



2016 Issue No. 28 — The Ruin, the Future

Ruin, Rubble, and the Necropolitics of History

By *Stefka Hristova*

Abstract:

Luigi Fiorillo's *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines 1882* documented the bombardment and looting of Alexandria, Egypt on July 11-13, 1882. The album is preoccupied with the architectural, rather than the human face of devastation: buildings were ruined rather than lives. Its images bring in focus the destruction caused to the modern buildings by the fires of the Arab looters and blur out the death toll the British invasion has had on the residents of the city. While the album focused predominantly on the wrecked buildings, it also included images of dead Egyptians. In a photograph titled *Les batteries de Ras-el-Tin démantelées* we see the bodies of three dead Egyptian men – one of these bodies has been intentionally blurred out during the photographic development process. Depictions of human death complicate the idea of ruin. Building upon the articulation of rubble by Walter Benjamin and the concept of necropolitics as theorized by Achille Mbembe, I posit here that visual representations of human death toll resist the articulation of destruction as ruin and speak to its conceptual presence as rubble. It is through an articulation of the ruin as rubble that historiography can begin to illuminate significance and severity of political violence.

Keywords: ruins; rubble; photography; Egypt; Fiorillo

The ruin, cementing history into a place of melancholy and decadent beauty, speaks both of the inevitability of decay as well as of the strength behind the act of remaining, as ruins wait to be rediscovered, re-remembered. Situated in front of the photographic camera, the ruin envelops debris with romanticism and longing for history, whereas rubble brings to the forefront the violence of politics and the ways in which human life has been rendered insignificant in the act of decay through a wrenching aesthetic of mortality. In this paper, I explore the political work performed by rubble. I illuminate the violence, neglect, disempowerment, and physical and symbolic erasure that it comes to mark. Rubble speaks to the exclusivity of the ruin, and of history more broadly. Rubble is human, man-made, made out of men. And as such it is produced by violent forces that are always and already political.

My object of study here is Luigi Fiorillo's *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines 1882* which visually narrates the British bombardment of Alexandria in July 11 and 12th of 1882 and the riots and looting that followed. This military offensive crushed the Egyptian nationalist anti-European resistance forces led by Urabi Pasha. It marks the beginning of the British colonial occupation of Egypt under the rubric of a protectorate. Egypt attained independence in 1956. Fiorillo's album is part of the extensive Ken and Jenny Jacobson Orientalist Photography Collection located at the Getty Research Institute. The collection comprises 4500 images of the Middle East and North Africa. In this collection, as well as within the broad corpus of Orientalist photography, this album is unique in two aspects: first in its direct engagement with a military conflict of such magnitude, and second in its attention to modern European architecture within

the “Orient.” Ken Jacobson situates Fiorillo's work within a larger trajectory of “social documentation” in the Middle East (83). Yet the specificity of the historical event and the documentary aspect of photography should not preclude us from examining the larger ideological investments of Fiorillo's album. Claiming simply that these photographs documented the destruction of Alexandria in 1882 avoids the question of who is the proposed agent of this destruction and who are the victims. This “social documentary” album constructs a particular set of desires and harnesses a specific kind of visual knowledge that do engage the discourses of Orientalism proposed by Edward Said (35).

In juxtaposing photographic representations of the decaying ancient Egyptian architecture with destroyed modern European architecture in Luigi Fiorillo's *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines 1882*, I analyse the relationship between “ruin,” “rubble,” and necropolitics. Here modern Arab architecture was seen as devoid of historical value and thus categorized as rubble. I am interested in the agents and scale of destruction evoked in albums of ruins and rubble, be it the desert winds, the Arab tribes, Napoleon's army, or the British military. Building upon the articulation of rubble as history by Walter Benjamin and the concept of necropolitics as theorised by Achille Mbembe, I posit here that visual representations of human death toll resist the articulation of destruction as ruin and speak to its conceptual presence as rubble. I look at the presence of human figures and human faces in attempting to articulate the question of the humanity of rubble. It is through an articulation of both ruin and rubble that historiography can begin to speak to the mundanely and significance of political violence.

Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines

Most 19th century photographs and albums of Egypt focused on ancient architectural ruins and aimed to present souvenirs for the European travelers to the “Orient.” The French photographer Luigi Fiorillo's *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines 1882* documented modern ruin as it captured the destruction of buildings in Alexandria's European quarter. More specifically, it framed in fifty photographs the aftermath of the bombardment and looting of Alexandria on July 11-13, 1882.

