

Edward Lear



The Quarries of Assouan, Egypt

Reference: 11185

Dimensions:

Height: 29 cm / 11³/₈ in

Width: 53 cm / 20⁷/₈ in

Extensively inscribed and dated in pencil and in pen and brown ink: Quarries of Assouan AM 11.30- 1 PM January 27.1867 all one color [sic] pinky drab oker [sic], numbered (242) and with further colour notes, pen and brown ink and watercolour over pencil heightened with white

29 x 53 cm.; 11 3/8 x 20 3/4 inches

Provenance

Mrs R.K. Judges;

The Fine Art Society, January 1993, where bought by

Martin Davies (1924-2023)

This beautifully drawn watercolour dates from Lear's second trip up the Nile and his third visit to Egypt in the winter of 1866-1867, when he travelled with his Canadian cousin, Archie Jones. The men met in Luxor and visited Esneh, Edfu and

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Denderah, and had reached Philae by the end of January. Lear found his cousin irritating due to his habit of whistling and his lack of enthusiasm for the temples.

It was nevertheless a productive trip for the artist, who made many drawings. He was particularly interested in the country between the First and Second Cataracts which was new to him. Another drawing from this trip dating from 30 January of the first Cataract is numbered 267 (formerly in the collection of Dayton International), indicating that he produced twenty-five drawings in 3 days. He wrote to Lady Waldegrave on 9th March 1867 that the Nubian desert was, 'a sad, stern, uncompromising landscape, dark ashy purple lines of hills, piles of granite rocks, fringes of palm, and ever and anon astonishing ruins of oldest temples' (Vivien Noakes, Edward Lear: Selected Letters, London, 1988, pp. 208-209).

This detailed view accurately depicts the ancient granite quarries at Aswan mined by the ancient Egyptians. A line of unfinished carved granite can be seen lying in the sand in the background. When the construction of the Aswan Dam began in 1960, it became apparent that the ancient temples and surrounding area would be submerged and destroyed by the rising waters of the newly created Lake Nasser. UNESCO led an international fund-raising campaign to relocate them to higher ground by 1968.

Martin Davies (1924-2023) was the President of the Egypt Society of Bristol, who visited and photographed the second cataract twice in 1960s before the Aswan Dam was moved. He amassed an interesting collection of views of Egypt.