in Cairo.¹² Birch, uninterested in funding, posed a hurdle. Undeterred, Edwards found support near Birch's office with Reginald Stuart Poole, who, unlike Birch, had firsthand experience in Egypt. Poole's backing was instrumental, contrasting Birch's reluctance and signalling a shift in British Egyptology.¹³

6. Bednarski, A. (2014), 81

7. Bednarski, A. (2014), 81

8. See; Navratilova, H., Gertzen, T., De Meyer, M., Dodson, A., & Bednarski, A. (2023). Addressing diversity: inclusive histories of Egyptology. Liden: Mønster: Zaphon.

9. Thompson, J. (2015), 12

10. Thompson, J. (2015), 12

11. Thompson, J. (2015), 12

12. Thompson, J. (2015), 1

13. Thompson, J. (2015), 12

Profiles of Key Figures

Commencing with Amelia Ann Blanford Edwards (1831-1892),¹⁴ I will present concise profiles of each woman, emphasizing their distinctive contributions to Egyptology, exploring their influence on the discipline, and examining the obstacles they encountered. Among the early pioneers was Amelia B. Edwards the daughter of Thomas E., who served in the army, and Alicia Walpole, a British writer who exhibited exceptional talent from a young age. Her interest in ancient Egypt was sparked early on and she found inspiration in Wilkinson's work on the manners of the ancient Egyptians. Beyond writing, she was drawn to Egyptology, influenced by her father's experiences serving under Wellington in the Peninsular War.¹⁵

Amelia displayed a remarkable aptitude for writing and drawing in her childhood. Her early works, including poems and journal entries, hinted at her future literary prowess. While she initially considered a career as an opera singer, she ultimately chose to pursue journalism. Mary's writing career flourished, contributing to various publications such as Chambers Journal, Household Words, and the Morning Post. She also delved into editing, particularly focusing on historical and artistic works.¹⁶

During a visit to Syria, Mary's fascination with Egypt deepened, culminating in her enrolment in hieroglyph lessons. Over 25 years, she authored eight novels and became a prominent figure in Egyptology circles. Her contributions to the field, alongside her extensive writings, solidified her legacy as a multifaceted and influential figure in the Victorian era,¹⁷ known for her work in the popular genre of picturesque travel writing.¹⁸ Amelia Edwards pursued a diverse career, achieving success as a journalist, author, and scholar of Egyptology. Additionally, she



Figure 1 photograph sent by Amelia Edwards to her assistant secretary Emily Paterson for Christmas 1888. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.

14. Ockerbloom, M. (2024), <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/edwards.html>
15. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 145
16. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 145
17. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 145
18. Ockerbloom, M. (2024), <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/edwards.html>

played a significant role in advocating for women's suffrage, holding the position of Vice-President in the Society for Promoting Women's Suffrage.¹⁹ Remaining unmarried, Edwards chose a life marked by extensive travel, often accompanied by a female associate.²⁰ Her famous book, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*.²¹ First published in 1877,²³ established her as an authority on popular Egyptology and led to the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund (later the Egypt Exploration Society).²⁴

Margaret Alice Murray, a renowned British Egyptologist born in Calcutta on July 13, 1863, was the offspring of James C. M., an English entrepreneur raised in India, and Margaret Carr. Initially drawn towards a career in nursing, she assumed a supervisory role at the Calcutta General Hospital during a significant outbreak at twenty-one. However, her aspirations in this domain were thwarted in England due to her petite stature, prompting a shift to Egyptology under Petrie's guidance, establishing her as the primary full-time female practitioner in the discipline.²⁵ Commencing her academic journey at University College London in 1894.

Murray studied under luminaries such as J. H. Walker, Griffith, and Petrie. Progressing swiftly, she attained the position of junior lecturer in 1898, subsequently being promoted to lecturer in 1899. By 1922, she had become a Fellow of University College and later assumed the role of Assistant Professor from 1924 to 1935. Recognized for her contributions, Murray was honoured with the title of Honorary Fellow of the FSA (Scot.) in 1931, as well as the distinction of FRAI.²⁶