A souvenir to be personalised, or amended without departing considerably from the originating framework, it was addressed, at least discursively, to the European travelers to and residents of Alexandria, who were evacuated in June 1882. The album visualised the devastation and destruction of the cafes they visited, the hotels they stayed in, the alleys they walked, the consulates they relied on, the bazaars in which they shopped. In John Murray's 1888 travel guide, Fiorillo is listed as the only recommended photographer: “Views of Egypt and the Nile may be obtained at the book-sellers. L. Fiorillo, Place Méhémet Ali; cartes de visite good” (Murray 117). Among Fiorillo's clients were also British nationals in Khedivial service, as seen by the cartes de visite he produced for them throughout their civilian and military careers in Egypt.[1]

Fiorillo's album provides a visual record of the beginning of the English colonial occupation of Egypt. The devastation of Alexandria should be situated within the larger historical context of European-Ottoman-Egyptian relations.[2] Under the leadership of Ismail Pasha, Egypt's significance as a modern political power grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century. The toll of this expansion was an increased foreign debt to the European nations, which in turn justified greater foreign intervention in the internal affairs of this autonomous Ottoman region. Caught in a careful maneuver between European and Ottoman interests in Egypt, Ismail lost the support of both when he embraced the formation of Egyptian nationalism openly. Abdul Hamid, the Ottoman sultan, relieved Ismail Pasha of his duties and appointed Ismail's son, Tawfiq Pasha as the new Khedive of Egypt. The struggle between nationalist and foreign influences became exacerbated in Egypt's internal political scene. Ahmad Urabi Pasha emerged as the leader of a national movement, which resented the influence and interference of the European powers. Ottoman, French, and British officials met in negotiations on who would take control of Egypt once Urabi and his supporters were crushed. It was Britain that maneuvered its way into becoming the “guardian” of Egypt and on July 11, 12 Alexandria was heavily bombarded by British forces, sending Urabi's forces out for revenge in the European quarters of the city.[3] The British bombardment crushed Egypt's national ambitions and marked the beginning of the forty-year occupation of Egypt by England.

Out of the ashes would emerge a modern and prosperous Egypt under British governance. An Egypt, that according to Said, “was the vindication of Western imperialism: it was until its annexation by

England [in 1882] an almost academic example of Oriental backwardness; it was to become the triumph of English knowledge and power" (35). This time, modernity would be nurtured by a politically progressive European rule, so that it can grow, and become Egypt itself. The blueprint for restarting the modernizing project was visualized in the rubble-filled quadrants of Fiorillo's photographs.

Fiorillo's album of Alexandria constructs a particular set of desires and harnesses a specific kind of visual knowledge that engage the discourses of Orientalism proposed by Edward Said. This inflection of Orientalism is evident in throughout Fiorillo's work. Luigi Fiorillo's photographic work is part of a larger trajectory of "social documentation" in the Middle East (Jacobson 83). He produced *carte-de-visites* – such portraits of British dignitaries – that can be seen in the Online Museum of Victorian-Era British Military Photographs.[4] He further photographed "ethnographic" types, examples of which can be found in the Archive of the Griffith Institute in Oxford.[5] Further, Fiorillo took panoramic photographs of Alexandria prior to and after 1882 as seen in the archives of the American University of Beirut,[6] in the Library of Congress, and in the image of rebuilt and prosperous Rue Cherif Pacha in the Jackobson's collection, which is an "aftershot" of the ruined Rue Cherif Pacha Street captured in the Alexandria album. Fiorillo also produced interesting composite images engaging more symbolically the relation between Egypt and the European imaginary as seen for example in a photograph of the Italian anti-slavery activist Luigi Robecchi-Brichetti entombed in a sarcophagus held at the Civici Museum in Pavia, Italy and published Nicolas Monti's book *Africa Then*. Fiorillo, like many of his contemporaries, used his camera to constitute both ethnographic and historical knowledge in service of Europe's civilizing mission.

The *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie* is preoccupied with the architectural, rather than the human face of devastation: buildings were ruined rather than lives. Its images bring in focus the destruction caused to the modern buildings by the fires of the Arab looters and blur out the death toll the British invasion had on the residents of the city. The ravaging of the European buildings was not attributed to natural causes – rather the reason for attrition was sought in the looting and fires started by the defeated Egyptian nationalist forces. Lacking the patina of history, the modern ruin found historical legitimacy in its European origin and thus escaped the fate of all forgotten rubble. While the album focused predominantly on the wrecked buildings, it also included images of dead Egyptians. In a photograph titled *Les batteries de Ras-el-Tin démantelées* we see the bodies of three dead Egyptian men. The face of one of them has been intentionally blurred out during the photographic development process. This depiction of human death and suffering complicates the concept of the ruin and posits a discussion of history as rubble by questioning the place of the human figure and the human face in history.

