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Sura

Egypte vanuit een Belgisch perspectief

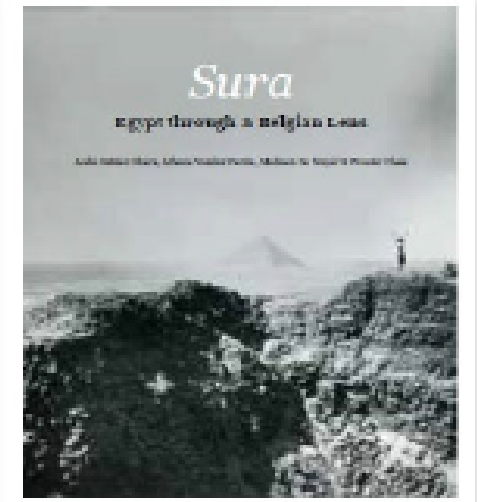
First curator of the Egyptian department at the Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH), Jean Capart (1877-1947) is often regarded as the founding father of Belgian Egyptology. Besides being the one who gave its impulse and rise to the development of the Egyptian collection at the RMAH, he was at the root of many other initiatives that contributed to turn, within a few years only, the RMAH into a prominent research centre in Egyptology.

Under Capart's leadership, one of the world's finest and most complete Egyptological libraries arose in Brussels at the RMAH during the first decades of the 20th century. Keeping up with pioneering practices that Capart had observed in leading-edge institutions around Europe and the USA, the museum's library rapidly housed a very large collection of books and journals about Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology along with an important photographic archive which was constituted for research purposes and academic dissemination as well as education and public outreach.

During his entire career, Capart constantly invested in the development of this collection by feeding it with photos he bought from colleagues and institutions abroad, and with photos he and his collaborators took during their scientific missions and trips throughout Egypt and in museums over the world.

The initial core on which this important photographic archive built up, and which counts more than 53.000 individual non-digital items today, consists of almost 7.000 high resolution historical glass plate photographic negatives dated to the first half of the 20th century. Although this large sub-collection constitutes, by its diversity and historical significance, an extremely rich source of documentation and information, it has been much neglected during the past decades, and its existence and contents remain completely undisclosed to the larger Egyptological community.

Following Capart's initial ambition, the SURA project (sura being the Arabic word for 'photo') aims to make this highly valuable photographic collection available again to the international scientific community as well as to the public, by ensuring its conservation and by creating a fully digitised database that will be freely available online in the near future.



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6. Sayed 'Cid' Mahmud at el-Marg

At the request of the Belgian entrepreneur Édouard Empain, who was to build a new suburb in Heliopolis, northeast of Cairo, Jean Capart excavated part of the 2.500 hectare area to make sure no archaeological remains were present there. During his exploration of the region, Capart was often accompanied by Sayed 'Cid' Mahmud, whom he portrays here sitting on a donkey on the road to the village of el-Marg.

Jean Capart, 13 February–mid April 1907
Inv. EGI 1148



7. Villagers in the area of Heliopolis

Sayed 'Cid' Mahmud on his donkey passes a group of Egyptian women carrying water jars on their head. The women are walking back from a water well to their village visible in the background.

Charles Mathien, 13 February–mid April 1907
Inv. EGI 6013



96. Mastaba K1, Bayt Khalaf

Huge mastabas dominate the low desert behind the village of Bayt Khalaf. With its 2 m thick outer walls, measuring 85 x 45 m, that are preserved to an astonishing height of 8 m, mastaba K1 is the largest. These mastabas were excavated by John Garstang in 1901. Based on seal impressions bearing royal names that were found in these mastabas, he believed that they belonged to kings of the 3rd Dynasty.

Jean Capart, 30 January 1930
Inv. EGI 7203



97. Mastaba K1, Bayt Khalaf

View on one of the shafts of mastaba K1, leading to a stairway that gave access to the burial chamber, located 25 m below the surface. When Jean Capart photographed mastaba K1 in 1930, Garstang's identification of these mastaba at Bayt Khalaf as royal tombs was still accepted. Today however, they are considered as private burial monuments.

Jean Capart, 30 January 1930
Inv. EGI 7202



8. Construction of Heliopolis

With the creation of the Cairo Electric Railways and Heliopolis Oases Company by Édouard Empain and his Egyptian partner Boghos Nubar Pasha, the urban project of Maar el-Gedik (New Cairo) was launched. An entire new city was built in a deserted area northeast of Cairo. Jean Capart captured the levelling works for the construction of roads in the future residential area of this new city of Heliopolis.

Jean Capart, 13 February–mid April 1907
Inv. EGI 1139



9. Construction of Heliopolis

Villas and other buildings were constructed in the so-called 'Heliopolis style', an architectural style that combined elements of Egyptian, Moorish, Persian, European, and Neoclassical traditions to form a homogeneous unit. The domed building on the right is the casino under construction along with several residential units lining Ramses and Boutros Ghali Street. Like the famous Heliopolis Palace Hotel, it was turned into a military hospital during both world wars.

Jean Capart (?), 15 April 1909
Inv. EGI 1338



98. Crowds of Egyptians welcome the Belgian Queen Elisabeth, Ballana

During the royal voyage of 1930 the yacht *Khasned Kheir*, put at the disposal of Belgian Queen Elisabeth and her entourage by Egyptian King Fuad I, was welcomed throughout the country by enthusiastic crowds of people. Here the dock at Ballana, close to Abydos, is shown decked out with Egyptian and Belgian flags, and a banner wishing 'bonne arrivee' to the royal visitors.

Jean Capart, 19 March 1930
Inv. EGI 7508



99. Arrival of the Belgian Queen Elisabeth, Ballana

Jean Capart photographed Elisabeth, Queen of the Belgians, on the deck of the yacht *Khasned Kheir* as she arrives at Ballana and is greeted by a crowd of Egyptians on the bank of the Nile. They would visit the site of Abydos later that day, with the magnificent temple of pharaoh Seth I.

Jean Capart, 19 March 1930
Inv. EGI 7488