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Bonfils and the Early Photography of the Near East

Carney E. S. Gavin

I

IN 1970, when an explosion blew off the roof of the Harvard Semitic Museum into a midnight sky, more was revealed than the anger of those who were protesting alleged war projects of the Center for International Affairs, which then occupied the Museum's upper floors. The bomb's blast uncovered an utterly unexpected treasure-trove which promises to open new dimensions for research and education. When the damage was assessed, scores of dusty crates and crimson boxes were found stacked under the attic eaves, sprinkled with pieces of smashed skylight, and these contained some 28,000 photographic images — evidently the world's largest coherent collection of the early photo-documentation of the Levant — preserved in almost pristine condition because the seal of ninety years' oblivion had protected delicate emulsions from the effects of light and climatic change.

The significance of the discovery is becoming apparent only now, as Harvard Semitic Museum teams, with consultants provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, catalogue the pictures and investigate their stories. The original photographers ranged from intrepid travelers who made "snapshots" of journeys in regions remote even today, through commercial entrepreneurs experimenting both with chemical processes and with anticipated western curiosity about images of the exotic East, to Professor George Reisner, who meticulously compiled the first step-by-step photo-record of an expedition's progress at the 1908 HSM excavations at Samaria.

The subjects that were recorded illustrate every aspect of life in Ottoman times among rich and poor, in palace salons, village markets, and desert valleys, so that we may observe landscapes, monuments, and peoples now vastly changed or even vanished. The character of some early photographic techniques, notably the virtual grainlessness of

glass-plate negatives, permits enormous magnification of everything from minute architectural details in urban panoramas to intricate filigree ornament in costume studies. Despite their popularity in the Victorian period, when travelers customarily brought home tightly rolled packets of prints to paste into souvenir albums, early commercial photographs from the Near East have become rare simply because so many have been discarded in recent decades as "old-fashioned."

The early photographs of the Levant are especially valuable for research in many scientific disciplines because they provide the first truly accurate images of this region, in which there are deeply-rooted, indigenous traditions of aniconism. Jews, early Christians, and Moslems, basing their practice on a strict interpretation of the First Commandment, respectfully refrained from depicting those living things which only the Creator can call into being. The rare exceptions to this rule, when scrutinized, tend to demonstrate how generally representation was avoided by the otherwise artistically expressive peoples of this area.

It has been suggested that aniconism may be a characteristic of western Semitic culture antedating even biblical prohibitions. From antiquity — outside the region — we find pictures of Syro-Palestinian life on Assyrian reliefs, Egyptian murals, and the Arch of Titus. Apart from figurines associated with Canaanite fertility cults, most representational art found in the Holy Land reflects the influence of foreign cultures.

In our own day, traditional reservations against the impious presumption seen in image-making had to be addressed directly by King Ibn Saud at the time of the introduction of television into Saudi Arabia. Arguing before a specially convened college of scholars of Islamic law, the King pointed out that, apart from the usefulness of electronic media in disseminating the message of the *Qur'an*, cameramen — in contrast to other artists — are really not creating pictures but instead, through mechanical means, are recording the shadows cast by God's sunlight!

Throughout the Near East today, photography is mainly an ethnic profession. While brilliant young Arab and Israeli photographers are now hard at work, the old-established photo studios and camera supply houses are still Armenian. Even in Baghdad, the most venerable photographic firm, Rahman Al-Ahli studio, which has belonged to an

Arab family for three generations, traces its origin to an Armenian. The present proprietor's grandfather (at the time an Imperial Ottoman officer) was suddenly ordered to adopt a hobby when emulation of the spirit of European officers' corps was decreed by military regulations. Finding polo ponies beyond his means, Mr. Al-Ahli decided to take up photography, which he then proceeded to learn from a Mr. Diakon-ian who had been trained in Istanbul.

Most young Armenian photographers are unable to explain why their profession has been virtually an ethnic monopoly and can only point to their own inheritance of an old family business or their apprenticeship at an early age to a kinsman. An older photographer, the widely respected Mr. Mardik Berberian of Amman, whose father had been called from Damascus by the Emir Abdullah to make the first pictures at the Ragadan Palace, was able to offer intriguing reasons for his family's involvement in the profession in Asia Minor and Beirut as well as in Syria and Jordan. Sitting in the back-room of his shop, Mr. Berberian deplored the fact that the Harvard Semitic Museum's archival efforts were twenty years too late to save his family's enormous collections of glass-plate negatives which they had hired two gleeful boys to smash and discard in order to make space for the conversion of the studio into a camera and film store:

We loved those pictures, the work of all our family, but no one was interested then. Those who had sat for portraits had died; Amman was shown as a mere village in our pictures; all the places we had photographed have changed so much we couldn't imagine anyone ordering a new print from those old negatives.

Why are so many Armenians photographers? There are three reasons: Back in my grandfather's day when it all began, many of us were able to acquire technical training in Turkey; we are Christians and have no worries about making pictures; above all, in the time of persecutions we had to be able swiftly to begin life again "naked" in a new place. Skills cannot be robbed and we could always get new lenses and paper wherever we fled.

Recently Turkish records have revealed that even the Court Photographers of the Ottoman Sultans, Abdullah Frères, were Armenians who converted to Islam only after receiving their Imperial appointment.

The phenomenon of photography in the Near East itself deserves careful sociological study even beyond the human evidence communicated in the images. Many photographs made in the last century

— especially of village maidens or leaders of strict sects — today could be taken only with the greatest difficulty, if at all. In addition to the traditional religious prejudices, or conservative opposition to new-fangled contrivances, one often encounters a suspicion, unfortunately not totally unjustified, that photographers' work might be used abroad for espionage, political propaganda, or for some humiliating purpose.

Despite such delicate sensibilities, certain types of photography thrive. For example, street photographers, often Armenians, set up venerable equipment near most Saudi Arabian embassies; many of their customers, who pose for identification-card portraits in front of black cloths draped over stone walls or bushes, are workers seeking jobs in the oil fields.

Omnipresent portraits of rulers and religious leaders on posters in the streets, shops, and homes follow several strict if unwritten protocols: facial expressions and dress in such formal pictures usually indicate graphically the spirit of the regime or at least the public image desired. In official group-pictures, conventions determine the composition so that the heir apparent or the real power-behind-the-throne is placed always in a special relationship to the titular leader.

Even in engagement portraits provided by a bride's family for her fiancé, artificial coloring techniques are often deliberately applied to black-and-white photographs so as to produce pastel effects (similar to Hollywood "stills" of a generation ago) undoubtedly in the aesthetic tradition of the engagement portrait of the bride's mother, even when the bride herself is a very modern young woman.

Military officers sit for formal portraits in full uniform or battle dress — sometimes wearing totally dark sun-glasses which produce an unsettling impression of power, mystery, and machine-like resolve. Such images also recall, somewhat incongruously, earlier portraits of fully veiled women.

Similar conventions are to be found in Western photography, as has recently been exemplified by Barbara Norfleet's fine exhibit of wedding photographs at Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts; American political campaign posters might also be cited. In the Near East, however, the rigidity of such aesthetic protocols is particularly intriguing because the absence of local pre-photographic portrait traditions permits controlled analysis of trends and influences strictly within the medium of photography.

One tradition now gone dictated that portraits of women be taken

only by other women. As late as 1939 in Baghdad and 1942 in Amman, such was the custom in order to safeguard the privacy of family life. While most female photographers were Armenian Christian relatives of studio proprietors, it is worthy of note that, despite their traditionally sheltered existence, Near Eastern women (who in fact have always exerted enormous if publicly unrecognized influence) were regularly masters of a profession involving optical physics, chemical solutions, and artistic composition.

The earliest years of photography in the Near East require much further investigation, partly because the genesis of modern visual communication on an international scale can be traced to those camera pioneers whose lenses recorded images of storied scenes with an immediacy and verisimilitude inherently more accurate than the engravings of the day.

The composition and even the tonal qualities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century engraved views of the Orient greatly influenced the techniques of the first photographers. They would frame their images, add clouds for artistic effect, and pose figures for scale, all in obvious emulation of the skilful renderings by Western artists which, in turn, were based ultimately on sketches made by travelers. Such engravings or lithographs were joint efforts of as many as half a dozen specialists in some cases. Thus, the vision of the original voyager would often be "improved" by a painter, whose design would then be meticulously delineated by a draftsman to serve as a guide for craftsmen to copy on metal or stone, so that a printer could produce pictures for a publisher to distribute through a bookseller. The major participants in this process are frequently identified in tiny subscriptions beneath the final print (by designations such as *pinxit*, *del.*, *ed.*, *gravit.*, etc.). In striking contrast to such human chains, the early photographers of the Levant controlled the entire pictorial process from the moment of deciding on a subject to the selling of the final gold-toned albumen print.

Within months of the French government's gift to humanity of the invention of the Daguerreotype process through which images of light were registered on metal plates, daguerreotypes were being exposed in Egypt and the Levant. Under the direction of N. P. Lerebours, two volumes of the results of the *Excursions Daguerriennes* were published in 1842. At first glance the printed pictures look like traditional engravings, but in fact the clichés were made by cutting

directly into the lines of light captured on daguerreotype copper-plates exposed by travelers such as Frédéric Goupil Fesquet and July de Lotbinière.