Fiorillo's *Album* is part of the Ken and Jenny Jacobson Orientalist Photography Collection housed at the Getty Research Institute (GRI). Alternate versions of this album exist in the Royal Commonwealth Society Library (RCSL) in Cambridge, UK and in the Lady Anna Brassey Collection, housed in the Huntington Library. Comparing the albums at the GRI and the RCSL, it appears that there are additional photographs inserted in the GRI version, as they bracket the otherwise consistent sequence of fifty numbered and French captioned photographs by Fiorillo. The album at the GRI includes the portraits of the key British and Egyptian political figures involved in the battle. On the inner side of the front cover are attached photographs of the British commanders then Sir, later Baron, Garnet Wolealey, then Sir, later Baron, Beauchamp Seymour, and the Ottoman Viceroy for Egypt Ismail Pasha. Attached to the inner side of the back cover is a portrait of Urabi Pasha (Araby Bey) who represented the oppositional nationalist forces. According to Nancy Micklewright, the album from the Brassy Collection contains one hundred and three photographs, fifty-one taken by Fiorillo and the rest by Sebah, Bechard, as well as by other unidentified photographers (80). The portraits of the four men are also part of this album; although here, they are integrated into its structure, rather than appended to its ends.

Fiorillo provided an extensive account of the devastation of Alexandria. His desire to utilise photography as a recorder of history is evident from his inclusion of two photographs of the La Place des Consuls: one showing the central square of Alexandria before the fires started by Urabi's retreating army and other looters, and another after the fires (*La Place des Consuls avant l'incendie* [Fig. 1] and *La Place des Consuls aprs l'incendie* [Fig. 2]). This visual sequence splits the album into two parts: the first engages the narrative of bombardment while the second tells visually of the fires and looting that followed. The first section sets up the duel between Urabi and the British military forces, resulting in destroyed forts and abandoned Egyptian guns. A second grouping can be seen in the images framing the damage of the main

square and the European section; this time the destruction is attributed to the Arab looters. The first sequence concludes with the end of the bombardment, when the city square had remained intact. The second sequence begins with the fires started by Urabi's forces. The overwhelming destruction of the European modern buildings in Alexandria is attributed exclusively to the looting Arabs. Not only the narrative structure but also the content of the images themselves speaks to the destructive force of the colonial subjects. Some of the buildings are seen still smoking from the "vandal" fire set by the rebels – for example, fire fighting equipment is in view in the after-image of the La Place des Consuls. In a "closer view" photograph, titled *La Place de Consuls côté droite (ruines)* [Fig. 3], the walls of the buildings lining up the right side of the square are visibly charcoaled by the smoke of the fires. For these damages, a group of Arab men is pictured in a military court-martial setting in front of the Justice Palace [Fig. 4]. The forces attributed to this devastation are not those of the British navy, which bombarded the city and opened up the door towards the forty-year occupation of Egypt by Britain. Rather, they are attributed to those Arab men who supported Urabi Pasha's call for an independent Egyptian nation-state. The album presents these men as the guilty ones – deserving to be killed in "battle," or subsequently subjected to trial by a military tribunal for attacking not only the external naval British blockade but also the internal European enclaves within the city.

The ruins laid bare on the pages of this album construct an inventory of a modernity destroyed and a photographic map of the rebuilding work that lies ahead. Most of the streets and buildings photographed are located in the vicinity of la Place de Consuls – off to the sides of the Great Square. They frame the destruction of Hotel Europe, the Italian Post Office, the French and English consulates, the New Bazaar as well as the French Quarter - l'Okelle Francaise. Among the buildings photographed are also the homes of the Alexandria elite, which included predominantly immigrants such as M. le Cte Zogheb and M. le Comte Zizinia. Most of these sites were on their way to reconstruction in 1883: Alexandria as a modern city was recreated by "its elite and bourgeoisie," while a separate, autonomous city was built by the "foreigners" (*Cities of the Middle East and North Africa* 27). The album provided a visual grid for the reconstruction of the European section of Alexandria. It organized the space of European life in a legible manner so that the damages can be accessed, the reparations paid, and thus the revival could begin. Framed in an album, the destruction of Alexandria was made more manageable for its European audience, as it suggested a hierarchy of spaces where both physical and political rebuilding can take place.

