

RESEARCH PAPER

# Amelia Edwards in America – A Quiet Revolution in Archaeological Science

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This article examines the American tour of the Egyptologist, novelist and travel writer Amelia Edwards in 1889–1890. Edwards's lecture tour was a critical and largely overlooked event in the evolution of modern archaeology. Edwards rejected the dominant male-centric culture of 'heroic archaeology' along with its trophies and myths. She told the story of Egypt with an emphasis on everyday life, including the lives of women. She did not present simplified or 'dumbed-down' versions of existing histories in order to make them suitable for women, as the male scholars of the time, who opposed her, charged. Nor did she sensationalize the past to dazzle or 'hook' her audience as previous adventurers and showmen had done. A gifted novelist, Edwards told a big story made of many small things. Despite fierce opposition, Edwards' approach to Egyptology did more than just popularize the subject; it shaped the methodology of modern archaeology.

Picture this: a large lecture hall filled to the brim and humming with voices. The place is Brooklyn, and the year is 1890. The elite of the city are gathered here for a much-anticipated event. Among the crowd are some of the most prominent artists, scholars and political figures of the day. The topic of tonight's talk: 'The Literature and Religion of Ancient Egypt'; the speaker is famed English author, explorer and Egyptologist Amelia Blandford Edwards. It promises to be a memorable evening, for this is the last lecture of Edwards's American tour that had begun the previous fall. The tour had several purposes: It was undertaken to raise awareness of, and interest in, the Egypt Exploration Fund, of which Edwards was a founder. This final engagement in Brooklyn was also meant to generate funds to purchase works of art for the Museums of the Brooklyn Institute, which would later become the Brooklyn Museum.<sup>1</sup> Edwards's tour, which began in Brooklyn at the same venue in November of 1889, had been covered extensively by the press, and her talks were consistently sold out. Despite her success, however, the path to this point and to this stage had not been easy for Edwards or for her American colleague and champion, the Rev. William Copley Winslow.

This event on March 10, 1890, was widely reviewed and commented on mostly positively, and in some cases effusively, by all of the important New York newspapers. According to a report in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 'an audience more distinguished or more representative of Brooklyn's wealth was never brought together.'<sup>2</sup> The gathering was a "who's who" of New York and Brooklyn cultural life, and the spectators filled the hall to capacity.

Even people who had been unable to obtain tickets showed up anyway. The venue, the Brooklyn Academy of Music Hall on Montague St. in Brooklyn Heights, seated approximately 2,200 people at that time, and the *Eagle* reported that, 'fully twenty-five hundred persons were present'<sup>3</sup> – it was standing room only.

Contemporary reactions to this lecture and to Amelia Edwards's tour generally were not all favorable, however – far from it. Although a popular success, Edwards faced fierce resistance from established figures in the field, from academics and from various interested parties who could not, or would not, take a female scholar seriously. Her gender was a problem, as was her lack of credentials. Some of the comments were quite bitter, and they focused not only on the fact that Edwards was a woman but also on her rather suspect charisma and popular appeal. Success under these circumstances required unusual strength of character – a quality that, fortunately, Edwards possessed in abundance.

How do we know? We have written descriptions of Edwards as a person – and vivid ones, at that – but these outside observations can only convey so much. A deeper picture of a personality often requires some tangible element to bring it to life. This is why we collect artifacts of the past, especially objects that are handmade. We pick them up, and they pulsate with life and are heavy with the weight of human intention and intelligence. The Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives are lucky to have in their stacks an unusually vibrant relic of Edwards, and of this electric evening in particular – a manuscript of her last American lecture, which is written in her own hand.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of her visit to Brooklyn, Edwards was one of the most prominent Egyptologists of the age. After a long and celebrated career as a writer of popular fiction and travelogues, Edwards turned her attention to Egypt