After W. H. Fox Talbot patented the calotype process in 1841, books of actual photographs began to appear. Thus, Gustave Flaubert's 1849–1851 travels in Egypt, Nubia, Palestine, and Syria were illustrated through frontal views of monuments made by his companion, Maxime Du Camp, who listed on protective tissue-paper the precise metric dimensions of the details recorded in each calotype — presumably to corroborate the veracity of the new pictorial method. To confirm Félicien de Saulcy's historical theories, the painter August Salzmann spent six months in Jerusalem in 1854 to depict the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic aspects of the city's culture more convincingly through "the forceful face of photographs" than could be done through the tales told by drawings.

When Frederick Scott Archer announced the development of the wet collodion method in 1851, the photo-documentation of the Near East began in earnest. Finer in clarity of detail than calotypes and wider in ranges of tone than daguerreotypes, vast numbers of prints could easily be made by the new process — despite dangers of the explosive collodion's boiling in eastern heat, a peril eloquently described by Francis Frith, a Liverpool greengrocer, who made three photographic expeditions to Egypt and the Levant between 1855 and 1859. Traveling about in a wickerwork carriage, and locally dubbed "the one who writes pictures on his belly," Frith produced images that were enthusiastically received in Britain. He was able not only to found a picture-postcard factory in Reigate but to publish six volumes of views and a luxuriously illustrated *Queen's Bible* dedicated to Victoria — all as a result of the success of Near-Eastern plates, the quality of which, he lamented, he was never later able to equal.

Experimenters in the new collodion process ranged from scholars such as Louis de Clercq, who published five volumes of plates (from 222 negatives) in his *Voyage en Orient* (1859/60), and the Reverend Charles Forster, whose *Sinai Photographed* appeared in 1862, to a rapidly growing group of professional photographers who provided travelers with mementos of local sites.

At Luxor, the firm of Beato (which, after recording the Indian mutiny in 1857, had made the first photographs of China and Japan) produced such souvenirs for generations. More ephemeral companies

can be traced in contemporary tourist guidebooks, and hundreds of albumen prints have survived, attesting to the skills of Scbah "of Constantinople," Lekegian, "photographer to the British Army of Occupation" (in Egypt), and Zangaki, one of whose pyramid views includes his darkroom-carriage painted with advertisements. Besides investigating the work of mysterious professional photographers sometimes known only by name and vaguely estimated dates of activity, the Semitic Museum has begun to explore the archives of aristocratic families such as the Princes of Liechtenstein, the Counts Hoyos, and the Poches of Aleppo for unpublished photographs made in the course of Grand Tours with Ottoman military escorts. Fortunately, the Palestine Exploration Fund has just completed conservation procedures to preserve its small but remarkable collections, which date back to (then) Captain Charles Wilson's 1864 explorations with the assistance of Sergeant J. McDonald as his photographer.

II

Of all the early photographers of the Near East, few have remained as enigmatic until recently as one of the most prolific — Félix Bonfils, whose studies of *côtures divers* provide the earliest truly systematic depictions of regional dress.

In the Fall of 1975, while preparing for the exhibit "Visions of the Past — 1975: Archaeological Photography in The Semitic Museum," the exhibit staff asked America's most eminent historian of photography, Professor Beaumont Newhall, for whatever information he could share. Professor Newhall's reply, "The only thing we really know about Bonfils is that he was a genius," summarizes the situation at that time. Within a year, however, Professor Newhall's colleague at the University of New Mexico, Professor Van Deren Coke, was able to write that Bonfils had been born in 1829 at St. Hippolyte du Fort near Alais (now Alès) and that he had died in 1885 at Alais.¹

With the gracious and assiduous assistance of M. Alain Grenier, Consul General of France in Boston, who had served six years in Syria and was thus particularly appreciative of Bonfils' photographs of regions he had come to love, the Semitic Museum began to address

¹ *Nineteenth Century Photographs from the Collection* (Albuquerque: Art Museum, University of New Mexico, 1976).

numerous letters of enquiry to French cultural missions in the Levant and to archives throughout France. Many of the French records in Beirut had been stored inaccessibly in the castle at Byblos for protection against the perils of the civil war. Puzzlingly, but, as later appeared, rather typically, scholars and librarians had never previously heard of Bonfils or his work, but expressed genuine curiosity and every willingness to assist our research in whatever way they could. From the municipal records of Alès came information confirming Professor Coke's dates, with the additional information that *Paul Félix Bonfils* had died at 32 Rue St. Vincent.

A perplexing discrepancy in dates (not to be resolved until later) appeared in the report of the archives of the Department of Gard, which stated that Félix Bonfils had been born on 8 March 1831. Other biographical information from the regional archives stated that on 27 August 1857 at Crespian, Félix, son of Paul Bonfils and Sophie Bernard, had married Marie Cabanis, who had been born at Congenies on 21 March 1837. Their two children, Félicité-Sophie and Paul-Félix-Adrien, were born at St. Hippolyte du Fort in 1858 and 1861. Both were eventually married in Beirut, the daughter to Alphonse Matthieu on 23 January 1898 and the son to Marie Saalmüller on 1 June 1897.

On the occasion of the birth of his daughter in 1858, Bonfils had declared his occupation as *rélieur* (book-binder), while in the censuses of 1876 and 1881 he is described as a photographer working in Alès. Further, most intriguingly, the census of 1876 described Bonfils as employing two photographic technicians (*ouvriers*) of Turkish nationality. While the entire Levant formed part of the Ottoman empire, the term "Turkish" may refer to origins more specific than Imperial citizenship, especially since "Syrian" or "Lebanese" normally would have been used for people from Beirut. Could Armenian photographic assistants be meant? A clue may be found in a 1902 book of 32 views of Damascus attributed to Bonfils but edited by A. Guiragossian, who describes himself as "the successor to the widow Bonfils, Beirut." A distinguished painter of present-day Beirut has the same surname; he knows of no photographic ancestor, but is extending enquiries among his numerous kinsmen.

The invaluable evidence from the archives of Gard was accompanied by a comment from the Director, M. Robert Debant, observing that not only had Félix Bonfils never been the object of any investiga-

tions among these records but that the archives contained neither any published work by Bonfils nor even a letter — nor could an obituary be found in the regional press from the time of his death.

Correspondence from the Director of the Oriental Library of the University of St. Joseph in Beirut revealed that Bonfils' shop on the Rue Georges Picot (the scene, unfortunately, of particularly violent fighting during the recent civil war) was mentioned in the Baedeker Guides for Palestine and Syria in 1882, 1896, and 1898, and even as late as 1932 in the *Guide Bleu: Syria-Palestine*.

Then, in the collections of the Harvard Library, there was found a slim *Catalogue des vues photographiques de l'Orient, Égypte, Palestine (Terre sainte), Syrie, Grèce & Constantinople . . . Photographiées et éditées par Bonfils Félix [sic] (Alais: Imprimerie et Lithographie A. Brugueirolle et Compagnie, 1876)*, bound in green paper. This 24-page promotional brochure lists for sale 99 stereoscopic costume studies, 33 (18 x 24 cm.) costume study prints, and some 550 photographs of sites in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece available in stereoscope or as prints in three formats (30 x 40, 24 x 30, 18 x 24 cm.). The catalogue's arrangements and phrasing of titles reveal much about Bonfils' selective eye and imagination. The systematically ordered views of monuments are described in a straightforward fashion, while costume studies are given almost anecdotal titles: "A Dervish Visiting Jerusalem Before Going to Mecca," "The Wife of a Bedouin Sheik Grinding Wheat," "Women Gardeners Relaxing Near the Orange Trees of Jaffa."

Further searching brought to light, in the Boston Public Library, a book of 100 small photographs, *Souvenirs d'Orient. Album pittoresque des sites, villes et ruines les plus remarquables de l'Égypte et de la Nubie (de la Palestine, de la Syrie et de la Grèce) . . . Photographié et édité par Félix Bonfils (Alais: chez l'auteur, 1878)*. Set in type in Nîmes by the firm Baldy-Riffard, the text (in French, English, and German) briefly describes each city or historical site rather than each of the photographs, which are paired within typographical frames on 50 pages opposite the two columns of tri-lingual text. The foreword by G. Charvet indicates the audience for whom this book was intended, and suggests the role that photography was beginning to play:

The photographic collection of the Orient's principal sites initiated, executed and completed by M. F. Bonfils with a perseverance without equal, should be

considered as one of our epoch's most considerable, picturesque, artistic and scientific achievements.

The traveller and artist departing for this enchanted region; those who have come back from there; curious spirits and lovers of beautiful things will not be able to excuse themselves from perusing the marvellous series of plates which make up this remarkable publication. Those who for reasons of health, fortune or social position cannot undertake such long voyages can esteem themselves happy to be able to accomplish such without giving up their daily routines.

The Orient whose remains, superior in beauty to all the world's ruins, ceaselessly excite admiration, is revealed with its cortège of splendors. Grandiose conceptions of the pharaohs, places made famous by the prophets, Christ and his apostles; colossal structures of Baalbek, vast horizons of Palmyra; such is the immense field where the reproducer of so many marvels takes our vision. The sculptor, painter, sketcher, architect, archaeologist, historian, Christian — all will find here majestic inspirations and incomparable souvenirs. The philosopher and thinker will want to gather themselves before those ancient witnesses to past ages which tell history better than history itself and reveal to us so much of the mysteries about empires, religions and human races that have vanished.