Murray's instructional role at UCL serves as a pivotal case study, proposing that academic settings, rather than field endeavours, nurture distinguished archaeological figures. Murray joined UCL in 1894 as the Egyptology Department blossomed under the tutelage of Flinders Petrie. Petrie's frequent absences for excavations in Egypt enabled Murray to promptly assume roles as an illustrator and scribe, impressing him with her skill and dedication. Progressing to Junior Lecturer in 1898 after four years of collaborative efforts with Petrie, she adeptly educated novices in hieroglyphics.²⁷

In addition to her scholarly pursuits, Murray actively engaged in various archaeological ventures. She participated in excavations in locations such as Malta (1921-1923), Minorca (1930-1931), Petra (1937), and Tell Ajjul in Palestine (1938) alongside Petrie and Mackay. Beyond Egyptology, Murray delved into the realms of witchcraft and folklore, serving as President of the Folk-Lore Society. Her literary prowess shone

19. Ockerbloom, M. (2024), <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/edwards.html>

20. Ockerbloom, M. (2024), <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/edwards.html>

21. Thompson, J. (2015), 12

22. Rees, J. Amelia Edwards, (1998), 1

23. Bainbridge, W. (2023), 266-286

24. Rees, J. (2008), 93

25. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 333

26. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 333

27. Whitehouse, R. (2013), 120-127



Figure 2 Margaret Murray (third from left) unwrapping a mummy at the Manchester University Museum in 1908. (Sheppard, K. L. (2013). *The life of Margaret Alice Murray; A woman's work in Archaeology*. UK: Lexington Books).

through with the publication of over 80 books, a testament to her enduring influence in academia. Murray's academic journey commenced with her inaugural article in *PSBA* in 1895, heralding a career that left an indelible mark on the field of Egyptology and beyond.²⁸

In addition to her excavations, Margaret Murray engaged in additional fieldwork activities. For example, between 1903 and 1904, she dedicated a season to work at Saqqara, where she meticulously reproduced the sculptures adorning the walls of tomb chapels.²⁹

The historical progression of mummy unwrapping in the Western sphere, culminating in Margaret Murray's public presentation of two mummies in Manchester in 1908, epitomizes an evolving narrative characterized by shifts between public exhibitions

28. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 333

29. Whitehouse, R. (2013), 120–127

emphasizing exotic artifacts and scientific investigations seeking to unveil medical and historical insights from antiquity.

While existing analyses have contextualized Murray's initiatives within the broader landscape of mummy studies, I argue that cultural scrutiny of her endeavors is warranted, navigating the intersection of public exhibition and scientific exploration. This dual facet of her work not only captivated public interest with its eerie allure but also propelled innovative scientific ventures that persist into contemporary scholarship. Murray's chief aim lay in engaging public intrigue while concurrently educating them on the genuine history of ancient Egypt, thereby facilitating novel scientific discoveries and enriching scholarly interpretations of Egypt's ancient eras.³⁰

Following, Sophia Poole, a renowned British author, was born in Hereford on January 16, 1804. She was the daughter of Reverend Theophilus Lane and Sophia Gardiner, and the sibling of E. W. Lane. In 1829, she wed Edward Richard Poole.³¹ During her residence in Egypt alongside her brother from 1842 to 1849, she authored "The Englishwoman in Egypt," spanning two volumes in 1844 and an additional volume in 1846. A new edition, edited by A. Kararah, was released in 2003. Poole spent her final years at her son's official residence at the British Museum, where she passed away on May 6, 1891.

Commencing with a reference to the notable work of 1844, "The Englishwoman in Egypt," by Sofia Lane Poole, we encounter a profound exploration of the experiential perspectives offered by Sophia Poole, whose extended residency in Cairo from 1842 to 1849 alongside her renowned Orientalist brother, Edward Lane, facilitated a deep immersion into Egyptian daily life.³² Fluent in Arabic and attired in local garb, Poole traversed diverse social spheres, engaging intimately with women across varying strata, from marketplaces to hammams and harems.³³ Her interactions extended to the upper echelons of society, including the viceroy Mohamed Ali Pasha's family, where her keen observations and nuanced understanding of customs painted a vivid tableau of Egyptian life.³⁴ Poole's narrative, penned as epistolary dispatches to a confidant, recounts her journey from Alexandria to Cairo, encapsulating village excursions and encounters with a spectrum of characters—from the pasha's daughter to disenchanted slave-girls.³⁵ A departure from her brother's scholarly tomes, Poole's work blends entertainment with erudition, offering a unique feminine perspective that complements Lane's preservation of a bygone Cairo, imbuing the era with a multifaceted richness unattainable through a singular male gaze.³⁶