The *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines* (1882) pictured spaces of European decay and Arab debris. The bombardment of Alexandria prompted an intensified search for the past underneath the rubble of the Arab Alexandria. Fiorillo included four photographs of the Le Fort Pharos [Fig. 5 and Fig. 6]. One image frames the structural damage of the Fort while the rest display the cause for this destruction – namely the unsuccessful, and maybe even unreasonable, attack by the Arab fighters on the British navy. They construct a more general view the damaged/damaging Egyptian stronghold, and supplement this vista with close-ups of the exact position of the guns used to fire against the British. These images of unmanned scattered military equipment confirm the defeat of the Egyptian anticolonial resistance. They frame an acknowledged European colonial victory.

Fort Pharos, according to an article from the *London Standard* published on August 16, 1882, was "one of the most interesting monuments in Egypt" as it "occupied the spot, where stood, up to at least the thirteenth century, the ancient Greek Pharos or light-house – one of the wonders of the world" (*Fort Pharos, Alexandria*). This wonder was covered in plaster, hence obscured, and vandalized by the Arabs in the 15th century. The author of this piece has no doubt that "the destruction caused by the English shells will reveal some of the original blocks of marble, and perhaps the foundation hues of the ancient light-house" (*Fort Pharos, Alexandria*). Underneath the rubble of the modern Arab architecture, Europeans hoped to uncover ruins speaking of a buried Hellenic past. The erasure of an Arab present seems to be irrelevant, even desirable, as it opens up space for a present and future European modernity; modernity that is articulated as continuity of Classical Greek antiquity. What is erased is the contribution of the Arab man, and the Arab civilization more generally, which were seen as both a symbolic and physical destructive force.

The perceived historical disconnect between the inhabitants of past, present, and future Egypt is explicit not only in Orientalist photography per se but more broadly in the emergence of the medium in general. This Eurocentrist idea is explicitly present in Francis Arago's 1839 seminal argument for the endorsement

and popularization of photography. Arago, considered a key political figure in the establishment of photography as a scientific practice and legitimate art, praised photography for its ability to faithfully reproduce the world in front of its lens, as to preserve it and transform it into an object of study by licensed scholars. He suggested that “had we had photography in 1798 we would possess today a faithful pictorial record of that which the learned world is forever deprived of by the greed of the Arabs and the vandalism of certain travelers” (Arago 17). Photography, from its onset, was endowed with the ability to save, if only as a picture, the ancient Egyptian monuments.

Taken by itself, the photograph of Fort Pharos taken by Fiorillo, speaks to the power of photography to document the destruction of this monument as a result of the British invasion. Taken as part of a series in the context of the album, this image, however, reads as a ruined bastion of Egyptian anti-European sentiments. The “greed of the Arabs” has backfired. Arago's statement seems to describe more accurately the intentions behind the second portion of Fiorillo's photographs; namely the images of the burnt European buildings. He documented the aftermath of the supposed “greed of the Arabs”: Arabs were pillaging now not the Ancient, but the European establishments.

The Question of History

The *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines* presented a dichotomous view of architecture: on one hand, architecture with contemporary European or past Hellenic origin has hailed as a ruin, as possessing the potential of or the actualized patina of history. On the other, Arab architecture, as well as the detritus of the European buildings, were seen as cobbled under the indistinctive category of rubble. The notion of the ruin, as Walter Benjamin has argued, that “[i]n the ruin history has physically merged into the setting” (*Origins* 177-189). Benjamin's ruin is not one that speaks to eternity. The ruin rather becomes a formulation of history as “irresistible decay” as “in the process of decay, and in it alone, the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting” (*Origins* 177-8). The ruin thus crystallizes history through its ability and privilege to be allowed to decay. The buildings in the European quarter of Alexandria stand as premature ruins but ruins nonetheless. Historical patina here is derived from their colonial origin.

Whereas ruin speaks to the importance of singularity of place, rubble quantifies destruction that is deemed insignificant and anonymous. Rubble, in the context of Fiorillo's work, however, included not only architectural but more importantly human death as well. Walter Benjamin's articulation of rubble as the violent toll of history provides an important paradigm through which rubble could be seen a historical rather than an ahistorical consequence of modernity. Benjamin's Angelus Novus faces history as rubble as

he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet [and] would like to pause for a moment so fair [verweilen: a reference to Goethe's Faust], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. (“On The Concept of History”)

Rubble then becomes histories of violence buried, fragmented, yet present. Rubble calls for the dead to awaken – for the living-dead to speak up, as they are a key constitutive feature of rubble. Rubble articulates historical materialism.