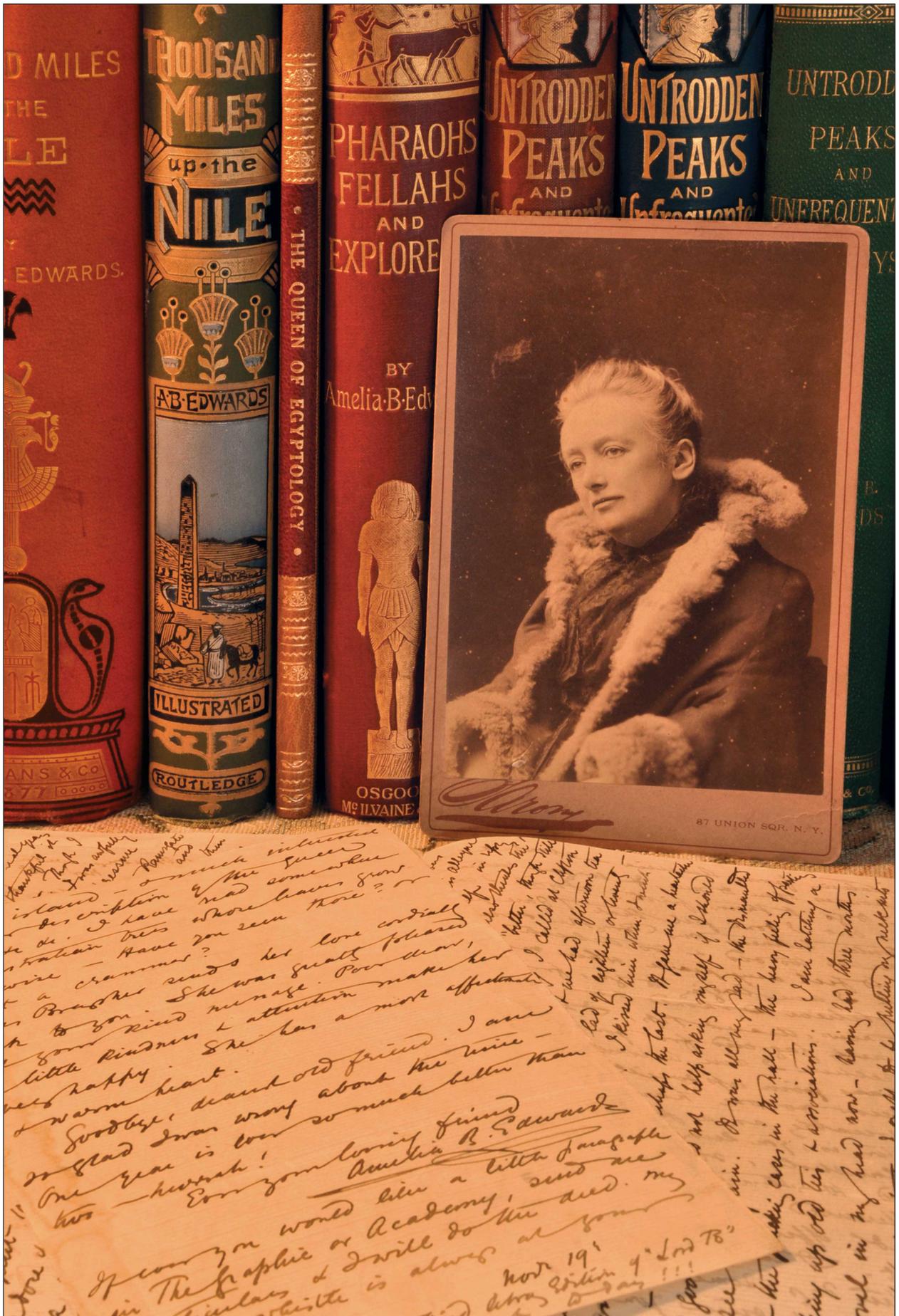


Figure 1: Photograph of Amelia B. Edwards by the American photographer Napoleon Sarony, March 1890. Courtesy of the Peggy Joy Library of Egyptology.

and reinvented herself as a scholar of the subject in an era when the emerging disciplines of Archaeology and Egyptology were dominated by men. It's worth going over some of the more familiar facts of her biography in order to fully understand some of the contemporary criticisms of her authority as an Egyptologist.

Born in England in 1831, Edwards had little formal education and no academic training in Egyptology. She began writing at an early age and made her reputation, and fortune, as a writer of popular novels. Her first work of fiction, *My Brother's Wife*, was published in 1855; her last novel, *Lord Brackenbury*, was published in 1880 and was a bestseller, eventually reaching 15 editions. After the death of her parents, Edwards began a life of adventure and successful travel writing. She first visited Egypt in 1873 during a spontaneous detour from a planned European trip. Edwards's account of her Egyptian sojourn became her best-known published work, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*.<sup>5</sup> The book became a bestseller and was praised for the fascinating view it gave of nineteenth century Egypt and also for its description of the antiquities of Egypt, which were largely unexcavated at that time. Edwards was deeply affected by what she saw happening to the cultural heritage of Egypt. Edwards writes in Chapter 18 of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* – Discoveries at Abou Simbel:

'Such is the fate of every Egyptian monument, great or small . . . the work of destruction goes on apace. There is no one to prevent it; there is no one to discourage it. Every day, more inscriptions are mutilated – more tombs are rifled – more paintings and sculptures are defaced.'<sup>6</sup>

In the years following, Edwards published numerous articles on Egyptian Art and Archaeology and worked to create the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF), which is now known as the Egypt Exploration Society. The Fund was founded in 1882 by Edwards and Reginald Stuart Poole of the British Museum. Its mission was to explore, survey, excavate and, above all, to preserve ancient sites in Egypt and Sudan in the most professional and scientific way possible.