30. Sheppard, K. (2012), 525 - 549.

31. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 374

32. Poole, S. (1845), vi

33. Poole, S. (1845), vi

34. Thompson, J. (2010), 571

35. Poole, S. (1845), p. vi

36. Poole, S. (1845), p. vi

Succeeding, Rosalind Louisa Beaufort Moss, who entered this world in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, on 21 September 1890, hailed from a scholarly lineage. Her father, the Reverend Henry Whitehead Moss, assumed the role of Headmaster at Shrewsbury School, thereby enhancing its distinguished standing within the educational realm. Her mother, Mary (née Beaufort), managed the household with firmness, overseeing a family of two boys and four girls. The Moss sisters' upbringing was significantly influenced by the predominantly male environment of Shrewsbury School.³⁷

Afterwards, Rosalind Moss and Bertha Porter, notable figures in Egyptology, were influential in advancing the Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings. Working under Professor F. Llewellyn Griffith's guidance, Porter, an adept bibliographer, meticulously gathered essential references for the project, despite lacking direct experience in Egypt. In 1924, she collaborated with Rosalind Moss, an accomplished anthropologist, to verify details for the inaugural volume on The Theban Necropolis. Following Porter's retirement in 1929, Moss assumed leadership, overseeing the creation of seven volumes with significant updates to accommodate the expanding wealth of new data.³⁸ Their collective dedication to scholarly accuracy and detail has significantly impacted the field of Egyptology, with their work remaining a cornerstone for researchers and archaeologists globally. Moss, born in Shrewsbury in 1890, contributed significantly to Egyptology, co-editing the Bibliography with Porter and demonstrating interdisciplinary expertise through earlier studies on life after death in Oceania and the Malay Archipelago.³⁹

Her meticulous research spanned various volumes focusing on significant Egyptian sites like Theban Necropolis, Theban Temples, Memphis, and regions across Upper and Lower Egypt. Moss's dedication led to updated editions, collaborating with scholars like Ethel W. Burney and Jaromir Malek to enrich the scholarly discourse.⁴⁰



Figure 3 Rosalind Moss, MOSS, R., & JAMES, T. (1990). A Dedicated life. Tributes offered in memory of Rosalind Moss. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 3

37. James, T. (1991), 150 - 155

38. Lesko, B. (2024), https://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/bios/Moss_Rosalind.pdf

39. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 47

40. Lesko, B. (2024), https://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/bios/Moss_Rosalind.pdf

In addition to her monumental books, Moss contributed insightful articles to esteemed journals, shedding light on diverse topics such as Egyptian stelae, rock-tombs, and ancient artifacts. Her scholarly impact extended to international dimensions, exploring connections between Egypt and places like Malta, Sudan, and Ukraine.⁴¹

Her commitment to compiling and editing Bibliography volumes until her retirement in 1970 highlights her dedication to disseminating knowledge within the academic realm of Egyptology. Moss's collaborative endeavours with peers and extensive travels to museums and archaeological sites solidify her enduring legacy in the discipline.⁴²

Another exemplar of pioneering British women in Egyptology, Gertrude Caton-Thompson (1888-1985) stood out as a prominent British archaeologist whose professional trajectory significantly influenced the discipline of Egyptology. Born in London on the 1st of February 1888, she commenced a voyage that would reshape archaeological methodologies within this domain.⁴³ Caton-Thompson's pioneering spirit led her to engage in excavations across varied landscapes, from the ancient sands of Egypt to the historical depths of Malta, Rhodesia, Zimbabwe, and southern Arabia. Her discoveries, including a predynastic village in He and two neolithic cultures, reshaped our understanding of Egypt's ancient past. Beyond her groundbreaking excavations, Caton-Thompson's legacy is also defined by her role in inaugurating the first comprehensive archaeological and geological survey of the North, a monumental undertaking that set new standards for archaeological research.⁴⁴



Figure 4 Gertrude Caton-Thompson.
Bierbrier, M. L. (2019). *Who was who in Egyptology*. London: The Egypt Exploration Society. 192

