

TWO AT OXFORD

While the candidates for any review of Internet resources these days are legion, with so many of them deserving, these two which came across my screen recently merit readers' attention and may not yet be in your bookmark list.

I. The Historic Environment Image Resource (HEIR)

In its own words, this new resource

contains digitised historic photographic images from all over the world dating from the late nineteenth century onwards. HEIR's core images come from lantern slide and glass plate negatives held in college, library, museum and departmental collections within the University of Oxford. New resources are being added all the time, including collections from outside the University.

HEIR's mission is to keyword the images and re-photograph them in their modern settings so they can be used by researchers from a wide variety of disciplines to track changes to sites, monuments, landscapes and societies over time.

This archive at the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford <<http://heir.arch.ox.ac.uk>>

currently contains more than 18,000 images taken from glass plate negatives, lantern slides, photographs, film negatives or 35mm slides and span the years from the 1870s to the early 21st century. Although the majority of the images are black and white, more than 2,000 are in colour. Contributors to the HEIR archive include the University of Oxford, the Ashmolean Museum, Historic England, the British Museum and Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries.

... The database contains hundreds of images of archaeological sites and monuments in Britain, Europe, the Near East and North Africa, including excavations of sites such as Knossos, Kish, Vinca and Verulamium; sites prior to excavation, restoration or destruction such as Carthage, Ephesus or Palmyra; and topics such as hillforts, standing stones, stone circles, churches, castles and cathedrals are all well represented in the collection. Many of these images have been unseen for 70 years or more.

A distinctive aspect of this project is its invitation to users to contribute information that will help to identify images that are in need of further documentation. One goal is eventually to be able to compare more recent photos taken from the same camera angles with

the earlier ones in order to document change over time.

I have done a simple location search here, bringing up many interesting images for Istanbul (also searchable under Constantinople), Pergamon (which comes up also under Bergama), a few from Ephesus (but not registering under Efes). The successful search by location will bring up a clickable page of thumbnails, where each one then leads to a separate page for the image and all the data. The options for free downloading include e-mail-sized images and larger ones suitable for use in a Powerpoint. Higher resolution images require login and payment. It is clear that the digitization of the originals is creating huge archival quality tiffs, though there is no effort here to clean digitally the originals, which, understandably, may be quite spotted and dirty, and, of course, where any process of cleaning could destroy essential data.

The project is working on obtaining contributions from around the world of other major collections of historic photos. It is already a valuable resource, but it has huge potential for future study and research as more material is added. The private funders who have supported its creation and the staff deserve plaudits for their vision.

II. Yousef Jameel Centre for Islamic and Asian Art, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The Ashmolean Museum at Oxford is one of the most important university-based museums anywhere in the world, having benefited from centuries of academic excellence and exploration and donations by many of those who served the British Empire around the globe. The museum now has announced a major initiative to make all its collections available on-line, following the example of other far-sighted museums who understand their obligation to make their resources freely available to the public. While there is much yet to be done for other parts of the collection, the Yousef Jameel Centre, named for one of the museum's fellows and honorary LHDs, a man of vision and extraordinary generosity, is well along in its mission to make the Ashmolean's Asian collections available on-line.

The Jameel Centre website <<http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/>> already makes available 35 highlights, 27 exhibitions, 15 galleries, 14 collection trails to follow, 20 publications to explore, and over 10,500 objects to browse or search. Each object is available

in high-quality, large, downloadable images, where views from different angles (side and back for ceramics, for example) can be had, and there is a zoom function to be able to see minute detail. The search functions are impressive, where a timeline with a slider lets one move through any thematic collection. For special exhibitions of the past, it is possible to see in one place all the objects that were drawn from the Ashmolean's own collection. The timeline feature

here is at least analogous to the one developed at the Metropolitan Museum in New York but already a bit more advanced technically. Overall, my impression is that what the Jameel Centre has accomplished makes much better use of the potential of the internet to facilitate easy searching and connecting of objects one with another than what one finds at least to date on most other museum websites.