Edwards embarked on her American lecture tour at the urging of the Rev. William Copley Winslow, who was the secretary and treasurer of the Egypt Exploration Fund in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Winslow had been trying hard to persuade Edwards to visit the United States as a representative of the EEF for some years. He prepared an invitation that beseeched Edwards to come to America, and this invitation was signed by such leading lights of the American literary, social and political scene as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Francis Parkman, Edwin Booth, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Julia Ward Howe and Seth Low, along with two hundred other dignitaries. In addition to promising her a stellar audience, Winslow wrote Edwards frequently with talk about the financial rewards, honorary degrees and memberships in distinguished societies that he was attempting to secure for her if only she would come; his language when talking about the rewards that awaited her was often rather unrestrained. Writing to Edwards early in 1889

about the financial arrangements for the upcoming tour, Winslow says:

'The point of fees, I have carried it well. You will have larger fees than any of your predecessors . . . [at] our educational institute ever had . . . except Dickens. . . . You must get yourself up like a prize fighter for the arena!'<sup>8</sup>

His efforts worked, and Edwards embarked on her tour that autumn, giving her first lecture on November 7 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn Heights. The initial lecture was a smashing success. In a letter to a supporter<sup>9</sup> giving details of that first lecture, Winslow writes that 'The rush for tickets was immense – the hall should have been made of India-rubber.'<sup>10</sup> Edwards continued her tour through major cities like Boston, New Haven and Hartford, ending up, again and at last, in the very venue in Brooklyn where she had started in March of 1890.

The focus of the trip to America, in the planning stages at least, was always practical, and success was to be measured not only in positive press and publicity for the EEF but also in money raised – although for whose benefit is unclear. Many of Winslow's initial letters to Edwards prior to her trip focused intently on finances. In May of 1889 Winslow wrote again to Edwards about the potential financial rewards of the upcoming tour:

'Now Dear ABE . . . don't fret, or worry, or even think over your projected trip. 1<sup>st</sup> it is beyond Dickens, Fraser, or any foreigner's lecture tour, in honor, glory, fame! They had no such role of academic places. 2<sup>nd</sup> your financial success is absolutely assured!'<sup>11</sup>

There follows in this letter, and in others, lists of lecture fees promised and calculations of expenses. Evidently, many of the host institutions were paying for the speaking engagements directly, with proceeds generated by audiences going to either Edwards directly or to both Edwards and Winslow, who was acting as her agent. In this way, Edwards would be paid – and handsomely, according to Winslow – while benefiting the EEF at the same time. The financial arrangements are complicated, but Winslow makes it clear that he believed that Edwards was in a perfect position to generate large amounts of cash.<sup>12</sup>

Winslow firmly believed that Edwards could pull in the crowds, and he counted on her appeal not only as a scholar but also as a popular author with a significant amount of star power. Because of her fiction, travelogues and ghost stories, Edwards was well-known for having a vivid and engaging style of storytelling. In her introduction to *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, she famously describes how she stumbled, dusty, ragged and 'not dressed for dinner,' into the dining room of Shephard's Hotel in Cairo, the legendary waystation for Victorian-era travelers to the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> She and her female travelling companion had turned up in Egypt quite by chance – with their European vacation ruined by rain, they fled the bad



**Figure 2:** Manuscript of the lecture “The Literature and Religion of Ancient Egypt” by Amelia B. Edwards given at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on March 10, 1890. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum’s Wilbour Library of Egyptology.

weather and headed south in search of sunshine. After washing up on the shores of Alexandria, the pair decided to stay and explore.<sup>14</sup> Noticing everything with her novelist’s eye, Edwards created vibrant and evocative descriptions of people and places – both contemporary and ancient – that begin on page one of her work and carry the reader delightfully through to the end.

An increasingly fashionable subject and a widely known author would seem to be a recipe for both financial and critical success, but from the beginning, Edwards and Winslow faced significant obstacles. A major issue confronting Winslow as the tour took shape was the realization that the very qualities that made *the author* Amelia Edwards the perfect ambassador for Ancient Egypt and the EEF in America were also the qualities that caused the most vocal objections.

To begin with, there was opposition to the Fund itself and to Edwards as its representative. This wasn’t new. The EEF had been founded relatively recently and had experienced much resistance from the academic and archaeological establishment in its home country of England. Samuel Birch, a notable force at the British Museum, dismissed what the EEF was practicing as ‘sentimental archaeology,’<sup>15</sup> and for many years refused to have anything to do with the organization. This view of the EEF as a band of amateurs was shared by more than

a few scholars in America and was only reinforced by the fact that Edwards had first made her reputation in a non-scholarly field – specifically novel-writing and travelogues, which were literary genres that were considered feminine and, therefore, trivial.