In continuation of the Series of British women who made significant strides in Egyptology, Bertha Porter (1852-1941) emerged as a distinguished Egyptological bibliographer. Hailing from London, born on April 9, 1852, she delved deeply into Egyptology, refining her knowledge under the guidance of prominent scholars such as Griffith and Sethe in Göttingen. Porter's mastery of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic

41. Lesko, B. (2024), https://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/bios/Moss_Rosalind.pdf

42. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 47

43. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 192

44. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 192

texts, reliefs, and paintings culminated in her magnum opus, the “Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings.” The inaugural volume, focusing on the Theban Necropolis, was unveiled in 1927, solidifying her legacy in the field.⁴⁵ Collaborating with Rosalind Moss, Porter paved the way for subsequent volumes, establishing a comprehensive resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike.⁴⁶

In final reflection, Flinders Petrie, a distinguished pioneer in archaeology, significantly advanced modern scientific archaeological methods. His meticulous chronology of Ancient Egypt, based on overlooked artifacts, and his establishment of Egyptology at UCL, underscore his pivotal role. Assisted by Kate Bradbury and his wife Hilda Petrie, their indispensable contributions remain overshadowed. Particularly, the overlooked career of Hilda Petrie, crucial to Petrie’s success, merits recognition for her fieldwork, student mentorship, and departmental administration at UCL, shedding light on the collaborative nature of their work.⁴⁷

Hilda Petrie, Flinders Petrie’s wife, from the time the Petrie’s got married in 1897, Hilda clearly became Petrie’s right hand in the field,⁴⁸ embarked on her first excavation in 1896 shortly after marrying him. Fieldwork represented for her a liberating experience, devoid of many societal constraints.⁴⁹



Figure 5 Hilda descending a tomb- shaft by rope- ladder, perhaps at Denderah 1897-8 (Drower, M. (2004). *Letters from the desert: the correspondence of Flinders and Hilda Petrie*. Oxford: Aris and Phillips, 135)

45. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 374

46. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 374

47. Sheppard, K. (2013), XX

48. Sheppard, K. (2013), 59

49. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102

Challenges Faced by British Women in Egyptology

In the realm of British women engaging in Egyptology, the challenges faced were deeply rooted in gender biases and societal restrictions. A notable example illustrating such obstacles is Margaret Murray's involvement in excavations at Abydos alongside Petrie in 1902–03. Murray recounts a significant incident from this period in her memoir. On her first day, Petrie assigned her the task of independently guiding the labourers to the excavation site. Standing at a height of merely 4 feet 10 inches, Murray initially encountered skepticism and resistance from the labourers, who questioned her authority. However, through her determined actions in leading them back to camp and implementing a penalty of a day's wage for non-compliance, she successfully established her credibility. Murray reflects on the evident disparity in treatment between herself and Petrie's male assistants, who were not subjected to similar tests of competence during the excavation proceedings.⁵⁰

Recent scholarly discussions emphasize the critical role of theoretical and cultural knowledge acquired in classrooms for accurate interpretation of archaeological findings in the field. This re-evaluation highlights the significance of classroom learning in archaeological education and knowledge production.⁵¹

The field's potential for knowledge production and data collection would diminish without foundational classroom learning. Recent research in scientific education has examined classrooms as gendered spaces, often occupied by women. Despite facing lower visibility, pay disparities, and longer hours, women carved out distinct identities beyond traditional roles, with classroom teaching serving as a significant avenue for professional advancement. Historians in archaeology have historically marginalized the classroom in favour of fieldwork, reinforcing gendered stereotypes within educational roles.⁵²

Despite her significant contributions, Caton-Thompson faced challenges typical of her time. As a female archaeologist in a male-dominated field, she navigated societal barriers and overcame gender biases to establish herself as a respected scholar and researcher. Her impact on Egyptology reverberates through her seminal works such as "The Badarian Civilisation," co-authored with G. Brunton, "The Desert Fayum," and "Kharga Oasis in Prehistory." These publications continue to shape scholarly discourse and inspire future generations of archaeologists to delve deeper into Egypt's rich archaeological tapestry.⁵³

Gertrude Caton-Thompson's unwavering dedication, pioneering excavations, and

50. Whitehouse, R. (2013), 120–127

51. Carruthers, W. (2014), 113

52. Carruthers, W. (2014), 114

53. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 192

enduring legacy have solidified her position as a trailblazer in the field of Egyptology, leaving an indelible imprint on the study of ancient civilizations.⁵⁴