Before these prestigious pictures, illusion is complete so that one believes himself to be actually in the presence of the subject, so well has the artist placed intelligence and taste at the services of his art. . . .

The author of this vast enterprise, beset by a thousand dangers and exhausting labors has certainly rendered to science a signal service by realising with so much perseverance and talent the work he set out to accomplish. Scholars and men of taste cannot extend to him too highly their encouragement and acknowledgement.

Nevertheless, the small (7.5 x 9 cm.), indifferently printed images of this work are disappointing in comparison to Bonfils' gold-toned albumen prints or even to other books published during the period, especially by Frith.

In fact, this small book with its pairs of tiny photographs represents the popular edition of an ambitious work of 191 large (28 x 23 cm.) albumen prints which survives in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, call numbers Ub 132 a, b, c, d), and was published in four volumes under the same title, *Souvenirs d'Orient*, at Alès in 1877 and 1878.

According to lists graciously supplied by M. Bernard Marbot, Curator of Photography in the Cabinet des Étampes, the Bibliothèque Nationale possesses 289 Bonfils prints, including those in both the large and small editions of *Souvenirs d'Orient*. By contrast, the Harvard Semitic Museum has more than 800 large albumen prints signed F. Bonfils.

The preface to a typical clergyman's travel book of the period, the Reverend Samuel Manning's *Those Holy Fields: Palestine Illustrated by Pen and Pencil* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1874), explains that many of the book's engravings "are from drawings made on the spot, but a greater number are from photographs. Those of Messrs. Borgheim and Nicodemus of Jerusalem, and *Madame Bonfils of Beyrout*, have been largely used for this purpose. . . ."

In correspondence dating from 1892 in the Semitic Museum files, a London dealer writes, "I hear from Bonfils that he has made an addition of 150 views to his Egyptian series — shall send these to you when I receive them." This, like a solitary print signed "A. Bonfils" in a New Hampshire private collection, indicates a mysterious continuity of production after Félix's death in 1885.

Thus, on the eve of a Fall 1977 research trip sponsored by the National Museum Act primarily to return artifacts to the Iraq Museum and to coordinate future collaboration with various Directorates-General of Antiquities, the results of the Harvard Semitic Museum's research on Bonfils could be summarized succinctly: contradictory dates and tantalizing evidence of photographic productions more extensive than could possibly have been executed by Félix Bonfils himself.

III

The forested ridges of the Cévennes enclose the long narrow valleys of the river Gardon, where stern yet warm-hearted people proudly cherish heroic Protestant traditions and a *charcuterie* said to go back to Roman times. The letters "OC" are attached to the region's automobiles almost as frequently as "F" as international identity shields. Occitanian lives as a language, not only on the lips of mountain villagers but in books and the journal *Pays Cévenol* from the press of M. François Compan. He had never heard of Félix Bonfils and indeed had lived more than four score years in the firm conviction that his father's 1902 panoramas of Alès were the earliest photographic works from the area. His 140-year-old publishing house, Compan-Brabo et Compagnie, had been closely linked with the Brugueirolle family's firm (now operating a Xeroxing store), so M. Compan expressed utter astonishment, as much at the 1876 catalogue as at the quality of Bonfils' photographs. Such mingled surprise and admiration was also ex-

pressed by the Mayor, the librarians, the municipal archivists, and the Museum Director of Alès — not one of whom had ever heard of Bonfils.

Even the extensive annual *Comptes-Rendus* of the Société Scientifique et Littéraire d'Alais, founded in 1869 "to promote the expansion of useful knowledge," never listed Bonfils among the Society's 30 resident members or any report from him or about his work, despite the organization's declared intention to "receive and discuss, only with the exception of political and religious questions, all communications submitted." The absence of any mention of their townsman's expeditions and productions is particularly puzzling since the author of the laudatory introduction to *Souvenirs d'Orient*, M. Gratien Charvet, served as President of the Society in 1873. The esteem in which M. Charvet had been held by the Society is reflected in a lengthy poem addressed to him the next year praising his "profound studies of the traces of the past." The members of the Society, mostly physicians, lawyers, civil engineers, and teachers, with an occasional industrialist or aristocrat, frequently directed their attention not only to antiquity but to the Levant. Thus, in addition to a former judge's paper entitled "Considérations Générales sur la Nation Phénicienne," an attorney's long poem, "Une Orientale," praises round shoulders, eyes ornamented with *kohl*, and lips with *benna*, in evocation of an ideal depicted in a contemporary painting of an odalisque now displayed in the Municipal Museum. Intriguingly, M. de Montredon's poem includes lines that might have been suggested by one of Bonfils' photographs [Plate XV]:

Cependant que vous fumeriez
Le blond tabac des cigarettes,
Cependant, belle que vous êtes,
Qu'à vous-mêmes vous souririez . . .²

Beneath an enormous chained oar in the Musée du Désert near Anduze, the shrine to those Huguenots who had chosen "The Wilderness" of the Cévennes rather than exile, a marble plaque lists Protestants condemned to servitude in the King's galleys; it includes two men named Bonfils who were sentenced at Montpellier in the mid-eighteenth-century. While the regional telephone book (1977) con-

² Société Scientifique et Littéraire d'Alais, *Mémoires & Comptes-Rendus*, XVII (1885), 48.

tained eleven listings of the name, the sole Bonfils in Alès had in fact come from a pastor's family of Nîmes. He is M. Maurice Bonfils, now Secretary-General of the local subprefecture, who knew nothing of an ancestor who could have been a photographer.

Along the somber avenues of the Alès cemetery, not a single monument of a Bonfils could be found. While the cemetery's helpful guardian searched in vain among burial records from 1885 for any reference to the name, he pointed out that a century ago there still flourished a local Protestant tradition dating from the days when Huguenots were denied tombs in churchyards: the custom of burying a person in a corner of his family's ancestral fields and marking the simple grave by planting above it a solitary cypress tree.

Above the deep, winding bed of the river Vidourle, the small town of St. Hippolyte du Fort nestles around several fountained squares, cool beneath thick canopies of spreading leaves. The Mairie's records there helped to clarify the discrepancy in dates between the records of Alès and the Department of Gard: Two boys given almost identical names had been born in the town only eight months apart to fathers both of whom exercised the same profession of "*tournier*" — possibly best understood as carpenter-joiner rather than exclusively a lathe-worker.

At 9:00 a.m. on 30 August 1830, the 25-year-old Auguste Bonfils reported that on the day before, at 10:00 a.m., his wife Jeanne Faisse had given birth to Paul Auguste Bonfils. Perhaps through an early-morning slip of the clerk's pen or maybe in accordance with a somewhat confusing custom of prefixing spasmodically to a man's given name that of his father, entry number 114 of the birth records of 1830 goes on to record that the mother was "married to the aforementioned Paul Auguste Bonfils."

On 8 March 1831, at 4:00 p.m., 27-year-old David [sic] Bonfils reported that his wife Sophie Bernard had delivered their son Paul Félix Bonfils two days before at 8:00 a.m., on 6 March at their home in the Rue Blanquerie, a narrow street adjacent to the Town Hall, virtually unchanged nearly 150 years later, except for the neon sign of the horsemeat dealer.

Today no one in St. Hippolyte knows of the Bonfils family — even in the tiny Protestant library, which has assiduously gathered biographies of the region's sons. In the lonely graveyard, the sixth tombstone to the right of the entrance, against the wall which faces the

Gendarmerie barracks, attests to the final resting place of Jeanne Faisse Bonfils.

Back in Alès, the death certificate in the *État Civil* of the Town Hall describes a simple mid-afternoon scene on 9 April 1885, when a 65-year-old property owner and a 32-year-old butcher came before the Adjunct-Mayor to report the death that day at 10:00 a.m. of their friend Paul Félix Bonfils, a photographer married to Marie Lydie Cabanis. Since they declared him to have been 56 years old, it is evident that Bonfils' friends had not known his true age. Behind the stately façade of 32 Rue St. Vincent there are now physicians' offices. While thorough searching of attics and cellars might possibly yield relics of Bonfils' photographic activities, the building has been so smartly refurbished during the past two decades (just as much of the late medieval city has been torn down for modern workers' apartments) that M. Marc Boudreuil, Director of the elegant small Musée du Colombier, thinks there is little hope for such survivals.

M. Boudreuil, who himself continues investigations of the pre-historic settlements of the Languedoc (as enthusiastically as M. Charvet did a century ago, but much more systematically), became so intrigued with the mysterious lack of local information about Bonfils that he wrote a provocative article in the regional journal *Midi Libre* (Saturday, 11 March 1978) to solicit evidence.

Entitled: "The Rimbaud of Photography: An Authentic Cévenol of the 1860s," the article reports on the Harvard Semitic Museum's investigations and comments upon the astonishing absence of evidence for any local activities of Bonfils other than a single photo-portrait of a stiffly-posed, mustachioed gentleman who stands with an elbow propped on a panelled podium. This photograph is in a rather large *carte de visite* format; the back is elaborately printed with a medal labelled Paris 1871 and the words:

Maison Oriental
Spécialité
Vues Photographiques
F. Bonfils
Beyrouth
(Syrie)
Alais (Gard) Rue St. Vincent 32

The statement, "All negatives are kept on file," follows a blank space for a registry number — not recorded in this case. On the obverse,

beneath the portrait, are the words: "Bonfils, Phot. Alais & Beyrouth." Undated, but for technical reasons attributable to the 1880s, the photograph reflects none of the aesthetic verve or sensitivity to human character to be found in Bonfils' Levantine portraits.