Shortly after the tour commenced, the American Egyptologist Frederic Cope Whitehouse blasted the Egypt Exploration Fund in print, and singled out Miss Amelia B. Edwards in particular, for criticism. In an article in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, he denounces the EEF for their ‘supposed scholarship’ and calls their ‘pretended discoveries’ the laughing stock of oriental scholars. He goes on to describe Edwards as a woman of rare ability who had ‘charmed the audiences who had crowded to see her’ – despite her complete wrongness on each and every point, from Whitehouse’s perspective.<sup>16</sup> It’s telling that his tone is far harsher when speaking of the size of her audience than it is when he points out errors in her scholarship. This discrepancy might have to do with the fact that his remarks were made on the occasion of his own lecture about Egypt a mere month after Edwards’s American debut. Whitehouse spoke in the Chapel of St. Ann’s in Brooklyn Heights in December of 1889, which was a far smaller venue than the Brooklyn Academy of Music auditorium that had hosted Edwards in November of that same year. The Chapel was, according to reports, ‘well-filled’ with

an attentive audience<sup>17</sup> – rather tepid adjectives that give the impression that the reviewer is being kind. The contrast with Edwards's recent sold-out event and the over-the-top enthusiasm with which she was received seems to have stung.

Jealousy on the part of established scholars against both Amelia and the Fund is something that Winslow was well aware of. In April of 1889, Winslow was busy trying to lock down dates and venues for her tour, and he wrote Edwards about the lack of support that he was receiving from the Archaeological Institute of America:

'Now why this apathy, sometimes hostility, to the Fund? Our work has far eclipsed anything done by the A.I. in exploration . . . This is a sore point to jealous souls. There has been, also, a feeling among some of them that only they should appeal + get money!! Norton cannot draw an audience: Frothingham has only a handful: + the A.I.'s protégé, Dr. Waldstein (now in charge at Athens) met with very indifferent results at lecturing here in Boston under the auspices of the A.I. Loring expressed to me keen disappointment at Waldstein. Well, to have the Fund's ". . . + learned" A.B.E. come + throw all these people into the remotest shade is too much for their philosophy to bear. **And she will do it!**'<sup>18</sup>

And she did. The men that Winslow names in his letter are Charles Eliot Norton, first president of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), Arthur Frothingham, secretary of the AIA and Charles Waldstein who (from Athens) directed the excavations of the Archeological Institute of America at the site of ancient Plataea, Eretria. Serious scholars and eminent archaeologists all, but Winslow's prediction proved correct: Edwards could, and did, throw them into the deepest shade, raising more money and garnering more praise in the press than they ever had. Winslow expresses his anger and frustration in another letter from March of 1889, noting that he was particularly irate about Norton, the leader of the Archaeological Institute of America:

'Norton disgusts me. His refusal, coldly, to sign that testimonial is beneath contempt. Norton prevented your honorary memb[ership] in the Institute. He is jealous, +, I judge, thinks you will draw large houses, which he cannot, on archaeological subjects. (he had 50 out in Boston last year, to hear him).'<sup>19</sup>

It is important to remember that Edwards drew more than two thousand to both of her Brooklyn lectures, compared to Norton's fifty – shade, indeed!

Aside from her popularity, others opposed Amelia Edwards strictly on the grounds that she was female; certain venues simply refused to host a lecture given by a woman. The Lowell Institute of Boston, a venue for free public lectures and other educational programs, seemed a natural fit for Edwards, but although Winslow lobbied

hard, it was not to be. The Lowell Institute was one of the first venues that Winslow approached about hosting a lecture by Edwards. Winslow writes to Edwards in December of 1888, when the American tour was in the early planning stages:

'I earnestly besought Aug. Lowell to break his rule, + have you, but he is obdurate: no woman can or shall lect. before the Lowell Institute. He says that if he excepts even you, his office would be besieged by women lecturers (!!!)'<sup>20</sup>

The man in question was Augustus Lowell, trustee of the Institute. The vision of his distinguished institution being overrun by lady lecturers was too much – he would not bend. Winslow wrote to Edwards in another letter in March of 1889:

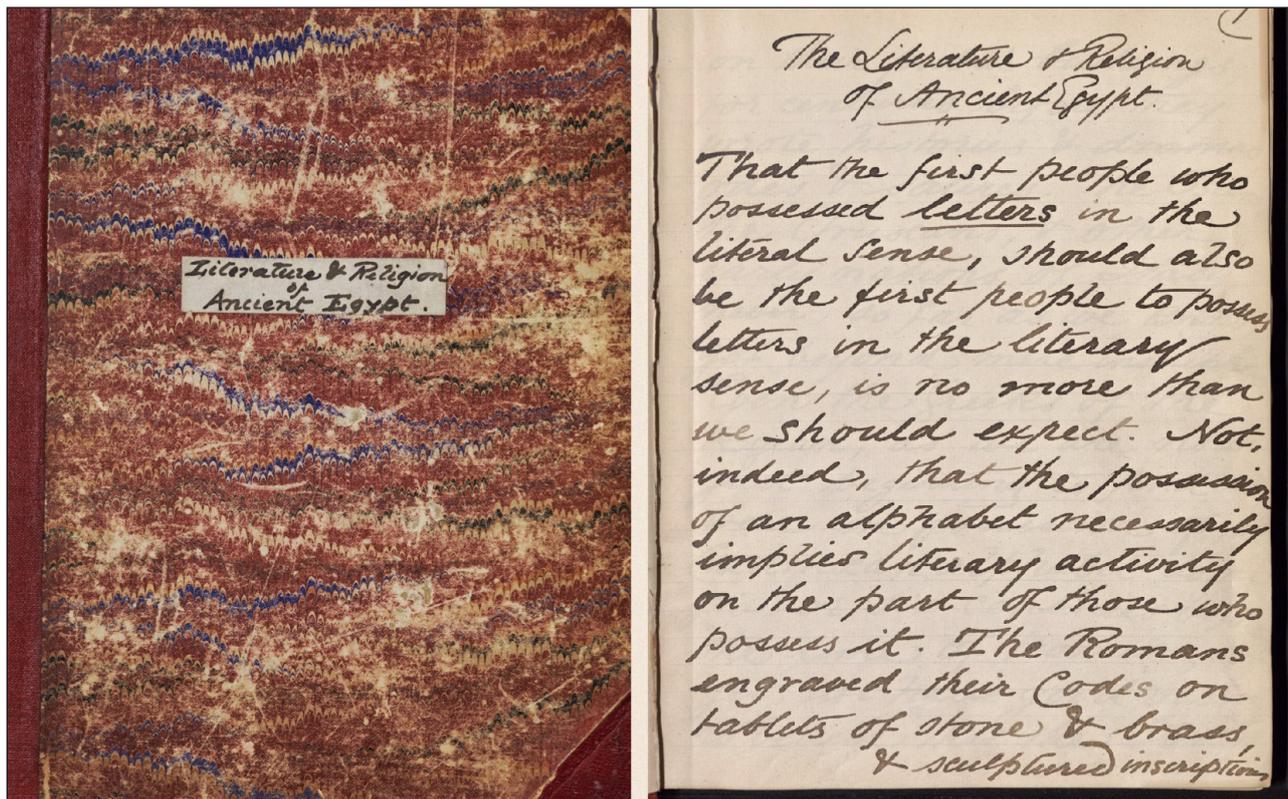
'The Lowell Institute matter is a splendid [advertisement]. for you; + I know it well. The fight still goes on: A. Lowell is getting a good pounding. Sentiment is all for you! I have enlisted our 1st writers. It would be brilliant if through you, as an illustrious example, the barrier was removed. Only the obstinacy of one man. But your name gets all the honor! I examined yesterday at Probate the will (1836) of John Lowell + it is only a technical right that lets Aug. Lowell shut the door against woman!'<sup>21</sup>

Winslow and Edwards believed strongly that popular sentiment was on their side, and they treated these hostilities and objections in the simplest way possible – they refused to consider these issues as weaknesses and they refused to back off. Both bet on the fact that Edwards's literary fame and her appeal to a lay audience, as well as her gender, were her strong suits, and they played to them. Even Lowell was no match for Winslow's optimism – in yet another letter dated March of 1889, Winslow tries to make the best of Lowell's snub and expresses his full confidence in Edwards' star appeal:

'If Lowell yields, you have the lectures, + intensified desire among the people to see you; if he refuses, your audience elsewhere, in Boston, will surely be doubled.'<sup>22</sup>

From the beginning – as is clear from his copious correspondence during the planning stages – the series of lectures, as envisioned by Winslow, was planned to attract the broadest possible audience, both amateur and scholarly, thus casting a wide net and maximizing the financial rewards. He emphasizes this repeatedly while writing one early letter, dated April of 1888:

'As to the topics. I have suggested before that you have a single lecture or two, fitted to give in a place where you speak once: comprehensive, popular, easily understood, probably illustrated. And 4 to 6 lectures more scholarly, perhaps, & more artistic,



**Figure 3:** Bound manuscript of the lecture “The Literature and Religion of Ancient Egypt” by Amelia B. Edwards given at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on March 10, 1890. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum’s Wilbour Library of Egyptology.

more intellectual, in which certain definite points or branches are treated. These for N.Y., Phila., Baltimore, Boston. But remember even in these, how little the mass of reading people know of the subject. The Times on Bubastis is grand. That’s the style! Your opening is vivid & graphic, & **no archaeologist here can do it.**<sup>23</sup>

And no archaeologist had yet done it – at least not on the scale that Edwards had during her American tour. Previously, other classical and Egyptian scholars had lectured in Brooklyn, and throughout the country, and had been able to attract respectable audiences. Because these men did not attract thousands to their lectures, and because they were not lionized by fashionable society in the way Edwards was, does not mean that they were failures. It does mean, however, that Amelia Edwards was different; she was what we today would call a ‘cross-over’ phenomenon. Additionally, Winslow had faith that Edwards, with her vivid style, could strike the right balance between ‘sparkle’ and scholarship. In a letter from March of 1889, Winslow writes:

‘[This opening lecture] will be of vast importance – a kind of keynote to your tour. It will be telegraphed all over land. I think you had better select for the 1st lect. a popular one, but, at the same time a lecture that with its sparkle shows that you are a thorough scholar.’<sup>24</sup>

Beyond being personally affronted that they were unable to attract large crowds, established scholars in the field might have also been rankled by Edwards’s and Winslow’s reach for a wider audience, in part, because of the history of Egyptology itself. The study of Ancient Egypt in the west had been evolving throughout the past century, but the discipline had yet to settle down from its erratic swings between the two extremes of obscure scholarship and splashy sensationalism.

