ON THE CUSP OF MODERNITY: Archaeological Travels in the Ottoman Lands through the Lens of John Henry Haynes

Background

John Henry Haynes’ travels through the Ottoman Empire in 1884-1885 provide insight into the pre-modern Ottoman Empire during an era of great archaeological discoveries. His first trip was with John S. Sterrett, who was on a journey to record epigraphic inscriptions around Anatolia. During the second trip, Haynes was part of the Wolfe Expedition, which aimed to discover archaeological sites in Mesopotamia. His early photographs and travel journals provide information both on the logistics of travel for western archaeologists and on their perceptions of the east.

Archaeological Photography

During these travels, Haynes’ main objective was to photograph ancient sites. His mission was often foiled, however, by the conflict between the devices of modernity and the logistics of an era that did not include modern amenities. For example, Haynes was highly dependent on pack animals to carry fragile photographic plates. “The account given was that the horse, which was perhaps the steadiest, stumbled, his pack shifted, his saddle turned, he became frightened and began kicking. His load happened to be the two boxes containing plates. They were thrown, one rolling one way and the other going the other way and certainly the boxes showed hard usage.” June 24, 1884. We also see the emergence of modern techniques, such as photogrammetry, in Haynes’ journals.

Travel Logistics

Haynes undertook both of his trips mainly using pack animals and horses because other means of transportation had not yet reached the interior of the Ottoman Lands. As Haynes recorded in his journals, this method of travel was exhausting.

Another challenging aspect of travel was finding a place to stay on a daily basis. When possible, the travelers lodged with other Christians. If this was not feasible, they were forced to contend with whatever they found. On occasion this struggle was too much for their nerves. In his journal, Haynes compares their accommodation problem to the Ottoman Empire itself:

“We have just arrived from Arabla, an inhospitable little Turkish village... We are at a Khan with a dark court, broad corridors and animals!” Thursday Nov 27, 1884.

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