In Paris, M. Bernard Marbot at the Bibliothèque Nationale and M. André Jammes, an antiquarian book dealer who has single-handedly rescued much of France's early photographic heritage, warmly encouraged the Harvard Semitic Museum's research yet could add no new information on the enigmatic Bonfils; both were glad, however, to incorporate into their own files the evidence pieced together in the South of France.

M. Gérard Lévy's elegant antique shop on the Rue de Beaune in Paris displays Far Eastern *objets d'art* so dramatically that, on entering, one hesitates, amid Taoist paintings, gilded seated Buddhas, and Samurai weapons, to wonder if the report is true that here also has been assembled the most significant private collection of early photographs of the Holy Land. In fact, M. Lévy, who made his fortune by collecting *Art Nouveau* artifacts when they were ignored, commands considerable expertise in a wide variety of cultural fields. After extensive studies in Near Eastern Archaeology under M. André Parrot, M. Lévy had concentrated on Japanese art — which as a young man he could not afford but which directed his taste to the forms of *Art Nouveau*. Born in Morocco, M. Lévy had inherited British citizenship from his great-grandfather, who had been Chief Rabbi of Gibraltar until a son moved to Tunis to serve as banker to the Bey. The family lost their position at the arrival of the French, but M. Lévy's wise and kindly father had done much to restore their prosperity.

When asked about Bonfils, M. Lévy put all his notes and images at the disposal of the Semitic Museum's research, and promised to come to assist further investigations in Cambridge. From among his collections, which include perhaps the earliest calotype panorama of Jerusalem (ca. 1851) and the only complete collection of de Clercq's photographs outside the Bibliothèque Nationale, M. Lévy produced a large Bonfils view of the Western Wall of Jerusalem, showing in the foreground a hearty, bearded figure standing incongruously there, arms akimbo, in jodhpurs and open shirt, his features shaded by a broad-brimmed hat. Suggesting that this might be a self-portrait by Bonfils, M. Lévy then went into his files, which are meticulously kept in a private code. Here are recorded remarkable discoveries, includ-

ing references to photographs made in 1854 during youthful travels in Egypt by Bartholdi, the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty, and calotypes by E. Bencke of Lebanon, in 1852, and of Egypt and Sinai, dated 1852 and 1853. Besides noting photographs signed "A. Bonfils," M. Lévy's research uncovered a rare book by Bonfils, evidently his earliest publication: *Architecture antique: Égypte, Grèce, Asie Mineure. Album de photographies*, par Bonfils, photographe à Beyrouth, Syrie (Paris: Librairie Générale de l'Architecture et des Travaux Publics, Ducher et Cie., le Rue Sorbonne, 1872).

M. Lévy and Professor Yeshayahu Nir of the Communications Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (the author of a history of Holy Land photography that will be ready for publication during 1979) hold differing opinions regarding the social status of the people depicted in Bonfils' photographs. M. Lévy's opinion, that most Bonfils subjects were in fact paid models gathered from the lower classes of society and fitted out in various regional costumes, stems partly from his own childhood recollections of Moroccans' aversion to having their images "taken."

Professor Nir contends that some Bonfils studies of Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem seem to show blind men who may not have known they were being photographed. Even though Harvard Semitic Museum pictures show these same "blind" Jerusalemites seeming to read from scrolls, such opinions must be seriously considered.

In support of M. Lévy's position, it is possible that the veils of many female subjects could well conceal the same figures. Nevertheless, careful scrutiny of Bonfils' repertoire has yielded only two indubitable cases of the same model posed to illustrate two distinct regional types — even though some studio "props" constantly reappear. Arab scholars consulted on this point have not so far challenged the basic authenticity of Bonfils' models even when they wonder at his ability to have persuaded some to pose. Clearly there is a need for further inquiry among social historians and students of the various religious and ethnic traditions recorded in those pictures.

On the advice of M. Lévy, the archives of the Société Française de Photographie, which contain two 1871 prints by F. Bonfils as well as the smaller edition of *Souvenirs d'Orient*, were consulted. Through the graciousness of the Society's Librarian, Mme. Christianne Rogers, invaluable documentation was found about Bonfils' intentions, methods, productivity, and travels — in his own words!

According to the minutes of the meeting of 1 September 1871, the President communicated to the Society a letter received from M. Bonfils of Beyrouth:

I am going to submit to the Société Française de Photographie a collection of prints of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Greece.

In making these proofs, heat has presented the greatest difficulty to overcome. I have worked with "*un collodion humide, un bain d'argent à la 10 pour 100 très-acide, révélateur au fer réinforcé à la acide pyrogallique.*" I would make use of two tents in preparing my negatives.

My proofs are principally pictures of Jerusalem and various panoramas. The collection I have put together consists of 15,000 prints and 9,000 stereoscopic views.

My negatives number 591 and were obtained for the most part with a Dallmeyer *Triplet de demi-plaque*.

I'm putting these negatives at the disposal of persons who would like to know about them and could complete upon my return to Beyrouth any assignments asked of me.

In addition to providing amazing statistics about his productivity, Bonfils' letter quite clearly indicates that he was in France at the time, although the Society's minutes do not unequivocally verify his presence at their meeting.

IV

Throughout the Near East itself, only two scholars among the scores who were consulted knew immediately of Bonfils' work: Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director-General of Antiquities of Jordan, had made use of a Bonfils panorama of the Roman forum of Philadelphia, which was miraculously well preserved in 1871, but is now engulfed by Amman's business district. Mr. Chawfiq Imam, Curator of the exquisite Al-Azm Palace in Damascus, had laboriously assembled views of his beloved city made by both F. and A. Bonfils; he had been unable, however, to uncover any biographical information, even though he had established relative chronological order for their panoramas by careful study of internal evidence of building activities.

Other scholars and officials throughout the region expressed keen interest in the study prints which had been brought to exemplify Bonfils' work. Iraqi authorities requested copies to consider for murals in a new Museum of Ethnology. Jordanian specialists requested prints to guide restoration of the Roman city of Jerash, from which farmers

had removed innumerable ancient stone blocks to build structures elsewhere or to burn to produce lime for their fields during the eleven decades since Bonfils' visit. When the Jordanian government later sent the Assistant Director-General to examine the Harvard Semitic Museum's early photographs of Petra for guidance in conserving decomposing façades, Mr. Yussuf Alami was greatly impressed with Bonfils' repertoire. His report inspired requests for reproductions for various non-scientific uses, including a cover article for *Jordan* magazine and an early view of Bethlehem to adorn the King's Christmas card.

Although little could be discovered about Bonfils' travels in their territories, Jordanian officials proved extremely helpful in other research. Indeed, through the energetic staff of His Excellency Adnan Abu Odch, the Minister of Information, negatives made by Abu Yakub Diran[ian] of Ma'an, a companion of T. E. Lawrence and Prince Faisal, were traced to preserve their irreplaceable documentation of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman armies.

In Syria, Dr. Afif Bahnassi, Director-General of Antiquities, and Dr. Haratani, who heads the National Museum of Aleppo, directed our attention to established photographic firms. The proprietor of Aleppo's Studio Ahram, Norbar Shahanian, was able to describe his own work since 1939 and the collections he had entrusted to the Aleppo Museum. His firm's negatives included work done by his father, his uncle, and two other Armenian predecessors: Vartan Derunian (who had flourished from 1924 to 1938) and an earlier establishment, Foto Misirlian, at work from 1910. In Damascus, Georges Drzi revealed horrifying pictures made at great peril in wars in nearby lands and equally horrifying scars which such photographs had cost him.

A presentation of Semitic Museum research was given at the American Cultural Center in Damascus to officials and members of the University faculties. Entitled "Windows To The Past: Discoveries and Puzzles in The Early Photography of Syria," the illustrated lecture elicited great interest from the Ministry of Culture's Ethnographic Survey, which is attempting to record regional customs through photographic documentation. This contemporary project is not dissimilar to Bonfils' efforts a century ago. Restoration experts at work on several stately Ottoman period palaces were eager to obtain copies of studies made by Bonfils of interiors which have been dras-

tically altered since his time. In response to an invitation to open the 1978 International Arab Historical Conference on the *Bilad Al-Sham* (the regions around Damascus) the Harvard Semitic Museum has prepared a television program for the conference sponsors, the Universities of Damascus and Jordan. Entitled *Petra, Jerash, and Damascus: An Album of XIXth Century Photographs*, the videotape draws heavily upon the images made by Félix Bonfils. Their cultural significance is described by His Excellency Dr. Sabah Kabbani, Ambassador of Syria to the United States, himself the first Syrian photographer to have systematically recorded in color the life of his countrymen.

In spite of such great interest in Bonfils' work, no further information seemed likely to emerge until the unofficial historian of the city of Damascus, the prodigiously learned artist, writer, and student of regional costume, Mr. Khaled Mo'az, paused to reflect about an article he had read years before in Arabic but printed in a foreign journal. Sorting through bursting but well-ordered files, Mr. Mo'az finally found a folder with a clipping from the Beirut magazine *al-Ushū' al-'Arabī* (*Arab Week*), No. 708, 1 January 1973, entitled "A French Soldier Comes to the Lebanon as a Warrior and Makes It His Home . . ." Written charmingly by Marwan Najjar, the article tells the story of the Bonfils family mainly through anecdotes recounted by Félix's grandson, Roger Bonfils, on a visit to Beirut, his childhood home.