GARY LEE TODD'S WORLD HISTORY PHOTOS

<<https://worldhistorypics.weebly.com/>>

A Professor of History at Sias International University in Xinzheng, Henan, China, since 2005, Gary Lee Todd has done a huge service in posting nearly 150,000 photos in freely-available, un-retouched full size files. As he explains, "They are a resource for scholars, writers, and teachers, but also meant to preserve a record of as much history as possible due to the fact that history is constantly being lost to natural disasters, neglect, and idiots with hammers or dynamite." It is an eclectic collection, reflecting the breadth of his interests and travels, including a lot from the U.S. and Mesoamerica, groups pertaining to railroad history, major European cities and their museum collections (London, Paris, Berlin...), Egypt.... The core of the collection though, which is of particular interest to those writing or teaching about the Silk Roads is from his travel and study in East and South Asia, with, understandably, a huge amount from China.

The index page is an easily scrollable listing by location, with sub-links for individual collections from museums or under other rubrics. Clicking on any of these links brings up pages of large thumbnails that can be scrolled. A mouse-over of any image gives a very brief caption as to what it is. Clicking on the image brings it up in a slide-show arrangement (this all via Flickr), where, if one wants to download the picture, the download arrow on lower right opens options as to what size to choose. If one downloads the picture and opens it via the default TWINUI option, it is then possible from that window to copy the picture off to one's computer by right-clicking and choosing "copy". The Flickr slide show display includes the date on which the photos were taken. Note, if you scroll the slide show, every few frames will bring up a Flickr advertising image.

To evaluate the site and quality of pictures, I took a few random samples, choosing places where I have been and thus know something about what one might see and photograph and the challenges in doing the photography. Here are a few observations.

Todd was at Angkor in Cambodia in 2012; so it is interesting to see the state of some of the temples then compared with what I saw there just at the end of 2017. In some cases, things were a lot more overgrown, not yet cleaned off. For the most famous of the temples, Angkor Wat, he has nearly 1500 photos (far more than I took in a very brief couple of hours at the site), including, he indicates, images of essentially all of the reliefs. For the lower gallery around the entire building, the low relief images can be particularly difficult to photograph well, as many of his images make clear, but he provides lots and lots of closeup details.

Todd was in Ulaanbaatar in 2017, where he took more than 800 photos in the National Museum of Mongolia. Given the pace at which new discoveries are being made by archaeologists in Mongolia, it was particularly interesting for me to see how the exhibits have changed since I was last there years earlier. I even spotted objects that I had been the first to uncover in an excavation back in 2007. It is clear he is captive to what the museum's own captioning may have told him about what he was seeing – so, for example, the reproductions from the Ilkhanid manuscripts of Rashid al-Din's world history (photo enlargements, framed on the walls), may not tell us about the lifetime of Chinggis Khan or *Mongol* painting (take, for example, the famous image of the siege of Baghdad in 1258...). The most important thing here is the photographs of artefacts: one can always correct any limitation of the captioning before using them in a lecture.

Among the museums in China note the extensive collection from the Inner Mongolia Museum in Hohhot, another very extensive group from the Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou, and, of course, much more from other locations. We are talking here about systematic photography as he walks through the galleries, some of the images including caption plaques, but most just the objects. The quality varies, since such museum photography is subject to vagaries of lighting, the angle from which one shoots, possible reflection on glass. But my impression is that Todd has done as well as one can in such conditions. For the most part images are sharp and bright, and where there may be problems, it is possible in some cases to manipulate the photos digitally to bring up detail in shadows, make a color correction or sharpen them. This does not mean, of course, that for something like early steppe belt plaques, laid out at a low angle within a case, one is necessarily going to get a usable result, but then, when so much else he offers is more than just “usable,” this is hardly reason to complain.