Walter Benjamin's concept of “historical materialism” speaks to the empathetic reactivation of the past in order to be able to take hold of our futures. Benjamin writes that modern historiography homogenizes empty time and sets it on an unstoppable path toward progress. It fails to see the past for its wholeness and instead presents the “appearance” of a chain of events. He names this mode of history “historicism” and argues that it aims to produce a universal history using an “additive” process. (“On The Concept of History”). This additive method seeks an accumulation of sequential singular historical time – time that supports narratives of progress and cultural evolution as well as political agendas of civilizing an aberrant Oriental other.

For Benjamin, an alternative conception of the historical time is “the here and now time” which provides a “model of messianic time [that] summarizes the entire history of humanity into a monstrous abbreviation” (“On The Concept of History”). This temporality insists on the continuity between the past

and the present: Benjamin asks “is there not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices to which we lend our ear today?” Such a concept of history rejects the erasure of the past and compartmentalisation of the flow of time into past/present/future. It holds out the potentiality of eternal existence, latent in the promise of resurrection. The Angelus Novus can see this truth: “where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe” (“On The Concept of History”). The revival of the past, however, is not entirely recognizable – it does not provide a view of “how it really was” but rather it sparks a familiar yet distant flash of memory (“On The Concept of History”). The past coexists along with the present. Yet it appears only as a momentary image. Rubble can never promise exact reconstruction.

Benjamin's writing suggests that this mode of history does not prevent a return of the past. The repetition, however, relies on the construction of a sequence rather than simultaneity. Benjamin's historicism relies on time that throughout his writing is seen as never lost, accumulated yet still sequentially organized: empty homogeneous time driven by progress is seen as “pursuing a straight or spiral path,” but also flowing like the “beads of a rosary” (“On The Concept of History”). Historicism allows precisely for repetition, but this repetition is unconscious – it is an unrecognized repetition, a repetition of events that appears to be a new singular, insular, unique phenomenon, disconnected from both past and future. Historical materialism, on the other hand, makes possible a conscious engagement with the past - “it allows us to think of history as consisting of simultaneous anachronisms” (“On The Concept of History”).

I argue that rubble acts as a productive concept for understanding history as a violent accumulation of “simultaneous anachronisms.” Rubble speaks of remains and the act of remaining. Nevertheless, I also ask how do we speak of the violence that makes rubble possible? Ann Stoler offers an articulation of ruin as a “violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects” (7). Ruin for her becomes an “active, ongoing process” (7). She juxtaposes the virulent verb ruin to the traditional idea of a ruin, which indicates “privileged sites of reflection – of pensive rumination (2013 9). I find this articulation of ruin as ruination, as “an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of it” provoking (11). In the context of Fiorillo's album, the rubric of ruination is evident in the visual argument about bringing to justice the rebellious Arab agents who have ruined the city. The concept of rubble does conceptual work similar to that of ruination: it speaks to the multiple temporalities that shape the political act of destruction. It allows for a nuanced view of the debris surrounding the ruin – a look at the heterogeneous multilayered accumulation of perceived detritus that ruination inflects. As such, it directs attention to the margins of the ruin, which appear small and insignificant in and of themselves and only as an accumulation into an indistinct mass can speak to the violence that has produced them.

The ruin endows a place with a melancholic trace of the past, and by cementing history into it, creates a historical monad, ready to be reactivated in the present in order to glow as a harbinger of a future. Situating the ruin in a landscape of pile and piles of rubble illuminates the heavy burden that histories and historiographies carry. Singling out a ruin, breaking open a singular monad, creates an opening, an interface through which past, present, and future can communicate and commune. Alternatively, the act of looking through the rubble of history reactivates rubble as history while at the same time reveals the violence of politics. Whereas the ruin comes to represent “irresistible decay,” as Benjamin writes, rubble points to forced and enforced wreckage. It politicised the notion of the “irresistible” by pointing to the role political violence plays in the fate and foretelling of destruction, decay, and disappearance.