By paraphrasing Mr. Najjar's article, we can now trace the main chapters in the Bonfils odyssey:

In 1860 with the French expeditionary corps sent to protect the Christian minority of the Lebanon during their bloody civil war with the Druzes, came a young soldier, Félix Bonfils, 29 years old, whose wife Lydie had borne him a son named Adrien, the father of Roger Bonfils.

After Félix's return to France, his wife was so moved by his stories of the beauty of the Lebanon that she began to dream of going there. When little Adrien became ill with chronic coughing and a physician recommended a sea voyage to a warm, dry climate, Lydie took her son to Marscille, where she boarded a ship for Beirut. Lydie took such delight in the city that on her own return she too could not stop talking about the Lebanon.

Félix owned a printing shop where he produced images through the heliographic processes just developed by Abel Niepce, nephew of Joseph Nicéphore Niepce, the "Father of Photography."

As time went on, Lydie's longing for the Lebanon gradually became an

overwhelming passion. Finally pulling herself together, she looked into Félix's eyes and pleaded "Why don't we go to the Lebanon and work there?" Her husband was stunned and skeptical. It was his own dearest wish—but what could a foreigner do in a land under Ottoman dominion?—Lydie's answer: "Photography!"

So Félix went to Abel Niepce to study possibilities, discuss opportunities, and prepare for technical challenges. In 1867, seven years after his first visit, Félix Bonfils' small family—husband, wife, and two children—moved to Beirut.

Mr. Najjar eloquently describes the remarkable spectacle of the family's caravan hauling fragile but cumbersome equipment along the bumpy tracks over mountains and through steppes, as well as the curiosity felt by Bonfils' subjects and reflected so clearly in their eyes as captured in his photographs.

In addition to traveling through the villages of Lebanon and Syria, Bonfils visited Palestine, opened branches in Alexandria and Cairo, and even began correspondence with an agent in New York.

His pictures began to reveal the life of the people of the Near East to his compatriots at home and, in the case of the Holy Land, he brought to them images of places they had dreamed of and visited only in their imaginations. He also recorded the classical sites of Greece and its islands.

Seven years old at the time of the family's arrival in Beirut, Adrien attended an Arabic school in Beirut where he acquired perfect command of the language. His studies were continued in France, but, at seventeen, he returned to Beirut to help his father. Soon Adrien assumed all the responsibilities involved in making photographs while his father attended to the promotional and fiscal aspects of the business.

Deeply religious, Adrien set out to illustrate the *Bible*—especially the story of St. Paul, whom he greatly admired. His biblical scenes enjoyed wide popularity in the United States.

After Felix's death in 1885, Adrien followed his father's profession for another decade, but all good things must come to an end. As British and American photographic companies began to establish agencies in Lebanon, and as every traveler arrived possessing a camera with which he could choose for himself pictures to bring home, Adrien sensed that he was no longer able to render a special service to the world.

On a plot of land acquired in the delightful village Broummana, Adrien built the hotel known today as the Park Hotel. Early success was cut short by Turkey's declaration of war against France in December 1914. Arrested, Adrien was imprisoned, first in Damascus, later in Aleppo, and still later on the frontier between Syria and Turkey. After the war's end, Adrien returned to Lebanon, but, for reasons of failing health, sold his hotel to return to France, where he died in Nice in 1929.

Adrien's son, Roger, follows his father's second profession as proprietor of

two hotels: The Queen's Hotel at Vichy and the Hotel Thermal in Royat. Even though he had left Beirut before the First World War, Roger Bonfils still speaks Arabic easily without any trace of a foreign accent.

Mr. Najjar's article refers to the research of Mr. Ritchie Thomas, Librarian of the American University of Beirut, who, after finding 1,300 photographs by Félix and Adrien Bonfils, placed notices in newspapers which eventually reminded an English engineer of having seen the unusual family name and fascinating old pictures in one of M. Roger Bonfils' hotels. Semitic Museum attempts to trace Mr. Thomas proved futile — until Mr. Thomas himself telephoned the Museum in January 1978. Now librarian at Wright State University in Dayton, he had just read a newspaper article from two years before about the discovery of the Semitic Museum's photographic collections,³ and was calling to offer his assistance and the results of exhaustive investigation into the early commercial photographers of the Near East. Through Mr. Thomas, the Semitic Museum has been able to reach M. Roger Bonfils, who has kindly consented to review the present article for consistency with family lore and to search for his father's masterpiece: Adrien's hand-colored series of the travels of St. Paul.

Mr. Thomas also was able to prove that when the Bonfils family came to Beirut, another French photographer, Tancred Dumas, had been at work there from ca. 1860. M. Dumas died in 1905, about 75 years old, and his negatives were later washed clean and used as panes for a greenhouse.

Despite investigations on four continents and enquiries addressed to hundreds of persons, the biographical data assembled to illuminate the achievements of the House of Bonfils, could be summarized all too briefly:

Félix Bonfils (1831-1885): Photographs of the Levant: 1867 — ca. 1877

Adrien Bonfils (1860-1929): Photographs of the Levant: 1877 — ca. 1895

We have chosen, however, to share the story of our investigations because we wish to alert librarians everywhere to the significance of even tiny bits of evidence as the Harvard Semitic Museum begins a National Endowment for the Humanities research project to assemble,

³ Keith J. Henderson, "The Mideast Captured in 19th Century Photographs," *Christian Science Monitor*, Friday, 30 July 1976.

around the core of the HSM collections, a *Comprehensive Archive of the XIXth Century Photography of the Near East* to preserve virtually untapped sources of invaluable documentation and to make them available for use by scholars in many fields.

Since Holy Land photographs traveled throughout the world, the United Nations Commission on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries has begun to assist the Semitic Museum in its quests — particularly since the search for early Near Eastern pictures can stimulate scholars to consider the preservation and educational usefulness of the photographic heritage of every land.

In collaboration with the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, a traveling exhibition of Bonfils photographs is now being planned to be shown first at Harvard and Rochester, and eventually in Alès, Beirut, and Damascus — in the footsteps of the almost forgotten pioneers themselves.

AN ALBUM OF BONFILS PHOTOGRAPHS

Notes on the Plates

(The original gold-toned albumen prints are all approximately 22 × 28 cm. in format.)

PLATE I

JERUSALEM: A SMALL STREET LEADING TO HEROD'S PALACE
(HSM 349, Bonfils 259)

This photograph is listed in the 1876 catalogue and is assigned numbers 102, 162, 95 according to print format. One can presume the image was exposed before 1871 and was included in the tally Félix Bonfils presented to the Société Française de Photographie.

Although the lighting of this scene ranges from darkest shadow to dazzling sunshine, the texture of each stone is preserved because of albumen paper's capacity to hold detail in spite of conditions of contrast too bold for most of today's materials. Four figures have been positioned at different points along the street to give scale to the perspective.

PLATE II

JERUSALEM: STREET OF THE JAFFA GATE
(HSM 77-102-036, Bonfils 1038)

PLATE III

JERUSALEM: INTERIOR OF THE JAFFA GATE
(HSM 802, Bonfils 845)

Precise dates for these photographs, not mentioned in the 1876 catalogue, are still being established through analyses of public lighting fixtures, architectural history, and advertisements — of which the most intriguing is the sign (in Plate II):

F. NICODEME
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BONFILS
CURIOSITIES OF THE EAST
OTHER ARTICLES FOR THE USE
OF TRAVELLERS

The name Nicodemus has been associated with Jerusalem photographs since the 1870s, and the 1894 Baedeker reference to the firm's address in Christian Street has suggested to Mr. Thomas that perhaps it had absorbed the older photographic houses of Shapira and Berghcim, which had been located there.

The viewpoints of the two photographs complement one another: Plate II was probably taken from some spot above the resting sweeper in Plate III — either from the roof of the building he leans against or from the balcony next door. Plate III seems to have been taken from the balcony visible in Plate II immediately above and to the right of the sign of the shopkeeper Nicodeme (who may not be connected with the photographer Nicodemus).

At the Jaffa Gate, the walls of Jerusalem were demolished by order of the Sultan to permit the Kaiser's 1901 state entry. A series of Bonfils exteriors of the walls at this point are being studied to locate the exact spot by comparison with the stonework today.

Such photographs can serve almost as "time machines." Bedouin encampments can be glimpsed over the battlements. Cooks' offers "reading rooms" as well as tickets, while the Jordan Hotel at Jericho promises "baths hot and cold" as well as "wines and mineral waters." Western umbrellas, embroidered veils, turbans, tarbooshes, knitted skull-caps, kuffiyehs, bowlers, and even a straw "boater" shield the pedestrians against the sun.