On one end of the spectrum, figures like the Great Belzoni loomed large. Described by one writer as an ‘Italian monk-turned peddler-turned hydrologist-turned circus impresario,’<sup>25</sup> Belzoni practiced Egyptology using the destructive methods of the time: digging up ancient artifacts with little regard for context, favoring ‘trophy’ pieces and taking breaks from this exhausting work by sitting down on random sarcophagi. Despite all of this misbehavior, his contributions to the field were as great as his carelessness.

Decades later, the English collector Henry Abbott took his cabinet of Egyptian ‘curiosities’ to New York in order to sell them and raise money. When that failed, Abbott rented rooms at the Stuyvesant Institute and opened a museum on Broadway. He filled the space with his collection of exotic and out-of-context items and invited the public to view them – admission 25 cents!<sup>26</sup>

Edwards acknowledged the efforts of these early explorers while despairing of their methods. In an article published in 1886 in Harper’s Monthly Magazine, Edwards

writes about the history of exploration at the ancient site of Tanis:

‘Drovetti, Salt, Minutoli, Belzoni, Ricci, . . . and a host of lesser depredators laid hands accordingly upon every movable object within their reach. . . . thus were founded the great Egyptian galleries of our European Museums.’<sup>27</sup>

She continues with a description of the sacred site as seen by Prisse d’Avennes in 1836; he found the area littered with broken artifacts, fragments of obelisks and statues whose heads had been sawed off to make them easier to transport.<sup>28</sup>

This was still the dominant image of the amateur archaeologist at the time, and scholars were wary. Winslow seemed aware of this when he advised Edwards, in a letter dated December of 1888, that in addition to more popular subjects she should prepare something more ‘finished’ for the Universities:

‘+ also as to your topics. I advise you to have some scholarly very finished lectures, for our universities + educational centres. Of course, you can’t speak as though the audience were versed in Egyptology. I want you to have several grades of lectures.’<sup>29</sup>

The tension between serious scholarship and accessibility was a real concern. Large audiences were a requirement if the tour was to be a success, yet on the more serious and scholarly end of the spectrum, Winslow had found nothing but financial failure – the Whitehouses and the Waldteins attracted small, respectable audiences, but they clearly could not fill a hall or raise a penny for themselves or for anyone else.

Edwards aced this difficult balancing act, and more, by staying true to her principles and to her vision. Her audience would include not only intellectuals and interested amateurs but absolutely everybody, including women who knew her primarily as a novelist and author of popular travelogues. Edwards had always intended to target her speeches to both male and female audiences, and she never downplayed the fact that she was a successful commercial writer – and in genres firmly identified with the feminine realm at that time. In a letter published in the *Literary News* in August of 1889, prior to her arrival, Edwards writes:

‘I beg that you will courteously grant me so much space in your columns as may enable me to convey my earnest thanks to the distinguished American citizens **of both sexes** who have honored me with an invitation to the United States.’<sup>30</sup>

As the tour continued, Edwards made the men who had objected to the fact that she was a woman, and a women’s writer, look absurd. Far from holding her back, being female was one of the keys to her success. Society ladies flocked to hear her, and reviews of her American lectures

were full of lengthy accounts of the parties, receptions and luncheons given by prominent women’s groups. On November 29, 1889, when Edwards spoke in Boston, the New England Women’s Press Association gave a reception for her with over 400 women in attendance.<sup>31</sup> The Sorosis Club, the first professional women’s club in the United States, honored Edwards at a lavish luncheon upon her return to New York, just after her last lecture in March of 1890. The next night she gave a lecture at the Nineteenth Century Club on the topic of ‘The Romantic Fiction of Ancient Egypt.’<sup>32</sup>

Fortunately for her, Amelia Edwards had been dropped into an environment where these women-only clubs were becoming a powerful force, both socially and financially.<sup>33</sup> The very year of her visit to America, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs – consisting of 97 women’s clubs from around the country – was inaugurated with a grand meeting in New York City. The female members of these organizations were educated, well-connected and, most importantly for Winslow and Edwards, well off. By staying true to herself and by embracing her female following, Edwards had found a formidable source of popular support for her work and, as a bonus, had tapped into the growing pool of gilded-age money.