The Question of the Humanity of Rubble

The *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines* is preoccupied with the display of the architectural, rather than the human face of the devastation. The souvenir album of ruined Alexandria was conditioned by Victorian codes of propriety and taste as well as by a political agenda of continued European dominance over the “Orient.” An inventory of the architectural face of the devastation caused by Egypt nationalists, the album's human face in sharp focus is constituted by the addendum of the portraits of military commanders: Sir Garnet Wolealey, Ismail Pasha, Sir Beauchamp Seymour, and Urabi Pasha. Nonetheless, there is also a number of living as well as dead anonymous human beings dispersed among the images. Inadvertently, the camera captured the human presence, a Benjaminian optical unconscious, in both the

ruins and rubble of bombarded Alexandria. The images from the European quarter include individuals, sitting or standing on the sidewalks, surrounded by ruins on both sides of the street. The two photographs of *La Rue Sésostris* [Fig. 7 and Fig. 8] are exemplary of Fiorillo's use of the human figure in this second section. The men, posing for the camera are wearing dark clothes that distinguish them visually from the predominantly lighter rubble. They appear to be dressed in western attire. In these two photographs of ruined modernity, the human figure functions as a unit of measurement against which the devastation of the fires can be assessed. It allows for a comparison of the destruction of Alexandria, as it is inscribed on the facades of the buildings that surround them. The piles of debris stretch way over their heads, the hollowed buildings engulf them. Reduced to an index, they allow for the emergence of a measurable space of debris in which modernity can be both preserved and rebuilt.

The use of the human figure as a measuring stick in relation to the articulation of the ruin has a long legacy in the history of Oriental photography and of photography more broadly. Probably the most well-known individual to be reduced to a measurement unit is Hadji-Ishmael. Hadji-Ishmael was forced into becoming a "gauge of proportions" in Maxime Du Camp 1850's photographic album of Egypt (Ballerini 147; see also Berg). Du Camp photographed Egypt's ancient monuments in ruins and included his servant as a "figure" in order to convey their scale.[7] He arranged these architectural vistas in an album that aimed to reconstruct a "photographic panorama" - where flipping between the pages allowed the viewer to maneuver between structure and the geographic context, of the city or the desert (Berg 17). The album's panoramic quality is constructed precisely using Hadji-Ishmael as a scale. In other words, the person is reduced to an embodied metric through which the great accomplishments of the old Egyptian civilization can be compared. The human figure became the index of the album: it provided the common denominator through which these ancient monuments of prosperity can be distributed and analyzed. The convention of using the human figure as a measurement is present across the photographs of ancient architecture in Egypt. The work of Du Camp was not an isolated case. Rather, it was part of a larger visual tradition in representing the Egyptian ancient monuments, which continued into the 1900s as seen in the work of Bonfils (for example "The mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun. The pointed arches of the arcade")[8], Zangaki (for example "The Great Sphinx, with the pyramids of Khufu and Khephren in the background"),[9] and A. Beato (for example "The Great Sphinx, with the pyramid of Khephren in the background").[10] But more fundamentally, scaling ruins/scaling history has been a project of photography since its inception.

What are we to make of the human figure in relation to rubble when it has itself has been reduced to ahistorical insignificant rubble and when it is asked to speak infuses rubble with multilayered fragmented historicity? The human figure in the ruined European quarter of the album and the albums of the ancient Egyptian ruins functions in similar ways: it provides the common denominator in a visual landscape that is no longer living. As a stitching element, it facilitates a conversation and conversion of architecture, as the landmark promising permanency and eternity. In albums such as Maxime Du Camp's however, the human figure seems ephemeral, while the buildings appear everlasting. In Fiorillo's arrangements, man seems to have persevered, while European modernity in the nationalizing land of the "Orient" appears to be dangerously transient. The future was to be rebuilt and nurtured by a modern man if modernity itself was to stand a chance of survival.

In one of the photographs from the first section of the album, which emphasized the dismantled guns on the Egyptian side, we see the bodies of three dead Egyptian men. This image is titled *Les batteries de Ras-el-Tin démantelées* [Fig. 9] and is followed by a visual by the same name that tightens the frame, revealing only unmanned guns. The photograph of the Ras-el-Tin stronghold, framing three of the victims of the British invasion, sits at odds with the rest of the images in the album. Here Said's assertion that there is a nexus between the knowledge and power creating "the Oriental" and in a sense obliterating him as a human being" becomes relevant (27). The obliteration of the human index makes it harder to gain knowledge of the devastation caused by the British invasion and thus to confront this invading European power. I am not justifying the use of people as units of measurement. I am rather pointing to the danger of the complete erasure of the human body in visual representations of war. The body of the dead Egyptian man was intentionally blurred out after the photograph was taken - possibly in the printing/development process. Positioned almost at the center of the bottom third of the frame, this blurred out body punctures the structure of the album, which has been so meticulously focused on capturing every smoked out brick. The blur buries the face of the deceased man, as well as the blood stream that separates his body from his detached left hand. The other two dead men in this photograph