PLATE IV

BAALBEK: THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER
BEFORE (THE ERECTION OF) THE PILLAR
(HSM 532, Bonfils 445 — Note: "Bonfils 182" is inscribed on the doorjamb)

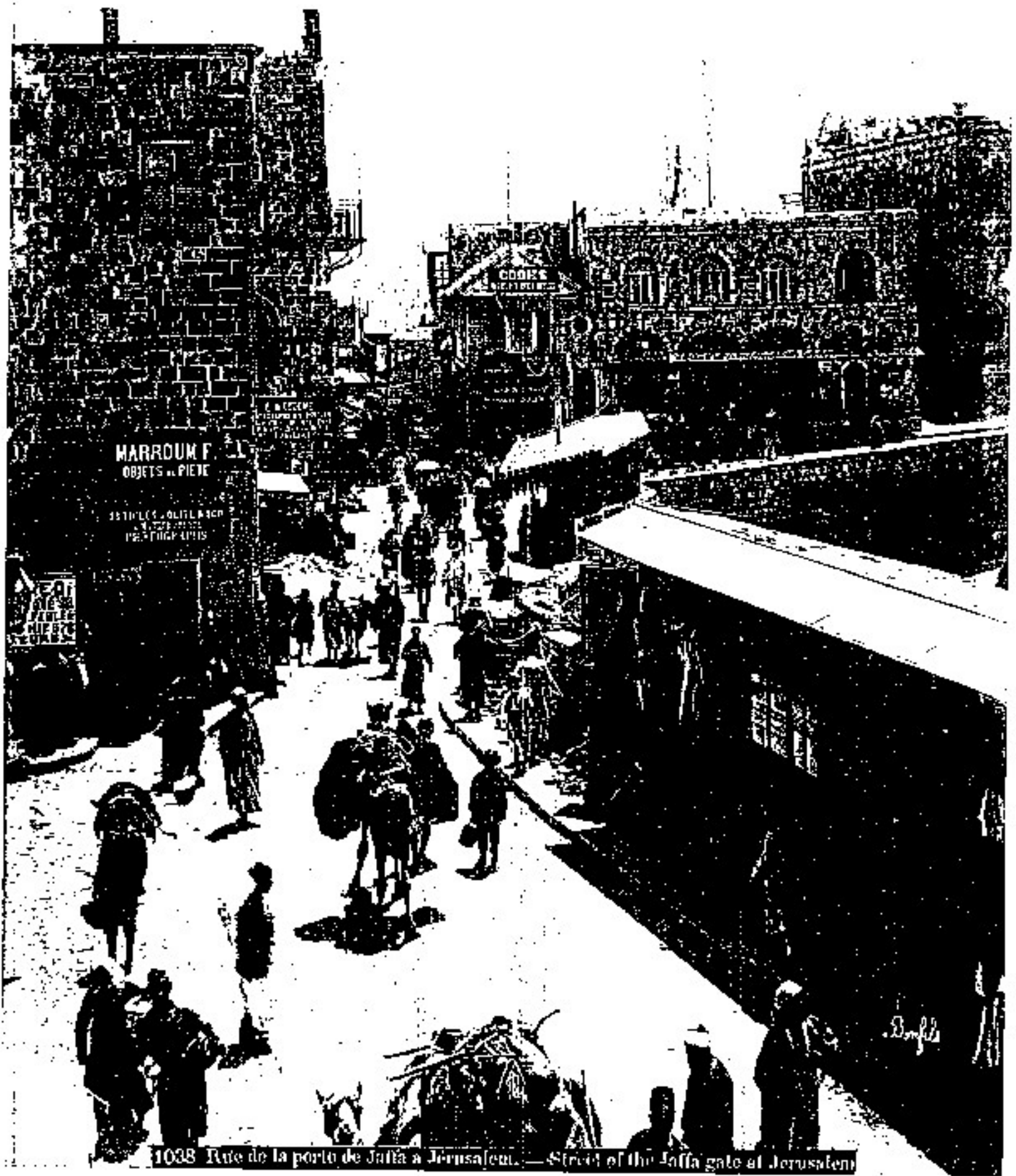
PLATE V

BAALBEK: THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER
(HSM 530, Bonfils 443)

The dramatic composition of Plate IV reveals on the bottom of the lintel's slipped keystone an image lost to view by the installation of Plate V's supporting



PLATE I. JERUSALEM: A SMALL STREET LEADING TO HEROD'S PALACE



1038 Rue de la porte de Jaffa à Jérusalem. — Street of the Jaffa gate at Jerusalem

PLATE II. JERUSALEM: STREET OF THE JAFFA GATE



PLATE III. JERUSALEM: INTERIOR OF THE JAFFA GATE



PLATE IV. BAALBEK: THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER
BEFORE (THE ERECTION OF) THE PILLAR



PLATE V. BAALBEK: THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER

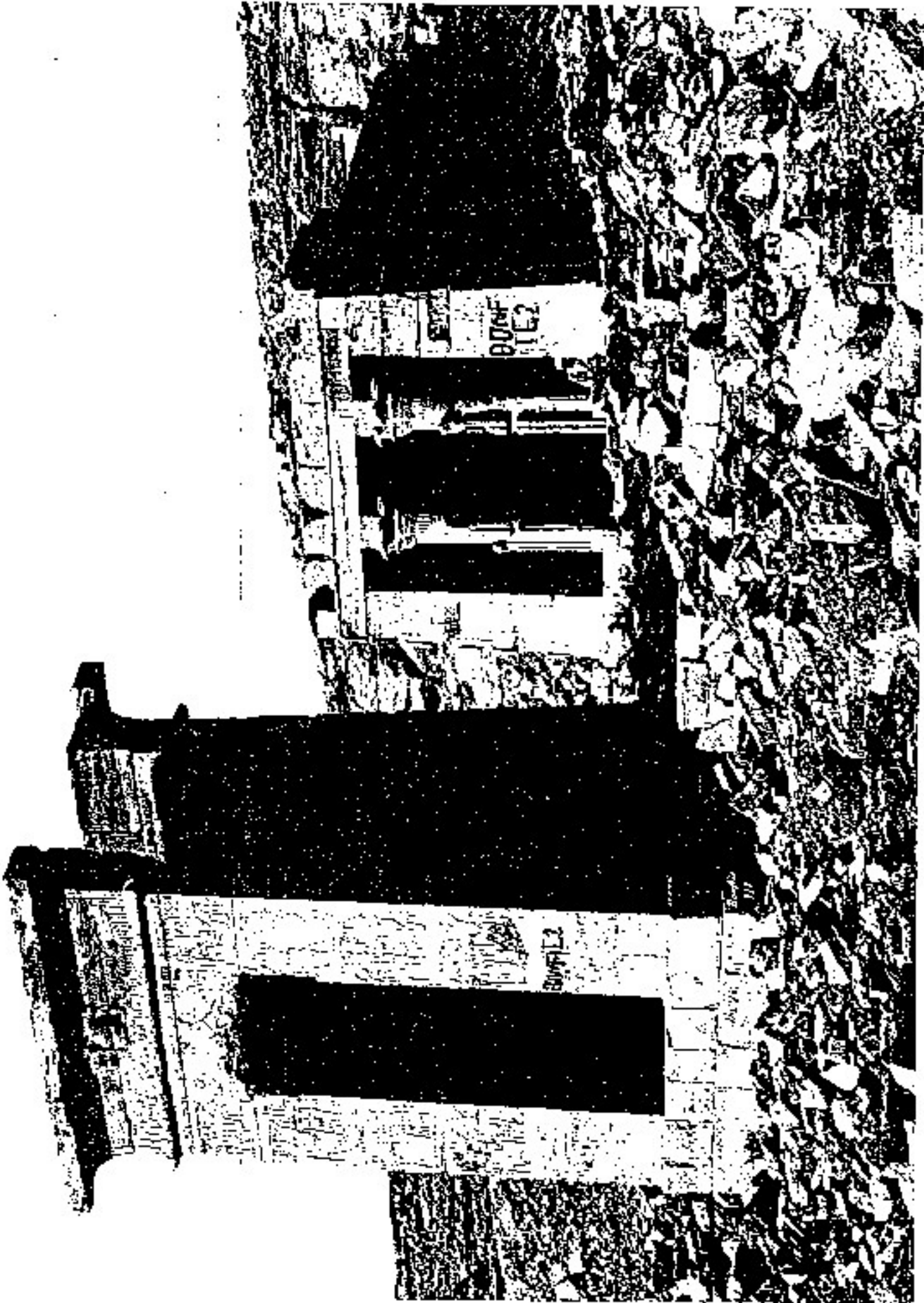


PLATE VI. UNTITLED (SMALL TEMPLE AND GATEWAY AT DENDERA IN EGYPT)