Despite her groundbreaking contributions, Porter faced challenges typical of her time, navigating a predominantly male-dominated field where recognition often eluded female scholars. Her meticulous work and dedication to compiling invaluable bibliographic resources laid a foundation for future Egyptologists, enriching the study of ancient Egyptian art and texts. Porter's legacy endures through her enduring publications and the preservation of her manuscripts at the Griffith Institute, underscoring her enduring impact on Egyptology.⁵⁵

Many of these female archaeologists operated in the shadows of their spouses, leading to their marginalization in historical narratives.⁵⁶ Often, their scholarly works were published under their husbands' names, obscuring their individual contributions. Additionally, a significant number of women toiled in archives and museum repositories, their efforts unrecognized as traditional archaeology, resulting in their omission from historical retrospectives.⁵⁷ Despite this, some of these women received obituaries, shedding light on their impactful but overlooked roles in the field. In the subsequent sections, by delving into the life and contributions of one such archaeologist deserving of greater recognition.⁵⁸

The tenacity and persistence demonstrated by British women in surmounting these obstacles shine through brightly. Delving into the historical records of archaeology unveils a myriad of extraordinary women who engaged in excavations, whether in solitude or in collaboration with male counterparts, frequently their spouses. Particularly, British women encountered a certain degree of acceptance when conducting archaeological endeavours in colonial territories, especially when their activities aligned with societal norms of femininity during the later part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is noteworthy to observe that professions such as nursing served as a favourable gateway for women to enter the field of archaeology.⁵⁹

Legacy and Impact

Exploring the lasting impacts of these women pioneers: Amelia Edwards held a crucial position as a writer and a key figure in the establishment of the Egypt Exploration

54. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 192

55. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 374

56. Female Archaeologists - Gertrude Caton-Thompson. (2024, 10 05). Retrieved from My own little corner of the world: <https://archaeologicalnerdiness.blogspot.com/2017/01/female-archaeologists-gertrude-caton.html>

57. Female Archaeologists - Gertrude Caton-Thompson. (2024, 10 05). Retrieved from My own little corner of the world: <https://archaeologicalnerdiness.blogspot.com/2017/01/female-archaeologists-gertrude-caton.html>

58. Female Archaeologists - Gertrude Caton-Thompson. (2024, 10 05). Retrieved from My own little corner of the world: <https://archaeologicalnerdiness.blogspot.com/2017/01/female-archaeologists-gertrude-caton.html>

59. Female Archaeologists - Gertrude Caton-Thompson. (2024, 10 05). Retrieved from My own little corner of the world: <https://archaeologicalnerdiness.blogspot.com/2017/01/female-archaeologists-gertrude-caton.html>

Fund, a precursor to the Egypt Exploration Society formed in 1887, originating in 1882. with R.S. Poole and Sir Erasmus Wilson as founding members. Amelia Edwards, in collaboration with Poole, served as the Fund's Honorary Secretary. This marked the first instance of a foreign organization receiving excavation concessions in Egypt. Motivated by deep respect for Ancient Egyptian monuments and dismayed by their neglect, Edwards sought to counter the escalating damage caused by unchecked exploitation. Following Napoleon's revelations, a surge in pillaging ensued, resulting in the indiscriminate removal of artifacts and architectural elements, damaging Egypt's heritage irreversibly. Edwards, initially enticed by antiquities, later acknowledged the ethical issues surrounding their acquisition, similar to the Elgin Marbles controversy. She advocated for responsible excavation practices, and artifact distribution agreements, and reinforced export restrictions to address these challenges.

Despite the challenges posed by financial interests and prestige, these reforms aimed to preserve Egypt's cultural heritage and mitigate the detrimental impact of unchecked exploitation and neglect.⁶⁰ The Egypt Exploration Society (E.E.S.) was established with a dual purpose of protection and exploration. Initiated by Amelia's deep concern over the ongoing losses and the neglected archaeological sites scattered across Egypt, the society's inception was attributed to her⁶¹ relentless efforts in garnering support from influential figures and the media. Under Amelia's guidance, the E.E.S. enlisted archaeologists, sponsored annual excavations, and published detailed reports. By strategically selecting sites with Biblical connections for initial excavations, the society aimed to counter the mounting criticisms challenging the historical authenticity of the Bible during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶¹ The successful unveiling of sites by Edouard Naville sparked both controversy and intrigue, leading to a surge in public interest and support for the E.E.S., thereby establishing the society as a prominent entity through effective publicity efforts.⁶²