But there is one important piece of this puzzle left to complete the picture. Amelia Edwards’s tour was a success because it had generated money, raised interest in the EEF and enhanced her reputation personally. But how had it changed the discipline of Egyptology? A supporter of Edwards, Sir Erasmus Wilson, provides one answer in a letter to Edwards saying: ‘[You] are reforming Egyptological literature. . . no more ponderous books!’<sup>34</sup>

There’s another version of this view from a review of her first Brooklyn lecture, which was published on November 8, 1889 in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*:

‘Amelia B. Edwards delighted and instructed an Academy full of people last night with her first lecture in this country. Her discourse on buried cities contradicted the impression, vague but frequent, that remote and mysterious things lose their interest when made **near and clear**.’<sup>35</sup>

It’s true that Edwards was retelling the story of ancient Egypt in a way that made the mysterious ‘near and clear’ – and all without losing her listeners’ interest – but her methods were as important as her mission.

She did not demystify Egypt by presenting her audiences with simplified or ‘dumbed down’ versions of existing histories and findings, as the disgruntled scholars would have it. Nor did she tell tall tales or sensationalize the mysteries of the past in order to dazzle and ‘hook’ her audience, as the previous adventurers and showmen had done. Amelia stuck to what she knew and, as a good novelist always does, she told a big story made of many small things.

Heading back to Brooklyn and to our original artifact, the handwritten manuscript of her last lecture, we can

see that the subject is literature – literature in the familiar sense of fables, parables, folktales, legends, myths, romances and, most importantly, novels. Novels and narrative storytelling were what Edwards knew best, and this is what she used to connect her audiences to ancient Egypt. The information was the same, and the themes were familiar, but the tale as she tells it hangs together quite differently from the narratives that had been offered before. Looking at Egypt from a novelist's perspective was an unprecedented thing at the time, and it's no wonder the idea faced opposition. This literary approach seemed too trivial for the subject, too modern and, furthermore, it was associated with feminine frivolity.

The more common framework for the story of Egypt up to this point was that of the epic or legend. Some of the classic characteristics of epic narrative are described in literary theory as a sense of 'high-distance', rigidity, idealization and strict separation from the changing present time.<sup>36</sup> Not near, but distant; not clear, but obscured by oceans of time. For the story of Ancient Egypt, this meant that there were no individual Egyptians, no passage of ordinary time, no small, quiet moments – there were only Pharaohs and Gods, mysterious symbols and silent, unchanging monuments seen from afar.

A novel is different. As a genre, the novel resists strict definitions, but it is generally thought to belong to the modern world. Novels unfold on a human scale; they contain small and precious objects, individual voices, multiple points of view, missed trains, lost letters and all of the other detritus of daily life. A novel is a delicate web woven out of details, rather than a grand design, and it is dependent on connections and context, not rigid formulas, to move the story from here to there and to create meaning.

During her lectures, Amelia Edwards told the story of Ancient Egypt as a novelist would: in a way that engaged her audience and made a difficult subject more accessible. With repetition, this process also infused the very methodology of modern archaeology with a novelistic sensibility. In Edwards's own words, he spoke again of Tanis:

'The chronicles of Tanis are her ruins. Fragmentary passages of her history are found scattered up and down the annals of the ancient world. . . the place tells its own story. . . every stone is history. . . and every stone, as it may be inscribed, or as it forms a part of this or that structure, is a vehicle of history. Thus each fragment has its message.'<sup>37</sup>

It's necessary, she continues, for the archaeologist to 'interrogate the stones' in order to uncover the lost chronicles of Egypt<sup>38</sup> – these component parts must be both considered and connected to make the story ever new.

Edwards' vision is felt in the career of the person who is sometimes called the father of modern scientific archaeology, Sir William Flinders Petrie, Edwards's friend and protégée. Instead of studying trophies and temples, Petrie worked patiently over pieces of broken pottery

and fragments of parchment. He put these pieces into a context and a chronology and allowed the story to move through time – ultimately connecting the ancient world with our own. Petrie recognized the inherent worth of the potsherds, fragmentary inscriptions and broken utilitarian wares of the past. This was the stuff of everyday life, which could provide a sequential understanding of historic events. Petrie sweated the small stuff and looked for meaning in connections – a distinctly anti-epic point of view.

Using modern terminology, it could be said that Edwards – and by extension Petrie and the EEF – were examples of a kind of *disruptive innovation* in archaeology. That is, they introduced a new paradigm partly imported from another discipline – literature – that fundamentally altered the practice of their own discipline. Edwards disrupted the old frameworks and provided a new conceptual foundation for the practice of modern, scientific archaeology.

The discipline of Egyptology in Europe and America was, of course, evolving and modernizing everywhere. In his study of the American Egyptologist Charles Edwin Wilbour, Joseph Margiotta briefly reviews the various 'European models of Egyptology' in light of Petrie's innovations. The French, the Germans, the Italians and others all made valuable and unique contributions to discipline in its modern form, but it was the Englishman – and direct intellectual descendants of Amelia Edwards – whose scientific and systematic methods of excavation were adopted by all.<sup>39</sup>

Outsiders always have a choice. They can work within a discipline and become better than anyone else – and succeed by mastering and adapting themselves to the existing standards – or they can push back against the paradigm and tell their own story. As interesting as it is to look at the challenges that Edwards faced as a woman in the nineteenth century, and as a 'lady author' of romances and fiction in the world of serious Egyptological scholarship, it is vital to understand that she did not just overcome obstacles and break into a male-dominated field as it was. She used the fact that she was a woman and a writer of women's literature to break old-style archaeology itself. In doing so, she set the discipline on the path to modernization, and she succeeded on all levels – not despite being a woman, but because of it. Winslow was right; nobody else could have done exactly what she did.