PLATE VII. GROUP OF BEDOUIN WOMEN RESTING



PLATE VIII. GROUP OF SYRIAN BEDOUIN WOMEN



656. Peasants from Mt. Carmel preparing for a meal

PLATE IX. DRUZE PEASANTS FROM MT. CARMEL AT MEALTIME

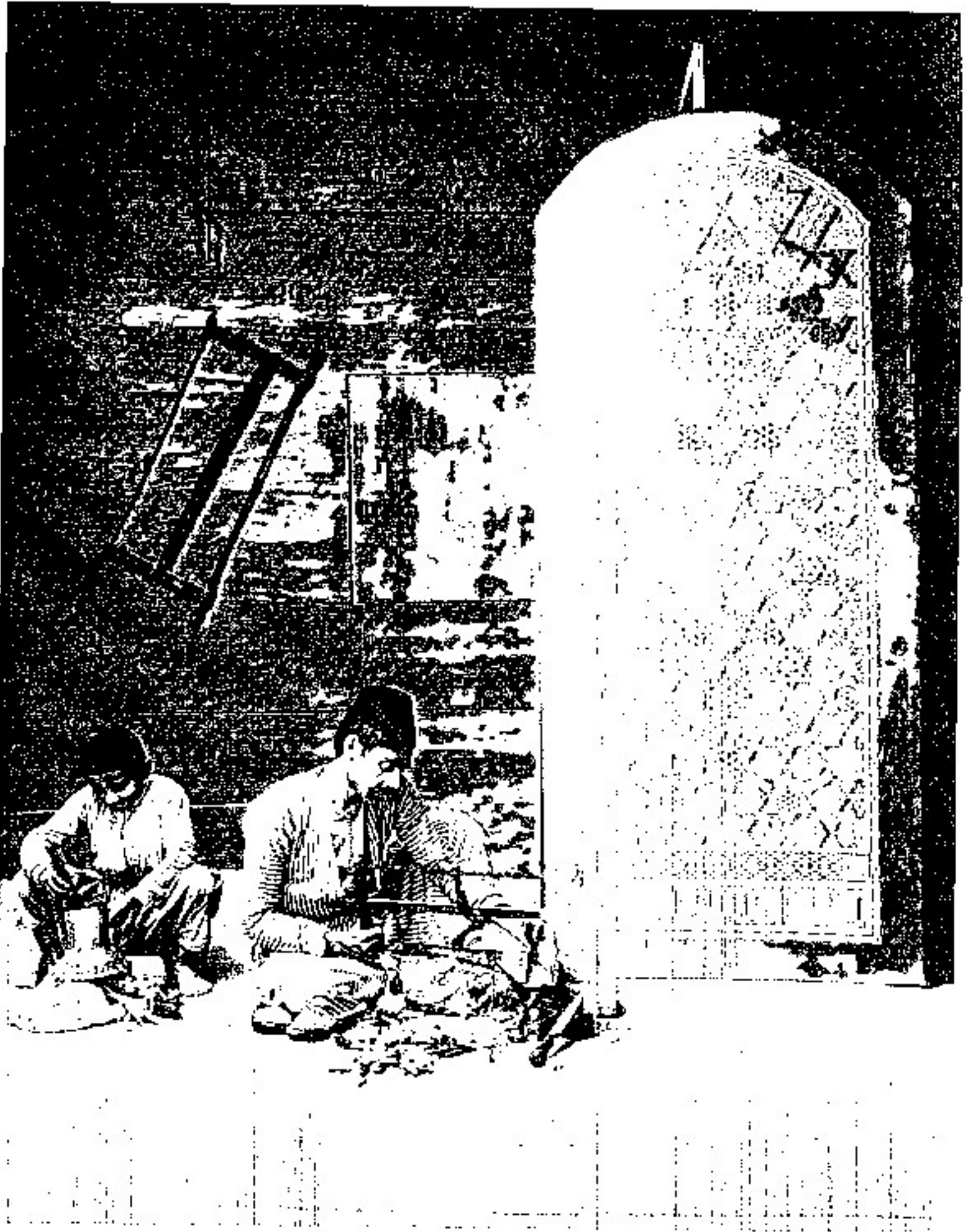


PLATE X. DAMASCUS: MAKING MOSAIC-WORK

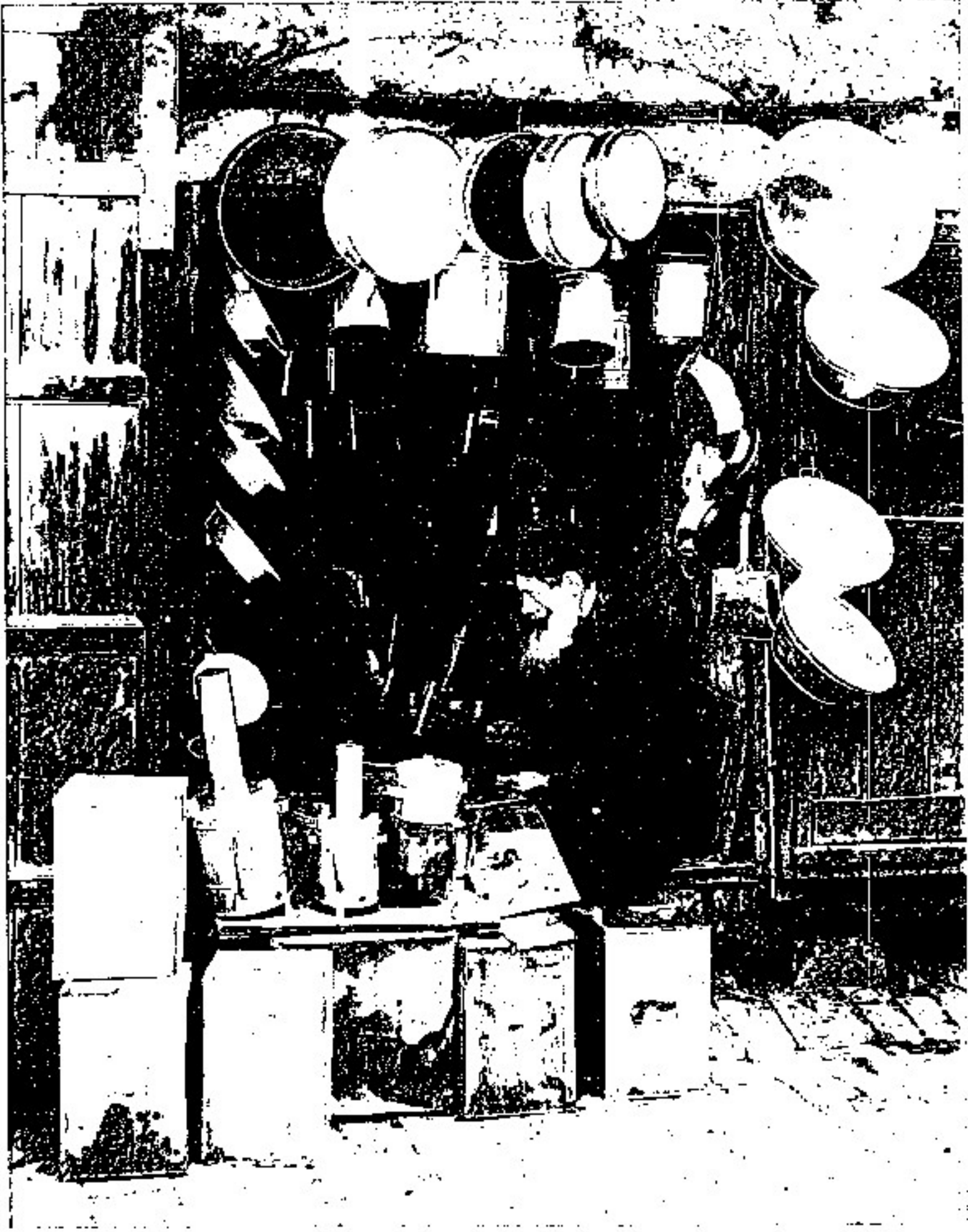


PLATE XI. JERUSALEM: JEWISH TINSMITH



635. Jeune femme de Bethléhem

Benfite

PLATE XII, YOUNG WOMAN OF BETHLEHEM



PLATE XIII. DRAGOMAN — TRAVELER'S GUIDE



PLATE XIV. MARONITE BISHOP OF MOUNT LEBANON



PLATE XV. UNTITLED (YOUNG WOMAN WITH FAN AND CIGARETTE)