Edwards' travelogue, which spanned from Cairo to Abu Simbel, instigated a successful career as a public speaker in Britain and America, earning her honorary doctorates and a named professorship in Egyptian archaeology and philology at University College London.⁶³ Her extensive knowledge of Egyptian history and her use of picturesque elements to convey her ideas to a lay audience solidified her position as one of the foremost female scholars of her time.⁶⁴ Amelia Edwards initially traveled to Cairo in the winter of 1873–74, seeking a brief respite of sunshine, warmth, and dry weather. However, this journey marked a transformative moment in her life. Upon

60. Rees, J. Amelia Edwards, (1998), 53

61. Rees, J. Amelia Edwards, (1998), 54

62. Rees, J. Amelia Edwards, (1998), 54

63. Bainbridge, W. (2023), 266-286

64. Bainbridge, W. (2023), 266-286

her return to England, she became a staunch advocate for the preservation of Egypt's heritage, dedicating the remainder of her life to this cause. Edwards played a pivotal role in establishing the Egypt Exploration Fund (now known as the Egypt Exploration Society), garnering significant support through her impassioned speeches and securing a loyal following both domestically and internationally. Her deep love for Egypt also manifested in her collection.⁶⁵

...dearer to me than all the rest of my curios are my Egyptian antiquities; and of these, strange to say, though none of them are in sight, I have enough to stock a modest little museum. Stowed away in all kinds of nooks and corners, in upstairs cupboards, in boxes, drawers, and cases innumerable, behind books, and invading the sanctity of glass closets and wardrobes, are hundreds, nay, thousands, of those fascinating objects in bronze and glazed ware, in carved wood and ivory, in glass, and pottery, and sculptured stone, which are the delight of archaeologists and collectors.⁶⁶ Expressed Amelia.

Examples of Egyptological Works by Amelia B. Edwards:⁶⁷

- » A Thousand Miles up the Nile, 1877 reprinted in 1982 (Century) and 1996 (Darf). German Edition in two volumes, Leipzig, 1878.
- » "Excavation of the great temple of Luxor, Upper Egypt," Illustrated London News, July 18, 1885, 60, 67, 70.
- » "On the dispersion of antiquities. In connection with certain recent discoveries of ancient cemeteries in Upper Egypt." Acts of the International congress of orientologists, 7th Vienna, 1886. Published 1888, pp. 37-46.
- » "Recent Discoveries in Egypt," American Geographical Society Journal, 22 (New York, 1890), 555-565.

Following her passing in 1892, the collection of Amelia Edwards became the central element of UCL's Egyptian possessions. UCL was chosen as the custodian of her valued artifacts due to its long-standing dedication to gender parity in degree conferral. Her substantial contribution also funded the first Chair in Egyptian Archaeology and Philology in the UK. With precision, Edwards structured her endowment to bar British Museum staff and, by stipulating a forty-year age limit for the role, essentially appointed Flinders Petrie as the exclusive qualified individual.⁶⁸ Amelia Edwards devoted herself to working for the proper excavation and recording of Egyptian monuments.⁶⁹

65. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102

66. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102

67. Lesko, B. S. (n.d.), 9-12. For more information, see; Lesko, B. S. (n.d.). Retrieved 09 20, 2024, from Amelia Blanford Edwards, 1831-1892: https://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/bios/Edwards_Amelia%20Blanford.pdf

68. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102

69. Rees, J. (2008), 96-97



Amelia Edwards exerts another significant influence through her contributions, the establishment of British Egyptology. After her passing in 1892, she instituted the first Egyptology chair at University College London, enriching it with her assortment of Egyptian antiquities. This endowed role was specifically assigned, in accordance with her directives, to William Matthew Flinders Petrie. The collection now resides in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, perpetuating Edwards' legacy and setting a precedent for future female scholars in the field.