With this we have come full circle – back to the overstuffed Brooklyn auditorium where audience members jostle for a better view of the eminent Egyptologist, eager to hear everything that she has to say in this her last appearance in America. The entire enterprise had been a smashing success despite the many challenges. Winslow believed in Edwards and her practical magic. He well understood her ability to spin stories into gold. Edwards stayed true to herself and to her origins in literature. She had not kept her femininity hidden or in the background; she celebrated it and was richly rewarded for doing so.

If there is any doubt that Edwards used all of her storytelling magic to bring the past into the present and to breathe new life into the science of archaeology – come and take a walk with her in Tanis:

Let us suppose such a stranger to have hired skiff a mile or two below Tanis, and to approach by way of the river. He is put ashore at the foot of a magnificent flight of steps, from the top of which he sees the great temple – a huge pile of buildings showing high above a massive wall. [...] here and there a gliding sail betrays the course of unseen canal, while far away to the northward, whence a mass of storm-cloud is driving up from the coast, a pallid, far distant gleam tells the story of the sea [...] This avenue is the Via Sacra of Tanis. It is about 375 feet in length, and within that comparatively short distance, arranged so as to produce the subtlest play of color and the greatest diversity of effect are ranged a multitude of red granite obelisks, yellow sandstone colossi, portrait statues in red, black and gray granite, shrines, sphinxes ... and the like. ... [s]uch is this splendid sacred way up which the stranger advances. . . . . 'Now all is desolate. . . the rest is silence.'<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Anonymous. (1890) Amusements: Miss Amelia B. Edwards, LL.D., L.H.D., will lecture on the Literature and Religion of Ancient Egypt, with fifty superb illustrations of Egyptian temples, sculptures and tombs, accompanied by musical recitations of Egyptian songs. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* March 9, 1890.
- <sup>2</sup> Anonymous. (1890) Egyptian Literature. A large audience at Miss Edwards' last lecture in the city *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* March 11, 1890.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Edwards, A. (1890) *The Literature and Religion of Ancient Egypt*. Manuscript. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives. <https://arcade.nyarc.org:443/record=b646742~S2> (accessed February 17 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> University of Pennsylvania Digital Library: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/edwards.html> (accessed 10/13/2017).
- <sup>6</sup> Edwards, A. (1891) *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*; 2nd ed. Rev.), London, George Routledge & Sons, p. 353.
- <sup>7</sup> The American branch of the EEF was found in 1883 by Winslow and was one of a number of branches of the EEF outside of England. The American branch of the EEF has a colorful history. Winslow himself was a tireless fundraiser and advocate for the organization – he ran into a number of difficulties with the organization in later years, including accusations of financial irregularity. For a full and comprehensive account of the EEF in America see – D'Auria, S. (2007); 'The American Branch of the Egypt Exploration Fund', *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt: essays in honor of David B. O'Connor* edited by Zahi A. Hawass and Janet Richards.
- <sup>8</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society. EES.II.d.233 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards April 28, 1889. . . . All letters quoted here with the prefix 'EES' are thanks to the Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society and in particular to Dr. Brigitte Balanda of the EES for her help.
- <sup>9</sup> The letter is addressed to Miss (Emily) Paterson, who was the private secretary of Miss Edwards; after the death of ABE she became the secretary of the Fund (1891–1918).
- <sup>10</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES.II.e.22 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards November 13, 1889.
- <sup>11</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES.II.245 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards May 31, 1889. 5.
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- <sup>13</sup> Edwards, A. (1890) *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* 2nd ed. Rev. London: George Routledge and Sons, p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 1 chap. 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Thompson, J. (2015) *Wonderful things: a history of Egyptology. 2, the Golden Age: 1881–1914*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup> Anonymous. (1889) The Israelites in Egypt. Mr. Cope Whitehouse's account of his researches. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* December 18, 1889.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES.II.d.234. Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards April 27, 1889.
- <sup>19</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES.II.d.230. Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards March 7, 1889. [Winslow seemed to be referring to Norton's refusal to contribute to a publicity circular in support of Edwards' Boston engagements. The Institute refers to the Archeological Institute of America of which Norton was the president.]
- <sup>20</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1888) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES.II.d.215 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards December 9, 1888.
- <sup>21</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1889) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES. II.d.231 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards March 13, 1889.
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- <sup>23</sup> Winslow, Rev. William Copley. (1888) *Letter* Lucy Gura Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society EES. II.h.2 Rev. William Copley Winslow to Amelia Edwards April 23, 1888.
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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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