

COLNAGHI



Hippolyte Délié and Émile Béchard,
Panthéon

COLNAGHI

ANTONIO BEATO

(French, active, Cairo, Egypt, about 1870 - 1880)

PANTHÉON

Albumen print

19.5 x 25.5 cm; (7 1/2 x 10 in.)

Provenance

Private Collection, France.

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This albumen print presents an assemblage of ancient Egyptian statues and figurines representing various deities, including Sekhmet, Osiris, Bastet, and Bes, photographed in the galleries of the Boulaq Museum in Cairo. Carefully staged and systematically arranged, the image conveys both the diversity and refinement of Pharaonic sculpture, ranging from small cult figures to finely worked votive statuettes.

In 1871, the photographers Hippolyte Délié and Émile Béchard obtained special permission from the eminent Egyptologist Auguste Mariette to photograph the rooms and collections of the Boulaq Museum. Founded by Mariette in 1858 as the first national museum of Egyptian antiquities, the Boulaq Museum was the direct precursor of today's Egyptian Museum in Cairo and was closely linked to the newly established Service for the Conservation of Egyptian Antiquities, also under Mariette's direction. Recognizing the documentary and educational value of photography, Mariette actively supported the project, personally selecting the most significant objects and contributing the accompanying scholarly texts.

The resulting *Album of the Boulaq Museum*, published in 1872 and illustrated with forty photographic plates, stands among the earliest systematic photographic surveys of an archaeological museum collection. At a time when access to Egypt's ancient monuments and collections was limited to a small circle of scholars and travellers, the album played a crucial role in disseminating knowledge of Pharaonic art and religion beyond Egypt's borders, shaping European perceptions of ancient Egyptian civilization.

The collaboration between Délié and Béchard came to an end in 1873, after which each photographer pursued his career independently. Nevertheless, their joint work on the *Album of the Boulaq Museum* remains a landmark in the history of archaeological photography.

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