Amelia Edwards corresponded with prominent Egyptologists such as Birch and Poole at the British Museum and Maspero in Paris, the latter whom she later translated works for, including his "Manual of Egyptian Archaeology".⁷⁰ Renowned for her meticulous research and dedication to self-education, exemplified by her mastery of hieroglyphs, Edwards distinguished herself from contemporary amateur writers. Beyond raising awareness about Egypt's monuments, Edwards envisioned an English organization to support archaeological endeavours and publications in Egypt, bridging the gap between advocacy and practical conservation efforts.⁷¹

Amidst a backdrop of rediscovered Egyptian treasures and expanding knowledge, she remained focused on her mission, steering clear of factional disputes while championing Flinders Petrie's exceptional archaeological prowess. Edwards' legacy included a substantial donation to University College, London, establishing the first Chair of Egyptology in a British university, with Petrie as the intended occupant. Her will meticulously ensured Petrie's appointment, excluding any competing claims. Edwards' contributions, including books and antiquities, were enshrined in the Edwards Library at the college. A portrait bust of Edwards appropriately adorned a historical publication by the college in 1992, commemorating a century of Egyptology at the institution.⁷²

Edwards' alignment with the women's rights movement influenced her decision to select UCL, which, during that era, stood as the sole institution offering women equivalent educational opportunities as men. The substantial contributions of women to the evolution of British Egyptology are undeniably intertwined with Edwards' pioneering endeavors in laying the groundwork for the discipline.⁷³

Amelia Edwards made a significant impact through her eloquent blend of charisma and professional authority. During her 1889-90 lecture tour in the United States, she admirably persevered despite fracturing her arm, maintaining her commitments even as the incident and the rigorous schedule took a toll on her health. Tragically, she succumbed to influenza in 1892 while overseeing the handling of antiquities at Millwall Docks, concluding nearly two decades of devoted service to Egypt. Her burial in Henbury's

70. Lesko B. S., (2024), 3-4

71. Lesko B. S., (2024), 3-4

72. Rees, J. Woman on the Nile, 2008, 94

73. Rees, J. Woman on the Nile, 2008, 95

churchyard, near Westbury, where she resided, is marked by an obelisk inscribed with her name and an ankh, symbolizing life in Egyptian culture.⁷⁴ The presence of the ankh, though possibly contentious to her parish vicar, reflects Edwards' profound reverence not only for the artifacts but also for the principles of ancient Egypt.⁷⁵

Within the domain of her travel and Egyptological works, Amelia Edwards authored significant pieces including "Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: A midsummer ramble in the Dolomites," initially published by Longmans, Green in London in 1873, followed by a second edition issued by Routledge in 1890.⁷⁶ Her work "A Thousand Miles Up the Nile" emerged from Longmans, Green in London in 1877, offering insights into the cultural and archaeological landscape of Egypt. Additionally, Edwards contributed to the field through her translation of G. Maspero's "Egyptian Archaeology," published by Grevel in London in 1887, showcasing her involvement in disseminating knowledge across linguistic boundaries. Noteworthy among her publications is "Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers," released by Harper and Brothers in New York at Franklin Square in 1891, underscoring her multifaceted engagement with Egyptology and travel narratives. Through these literary endeavors, Edwards left a lasting imprint on the exploration and understanding of both the Dolomites and the ancient wonders of Egypt.⁷⁷

In scrutinizing Margaret Murray's impact on the comprehension of ancient Egyptian religious customs, her perspectives and explorations through excavations and publications have significantly reshaped scholarly discourse. As a prominent figure, Murray questioned established archaeological methodologies, especially in the realm of ancient Egyptian religious research. Within historical archaeology analyses, there is a tendency to emphasize courageous male fieldworkers, thereby overlooking the valuable contributions of archaeologists within academic realms like museums and educational settings. Murray's pivotal role in instituting a comprehensive archaeology training regimen at UCL highlights the crucial role of classroom instruction in molding adept field archaeologists.⁷⁸

Murray's impact is most clearly reflected in the lasting achievements of her students in Egyptology, archaeology, and linguistics. Her extensive educational initiatives laid a robust foundation for their diverse and fulfilling careers in these fields.⁷⁹ Petrie's acknowledgment of her critical role in guiding students toward essential knowledge highlights her vital contributions. Beyond merely delivering information, Murray fostered both the professional and personal development of her students, creating formal educational settings and informal mentoring relationships that extended beyond