are framed further away from the viewer and seem to almost “blend in” with the rubble that surrounds them. Whereas the living modern human figure was intentionally positioned as the measurement of the devastation impacted on European modernity, here the human figure is deliberately obscured. The inclusion of the *Ras-el-Tin* photograph begrudgingly speaks to the death toll of the British invasion. Rather than evoking the dead body as an index of measurement of the destruction of war, Fiorillo chose to obliterate the possibility to distribute, control, and analyze the extent of terror and devastation on those who sympathized with the idea of an Egyptian nation-state.

I situate the human figure – living-dead – as indispensable in measuring the historical value of a past as well as the historical potential of a future. The presence of the living-dead illuminates the necropolitical value of historical time. As Achille Mbembe has argued, necropolitics describes the “generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (14). This material destruction of human bodies is precisely what Benjamin’s notion of historical materialism or the rubble of history attempts to address. Rubble thus becomes a productive allegory for the acknowledgment of necropolitics of history – and of history as a force in which political violence is both mundane and compelling.

Having addressed the role the human figure has played in the articulation of history as rubble, I turn to an exploration of the ways in which the human face, as well as the denial of the face, complicate this articulation. Recalling Fiorillo’s photograph, titled *Les batteries de Ras-el-Tin démantelées*, I want to call attention again to the dead man in the front center of the image and more specifically to his intentionally blurred face. His presence prompts questions about the role of the human face in understanding landscapes of violence.

The human face has been theorized by Giorgio Agamben as an “opening” holding the potential for communicability and community: “[t]he face is the only location of community, the only possible city” (90). The editors of the issue 18 of *Transformations*, “The Face of Technology”, write that the face is “the coding of the human.” [11] The denial of the property of face to people, who have already been reduced to scaling figures, speaks of their further dehumanisation and instrumentalisation. The blurring of the face of the victims of political violence both conceals as well as calls attention to the necropolitical forces that shape history. The blurred face denies not only history but more importantly, the humanity of rubble, of what is left by the destruction of a community and a city. The act of blurring, however, points to the exercise of necropolitical sovereign power, to the violence committed both on physical and symbolical levels in the act of denying humanity. Blurring articulates rubble. Rubble illuminates the violent act of blurring out history, community, communication, humanity.

Lacking face, lacking identity, the man from Fiorillo’s photograph becomes another piece in the collateral damage, in the rubble of political violence. He joins a necropolitical community of defaced victims. A community and a history that consists both of synchronisms as well as of what Benjamin calls “simultaneous anachronisms” mentioned earlier in this paper. On one hand, necropolitics are spatially synchronous – the mass and magnitude, the amassment of defacement, the scale of human death, the cost of the human toll, the loss of the human are articulated in this temporal modality. In Fiorillo’s photograph, the man with the blurred face stands both apart from the other dead human bodies, as well as together with other men in history, who have suffered similar physical and symbolical fate. He is joined in this secondary simultaneous anachronous historical community of a multitude of victims of political violence, whose presence has been blurred in order to make their suffering more viewer-friendly.

Summary

The souvenir album of ruined Alexandria attempted to provide an inventory of the architectural face of the devastation caused by Egyptian anti-colonial nationalists in the Battle for Alexandria in 1882. A record of death and destruction, it proposed that the modern Westernised man should usher progress whereas the violent Arab was to be tastefully disposed of and fairly punished. As such, it acted as a visual reassurance for its British audience for the necessity of establishing Egypt as a British protectorate. A British guardianship emerges as the only governance through which modernity can be preserved. In the process of cataloging modern ruins, however, the album captures unwillingly the human death toll of this military conflict. The documentation and subsequent attempt of erasure through the blurring of the

deceased Egyptian fighter prompt an investigation of the historical significance awarded to ruins as well as the rubble that surrounds them. Making rubble significant, reactivating it as history, allows for a nuanced and multilayered view of history. To sum up, Fiorillo's *Album Souvenir d'Alexandrie: Ruines 1882* documents political acts of ruination that differentially endow certain places, objects, and people with the historical patina of a ruin, while at the same time virulently rejects others as seemingly insignificant yet stubbornly indelible rubble.