Even for places one may have visited, Todd’s collection can be extraordinarily valuable. At the National Museum in Seoul, I did not get to see the display of the artifacts from the important Sinan shipwreck. He has more than 130 photos of them.

Lastly, a comment or two on looking at his photos from Agra in India. He was at the Taj Mahal on a typ-

ically hazy day in November 2015. His photos of the Taj are a reminder that, unlike the professional photographer working on assignment from, say, *National Geographic*, a visitor such as Todd is more likely than not to have but one, brief chance to see and photograph in what may not be the ideal light. That said, many of the pictures are lovely (the haziness does have its artistic qualities), but they do benefit from some manipulation in Photoshop to cut through some of the haze if one wishes better to see detail. And, if one wishes to be technical, it is clear that some suffer from chromatic aberration at the edges (red or green fringes induced by the way the lens captured the light). In a program like Photoshop one can correct perspective, tinker with tone and contrast, and get rid of the chromatic aberration (if that is important for one’s purpose), giving a result that is fully as good as anything a commercial, stock photography site is likely to provide at a hefty price.

Todd does indicate it would be nice if those who take advantage of his generosity would send a bit of money via Paypal to help support his habit. As a retired academic of modest means trying to support my own expensive habit, I confess I have not done so, even though I continue to mine his rich array of images from places I have yet to see (and many I have visited) when working on this journal or preparing a presentation.

DICK OSSEMAN’S PICTURES OF TURKEY, SYRIA AND JORDAN

<<http://www.pbase.com/dosseman/root>>

The more than 70,000 images Dick Osseman provides here for Turkey constitute what is probably the best, freely available collection to be found anywhere outside of some institutional website. He visited Syria in 2009 and 2010, prior to the onset of the war, which makes his photos from there particularly valuable. And he has seen a lot in Jordan, where his details of, e.g., Christian mosaics and the murals in the Umayyad bathhouse at Qusayr Amra are laudable. He also has a number of galleries for sites in Italy, though that part of his material is less fully developed.

Access from the opening page is easy, either by a clickable alphabetic list or by clickable labeled thumbnails for each of the galleries of photos. He has some thematic groupings (e.g., carpets and kilims, Sinan mosques), with most of the collections specific to a

particular location. For Istanbul, there are dozens of sub-folders, each for a particular theme or building. There are substantial sets taken in museums, for example, the one at Selçuk that displays the artefacts from there and neighboring Ephesus. One of the virtues of what he has done is his explanatory captioning, where he has had time to provide it. Thus one can find compact information on the “Library of Celsus” at Ephesus, although others of the many Ephesus photos (taken in 2011) are not accompanied by any indication of what they show. He also provides links to others’ sites which may contain additional information. His explanatory guidance to what can be found on his site is both in English and in Turkish.

Clearly Osseman has a good eye for composition and detail. He uses good equipment; some of the most

valuable of the pictures taken with a very wide angle (14 mm) lens; others with a good zoom. Interior photographs, such as his extensive set covering the mosaics and frescoes in the Kariye Camii in Istanbul, are first rate. A lot of the photos show close attention to proper perspective; others could have had some perspective correction, adjustment for tone intensity, etc. On the whole though, one finds here really professional-quality images which document many sites very thoroughly. He has noticed and photographed many details of reliefs and other decoration at historic sites which I must have seen but never photographed myself while there, even though I am not shy about filling memory cards.... His photos are not just buildings, sculptures, etc., but also include landscapes and

lots of casual shots of people, many of which are lovely portraits.

He has a liberal policy about use and re-use, which one should read—basically for academic and education purposes, it is sufficient just to give him picture credit. The images are available in various sizes, the largest ones in most cases quite adequate for illustrating an article and certainly for projection in a presentation. The website includes many of the laudatory comments from those who have used it and benefited from his visual introduction to places they then visited or, after seeing the pictures, intended to see.

– *Daniel C. Waugh*