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74. Rees, J. *Woman on the Nile*, 2008, 95
 75. Rees, J. *Woman on the Nile*, 2008, 95
 76. Jones, M. (2022), 203
 77. Jones, M. (2022), 203
 78. Carruthers, W. (2014), 113



the classroom⁸⁰ This nurturing environment was instrumental in shaping the future of archaeological practices. Although Petrie initially suggested that scholarly expertise was not essential for excavators, the value of Murray's instructional programs in equipping individuals with the necessary skills to become proficient archaeologists became increasingly apparent. The educational opportunities she facilitated at UCL produced a cadre of capable students who would later emerge as significant contributors to the discipline under Petrie's mentorship.⁸¹

In the context of archaeology, which often accentuates individual "heroes," it is crucial to acknowledge that these figures are shaped and developed within educational settings. Murray's influence on her students, as exemplified by Petrie's esteemed protégés, illustrates the transformative potency of dedicated mentorship and structured educational environments in nurturing the upcoming cohort of scholars in Egyptology and related fields. This narrative emphasizes the classroom not merely as a passive backdrop but as a pivotal arena for knowledge cultivation and the cultivation of future leaders in archaeology.⁸² Furthermore, it serves as a beacon for subsequent generations of women in Egyptology, including individuals from various nationalities whose contributions have been historically overlooked, such as Bosse-Griffiths, Kate, Broome Myrtle Florence, Brodrick-Mary, Calverly-Amice Mary, Lichtheim Miriam, and Desroches Noblecourt-Christiane.⁸³

Regarding documentation practices, Hilda Petrie demonstrated a proactive involvement in recording discoveries and meticulously documenting their contexts during field expeditions. Her thorough annotations on items within the Petrie Museum serve as vital links between artifacts and their respective excavation histories. Hilda additionally undertook site surveys, created inked illustrations for publication, and aided in editing her husband's writings. Significantly, she assumed a pivotal role in securing funds for archaeological ventures, leading Flinders Petrie to dedicate his ultimate memoirs to her, recognizing her indispensable efforts and influence.⁸⁴

Conclusion:

◇ In conclusion, examining the overlooked contributions of pioneering women in Egyptology from the late 19th to early 20th centuries is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the discipline's historical development. By delving into unpublished materials from this era, we can unveil new insights and perspectives that enrich our knowledge of Egyptology's evolution. It is imperative to shift the narrative towards

79. Carruthers, W. (2014), 125

80. Carruthers, W. (2014), 125

81. Carruthers, W. (2014), 125

82. Carruthers, W. (2014), 125

83. Bierbrier, M. L. (2019), 60, 69, 86, 127

84. Stevenson, A. (2015), 102

inclusivity, recognizing the significant roles played by all individuals involved in the field. Rectifying historical omissions and acknowledging the vital contributions of women in Egyptology will not only enhance the discipline's history but also promote a more accurate and comprehensive representation of its past.

- ◇ Amelia Edwards, a pioneering figure in Egyptology, left an indelible mark on the field. Her passion for ancient Egypt and her tireless advocacy for its preservation were instrumental in establishing the Egypt Exploration Society. Through her captivating travelogues, public lectures, and scholarly publications, Edwards popularized Egyptology and inspired countless individuals. By supporting and overseeing excavations, she made significant contributions to archaeological research. Her legacy extends beyond her academic achievements; she was a tireless advocate for the protection of Egyptian heritage and a champion for women in the field of Egyptology.
- ◇ It is imperative to cultivate a more inclusive historical narrative that recognizes the invaluable contributions of these remarkable women, alongside others who have similarly shaped the course of Egyptology. Their achievements serve as a clarion call for heightened awareness and acknowledgment of the pivotal roles played by female pioneers in archaeology.
- ◇ To fully appreciate the rich history of Egyptology, it is imperative to recognize the groundbreaking contributions of pioneering women scholars. Figures like Amelia Edwards, Margaret Murray, and Gertrude Caton-Thompson not only challenged gender norms but also made significant strides in archaeological research and preservation. By amplifying their voices and highlighting their achievements, we can inspire future generations of scholars and foster a more inclusive and equitable field.
- ◇ These early female Egyptologists paved the way for subsequent generations of women to pursue careers in this field. Their unwavering dedication to scholarship, coupled with their innovative research methods, has left an enduring legacy on Egyptology. As we continue to explore the mysteries of ancient Egypt, it is essential to acknowledge the vital role that women have played in shaping our understanding of this fascinating civilization.

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