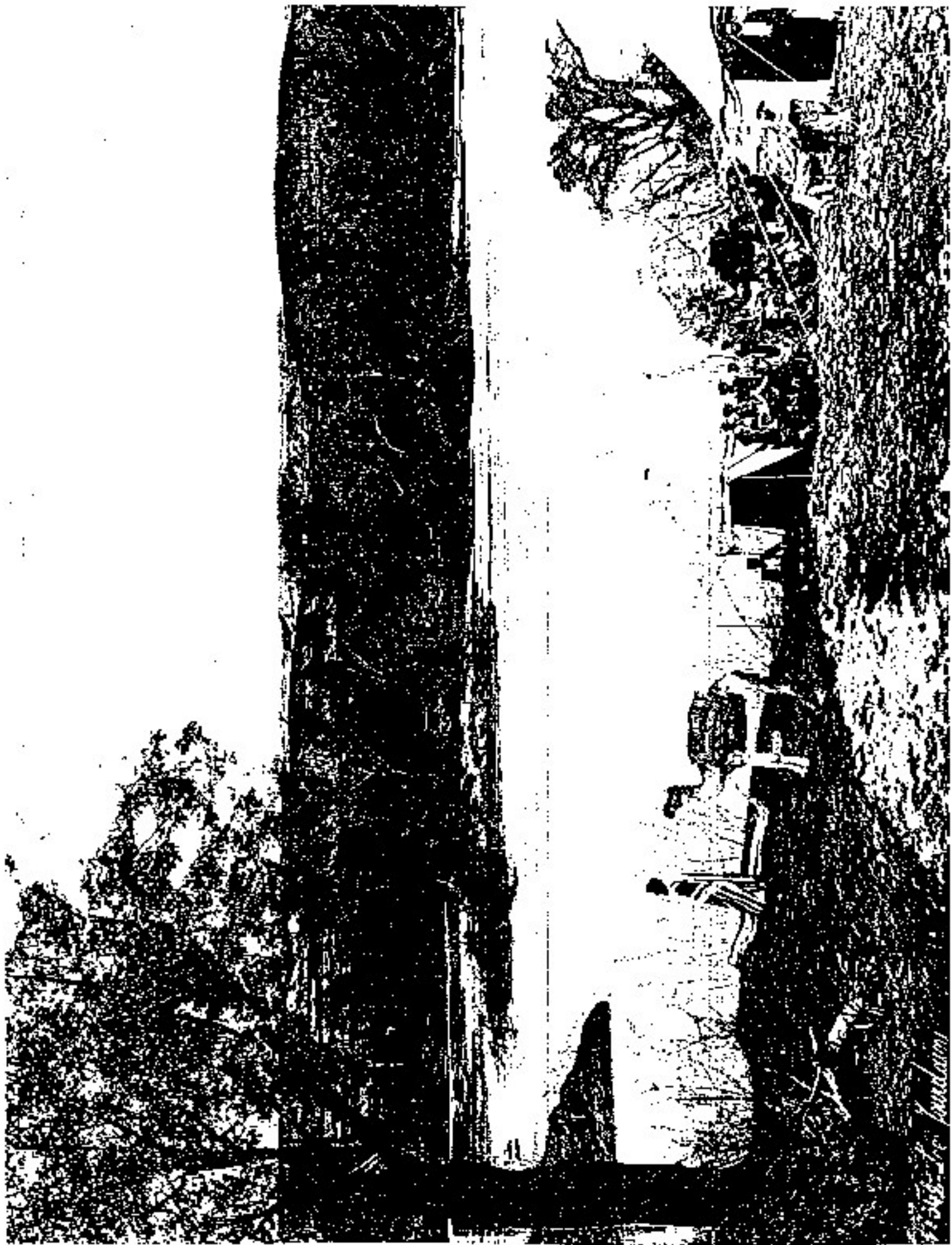


PLATE XVI. THE JORDAN

brickwork column: A Jovian eagle clasping a wavy ribbon in its beak and a stylized thunderbolt in its talons.

Both titles are mentioned in Bonfils' 1876 catalogue (Plate IV with prints numbered 202, 284, 494; Plate V with a single print, 24 × 30 cm., available, numbered 286). Careful study of Plate V's graffiti, however, reveals beneath the elegantly scratched advertisement, "*Bonfils, Photographe à Beyrouth: Vues de Baalbek*," other names with dates as late as 1884, the year before Félix Bonfils' death. It is most probable that Plate V represents Adrien Bonfils' study of a subject recorded by his father in the previous decade at the time of the installation of the pillar.

Other Semitic Museum photographs preserve Bonfils' record of the graffiti on this wall — notably HSM 779, Bonfils 822; and HSM 778, Bonfils 821 — both close-up studies of sculptured detail. In Arabic inscriptions, the dates are mostly 1882 and 1883, but one inside the right doorjamb seems to read "85." The fact that Hejira dates are not used in those inscriptions may itself be significant of Moslem avoidance of vandalism, if not of visiting pagan ruins.

PLATE VI

UNTITLED (SMALL TEMPLE AND GATEWAY AT DENDERA IN EGYPT)
(Marcove Collection: Bonfils — on deposit in HSM)

Aesthetically we find here a symphony of stones and shadows totally different in character from that of Plate I. From the point of view of internal evidence, each structure bears a large inscription of the name Bonfils inexpertly daubed in charcoal, with both the syllabic separation and the backwards letters indicating the handiwork of an admiring local, rather than deliberate self-advertisement by the photographer as found incised into the wall in Plate V. Although from antiquity travelers have seemed compelled to deface monuments with notices of their visits, Bonfils' graffiti (or, in this case, his permanent record of another's transitory homage) appear to foreshadow modern promotional practices in a way consciously at variance with other photographers of the age, whose images carefully preserve the gravity and romanticism of engravings.

Bonfils, by contrast, frequently betrays a sense of humor in his compositions, especially in posing for scale, often in precarious positions, figures that sometimes show amusing exchanges of articles of clothing between Westerners and Levantines. Such unconventional photographic practice can only partly be explained by Bonfils' expectation that artists would render his pictures into appropriate engravings, as happened to Plate VI, which appeared as a line-cut in America in *Scribner's Magazine*, IV:4 (October 1888), 390, *without* the charcoaled names.

PLATE VII

GROUP OF BEDOUIN WOMEN RESTING
(HSM 638, which adds "Syria" to the title; Bonfils 644)

Against an artificial backdrop painted with palm trees, this elegiac group rests near "stones" of *papier mâché* arranged to resemble an Islamic grave. In the spirit of Delacroix's North African sketches, the beautiful faces take on a somber aspect by reason of their cast-down eyes—a unique feature in a Bonfils studio scene.

Professor Dawn Chatty, currently conducting investigations at the University of Damascus on the social history of Arab women, has pointed out that in this picture and the next no facial tattoos are discernible, in contrast to what would almost certainly be recorded in photographs of similar Bedouin women today. This may substantiate the theory that such tattoos, normally administered by Gypsies, did not become common until after the great influx of Gypsies into Syrian territories after the upheavals of World War I. On the other hand, since such tattoos are blue, one cannot disregard the possibility that the color simply did not register on Bonfils' negatives.

PLATE VIII

GROUP OF SYRIAN BEDOUIN WOMEN
(HSM 597, Bonfils 603)

PLATE IX

DRUZE PEASANTS FROM MT. CARMEL AT MEALTIME
(HSM 650, Bonfils 656)

Despite the incongruously painted backdrop with European birches and cypresses, and once again Bonfils' *papier mâché* "stones," Plate VIII's grassy foreground appears realistic enough to suggest that the formal scene may have been posed outdoors, while the almost candid arrangement of Plate IX, given unity by the centrality of the rice platters, has been lit from the sunlight entering the porch. Apart from the handsome faces and details of costume, both pictures preserve testimony of Bonfils' persuasiveness, especially in the case of the Druze, whom he had originally encountered on the field of battle in 1860.

PLATE X

DAMASCUS: MAKING MOSAIC-WORK
(HSM 987, Bonfils — no number discernible)

PLATE XI

JERUSALEM: JEWISH TINSMITH
(HSM 637, Bonfils 643)

From his series of craftsmen and merchants at their work, Bonfils' studies provide examples of his own technical virtuosity. In the case of the Damascene artisans, the example of their finished inlay-work has been manipulated in the printing process to make this section of the picture brighter in order to emphasize the intricate delicacy of the design, with the unintended result of bright-

ening the end of the cabinetmaker's saw! From the shadowy depths of the tinsmith's shop peers his young apprentice, framed by the brightly reflective surfaces of pans and new stoves. It should be noted that the tarboosh in both photographs represents the usual headdress of urban men in Ottoman times — irrespective of ethnic or religious traditions.

PLATE XII

YOUNG WOMAN OF BETHLEHEM
(HSM 630, Bonfils 635)

PLATE XIII

DRAGOMAN — TRAVELER'S GUIDE
(HSM 607, Bonfils 612)

Again amid the artificial rocks of his studio, Bonfils preserves the aspects of real people. For ethnographic purposes his costume studies are particularly valuable because even the British Museum's collections of regional dress were not begun until 1902 — even though they included garments gathered by missionary societies in the preceding decade. The rows of coins on the young woman's cap reflect the value of her dowry, while the weapons of the Dragoman indicate his ability to protect his charges.

The role of the *Dragoman* (developed from a pronunciation of the Arabic word for "interpreter") cannot be underestimated in our understanding of Westerners' first impressions of the Levant. Dragomans, whose multifarious activities in providing every comfort for tourist parties are delightfully described in Mark Twain's *Imocents Abroad*, were above all eloquent storytellers, often transmitting genuinely ancient unwritten traditions invaluable for the identification of historic sites, as well as fantastic legends or amusing anecdotes.

PLATE XIV

MARONITE BISHOP OF MOUNT LEBANON
(HSM 601, Bonfils 606)

PLATE XV

UNTITLED (YOUNG WOMAN WITH FAN AND CIGARETTE)
(HSM 658, Bonfils 665)

Bonfils' portraits of religious leaders form a separate genre within his work and sometimes seem to have been posed in properly official settings rather than in a studio. Despite the otherwise unique bookcase in the background, the braided piping, fringe, and velvet on which the Maronite prelate is seated can be seen again on the footrest of the bold young woman posed in front of a backdrop reminiscent of Garnier's *Opéra*. Her heart-shaped feathered fan recurs in a variety of female portraits, mostly posed in much more respectable attitudes.

PLATE XVI
 THE JORDAN
 (HSM 432, Bonfils 342)

Careful study of this pastoral landscape reveals astounding inconsistencies in the relative proportions of the human figures, which provided the key for Ms. Elizabeth Carella's discovery that this picture is in fact a montage composed of at least nine separate elements from various other photographs represented in the Semitic Museum collections! Undoubtedly this is a product of whimsy as much as of skill manipulated to provide a vision in accord with Westerners' fantasy of an adventurous expedition. Bonfils' practice of self-advertisement can be glimpsed in his sign behind the camel's forelegs. From the beard and the mole upon his left cheek, we can suspect that the seated figure (in pith-helmet, nearest the liveried attendant at the entrance of the main tent) represents a self-image of Félix Bonfils.

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