

David Roberts, R.A.



Fragments of a colossal statue at the Memnonium, Thebes

Reference: 10915

Dimensions:

Height: 32.70 cm / 12⁷/₈ in

Width: 48.90 cm / 19³/₄ in

KT633

Fragments of a colossal statue at the Memnonium, Thebes Signed l.l.: 'David Roberts. R.A.' and inscribed and dated 'Memnonium, Thebes Dec. 5th, 1838', further inscribed l.r.: 'Dimensions of the statue/Between the shoulders [?] 26 feet/ Circumference of the Head 54"/Shoulder to the elbow 13" [5]', watercolour over pencil heightened with bodycolour on blue-grey paper 32.7 x 48.9 cm; 12 7/8 x 19 1/4 inches

PROVENANCE

Possibly David Roberts; Christie's, London, 13-20 May, 1865, lot 67 as 'Thebes: Fragments of the Colossus of Rameses'; Anonymous sale; Sotheby's, London, 15 March 1990, lot 42; with Spink, London, 1990; Christie's, London, 16 November 2006, lot 128

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

This temple on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor, was visited twice by Roberts during his voyage on the Nile in 1838. On the outward journey, on the way to Abu Simbel, he had visited all the temples on both sides of the Nile at Luxor, and on 21 October hired donkeys to visit the ruins at Gurnah on the west bank, noting in his journal: 'The head and shoulders of the Memnon lying on the ground is enormous one can only wonder how it got there - the trouble of dislodging it must have been almost equal to the erection ...'.

The present drawing was executed on the return journey when he was on the west bank of the river at Luxor from 3 to 5 December 1838. Roberts noted in his Journal 'I have been very industrious today, thanks to a Thunder Storm, a most uncommon thing in this part of the world - The sun was quite obscured and the peals of thunder were very loud accompanied with rain.... Made four large coloured sketches two of the Memnonium and two of Medinet Habou.' (Eastern Journal, National Library of Scotland).

The present drawing was executed on the spot, although it is possible that the colouring was completed later during the trip. This drawing was used as the basis for the drawing which was eventually lithographed.

This temple was called the Memnonium or the Tomb of Ozymandias, one of the names of Rameses II, the king to whom it was dedicated. It is now more commonly known as the Ramesseum and is the temple from which another colossal head was taken to the British Museum, where it inspired Shelley's famous sonnet Ozymandias.