Stefka Hristova is an Assistant Professor of Digital Media at Michigan Technological University. She holds a Ph.D. in Visual Studies with emphasis on Critical Theory from the University of California, Irvine. Her research analyzes the visual cultures of war and displacement. Hristova's work has been published in journals such as *Visual Anthropology*, *Radical History Review*, *TripleC*, *Surveillance and Security*, and *Interstitial*.

Endnotes

1. www.soldiersofthequeen.com/page60-AlfredBerryBrewster.html
2. For an extensive account of the political struggles between Europe and the Middle East, see Karsh Efraim and Inari. *Empires of the Sand*. London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
3. For contemporaneous account of the bombardment of Alexandria see Archer, Thomas. *The War in Egypt and the Soudan*, Volume 1, London: Blackie and Son, 1886.
4. <www.soldiersofthequeen.com/page60-AlfredBerryBrewster.html>.
5. <www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/mirage/enlargements/gi03993.html>.
6. <<http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/jafet/blatchford/html/489.html>>.
7. For example in Du Camp's photograph [Abu Simbel], 1850 <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/treg/ho_1981.1229.2.htm>.
8. <www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/mirage/gi04084.html>.
9. <www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/mirage/gi04089.html>.
10. <www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/mirage/gi04120.html>.
11. <www.transformationsjournal.org/issues/18/editorial.shtml>.

Figures



Figure 1. *La Place des Consuls avant l'incendie* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 2. *La Place des Consuls après l'incendie* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 3. *La Place de Consuls côté droite (ruines)* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 4. *La Cour Martiale au Palais de Justice* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 5. *Le Fort Pharos (ruines)* by L. Fiorillo

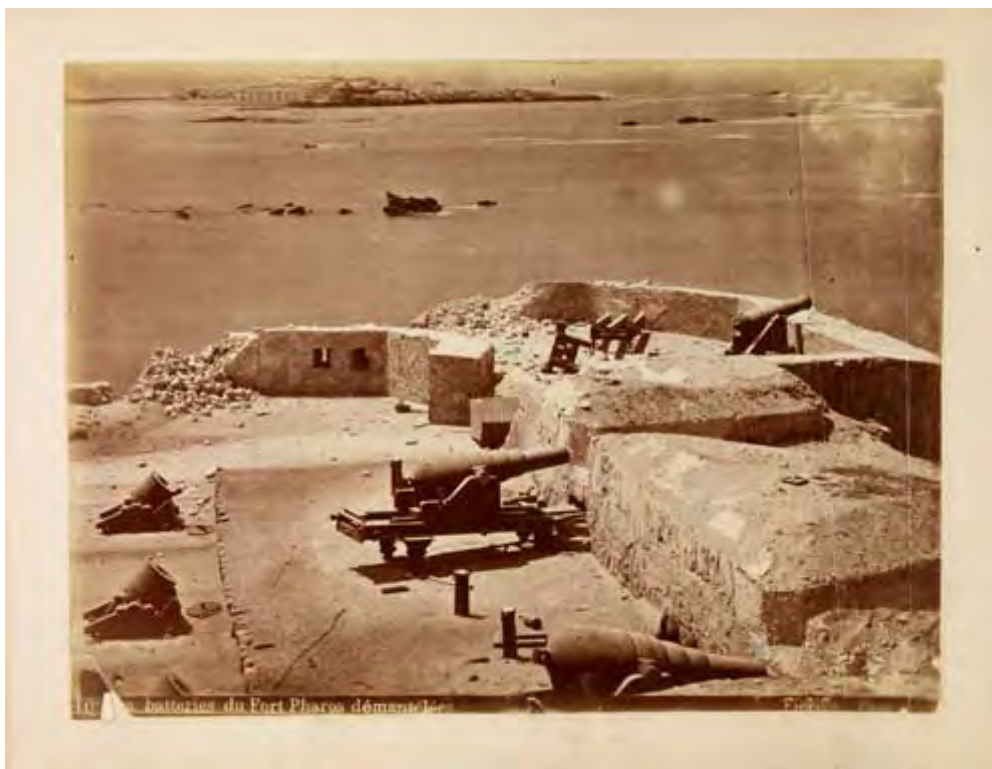


Figure 6. *Les batteries du Fort Pharos démantelées* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 7. *La Rue Sésostris* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 8. *La Rue Sésostris* by L. Fiorillo



Figure 9. *Les batteries de Ras-el-Tin démantelées* by L. Fiorillo

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