

HENRY SALT, CONSUL IN EGYPT 1816–1827 AND PIONEER EGYPTOLOGIST¹

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THE exploration of the antiquities and the elucidation of the history of many remote corners of the world has owed much to such people as officials, soldiers, traders and missionaries who have found themselves assigned to long periods of foreign service and who have utilized their leisure periods to engage in local research and investigation. Not least amongst these classes have been the members of the consular corps of the various European powers, bodies which, although often hard-worked and almost always underpaid, have produced some great figures in the field of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century orientalist scholarship. One thinks, for instance, of the German scholar Wetzstein in Damascus, the Austrian Von Kremer in Cairo, and the Britons Sir Richard Burton in a succession of posts in the Middle East, Africa, South America and Europe, and H. L. Rabino di Borgomale at Rasht in Persia.

Amongst the amateur scholars and explorers of the nineteenth century, the British ones were singularly well-placed during an age when, after the Napoleonic Wars, Britain enjoyed an unparalleled prestige in the world and when the might of empire, though usually held in reserve, could at times be used to protect and further the work of British enthusiasts. Also, the early nineteenth century at least was in many ways an extension of the previous one, when aristocratic and official patronage counted for much. The encouragement and help which launched Henry Salt on his diplomatic and consular career came from his connection with a noble family, the Annesleys, and in particular, from his links with George Annesley, ninth Viscount Valentia and then second and last Earl of Mountnorris.²

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Wednesday, the 16th of January 1974.

² At the height of the Salt-Belzoni controversies (see below, pp. 85–6), Salt's enemies lampooned him for his dependence on the Annesleys, calling him "Valentia Salt" and "Mr Valentia Secretary Salt"; see S. Mayes, *The Great Belzoni* (London, 1959), p. 259.

Salt was born in 1780 at Lichfield, the son of a local physician. His early aim in life was to become a portrait painter, and on leaving school in Market Bosworth, he was taught drawing by a local watercolour artist. In 1797, still only seventeen, he went to London and became a pupil of two Royal Academicians successively, Joseph Farington and John Hoppner. Salt's later topographical and archaeological drawings show that he had considerable skill and accuracy as a draughtsman, but he does not seem to have had any great talent as a painter.¹

He was launched into the social world and on to the path of preferment by his abandoning the uncertain prospects of a fashionable portrait painter and becoming in 1802 a combination of secretary and companion to Lord Valentia, what is described by Lord Valentia himself in his travel book as "Secretary-Draftsman".² It seems that Salt's uncle, the Rev. Thomas Butt, former Vicar of Arley (a living in the presentation of Lord Valentia, see below), had introduced him to that nobleman a year or so previously, and it is clear that Salt was already an ambitious man.³ Both this personal bond and doubtless a shared West Midland background helped Salt here. The Annesleys were an old Nottinghamshire family in origin—Annesley still exists as a place near Hucknall—who had taken a prominent part in the Jacobean and Caroline settlements of Munster and Ulster and had acquired honours in the peerage of Ireland as Barons of Mountnorris in Armagh and Viscounts of Valentia in Kerry. Though failing to acquire an English or United Kingdom peerage, they remained essentially an English noble family, as did the other branches of the Annesley family.⁴ Despite the

¹ For these details of Salt's early years, see the article in *DNB*, i. 212-13 (by Warwick Wroth). The information there is drawn essentially from *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt, Esq., F.R.S. etc., his Britannic Majesty's Late Consul General in Egypt* (2 vols., London, 1834) by J. J. Halls, a relative by marriage of the Salt family and lifelong friend of Henry Salt, to whom the latter entrusted all his letters and correspondence during his lifetime.

² *Voyages and Travels*, ed. 1809 (see below), i. 1.

³ Salt and Lord Valentia had apparently first met at Fuseli's art gallery in Pall Mall in 1799, see Halls, *op. cit.* i. 60-62.

⁴ The collateral branch of the Annesleys which succeeded after 1844 to the viscounty, though not to the earldom, gained the United Kingdom barony of Annesley in 1917, see G.E.C. *et alii*, *The Complete Peerage* . . . (London, 1910-59), xii/ii. 203 ff.

possession of an estate at Camolin Park, County Wexford, the family's principal residence at the beginning of the nineteenth century was at Arley Hall between Kidderminster and Bridgnorth, where Worcestershire, Shropshire and Staffordshire meet, and later in his life, after he had in 1816 succeeded to the earldom and estates, Lord Valentia gradually rebuilt much of Arley Hall in the fortified Norman style and turned it into Arley Castle.¹ Hence Salt's Staffordshire origins, as well as his connection through Thomas Butt, may have commended him to Lord Valentia, whose family seat lay at the southern extremity of the county of Staffordshire; even so, it seems improbable that Lord Valentia, who was himself an educated man, a member of such bodies as the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries and the Linnaean Society,² would have taken into his employment an incompetent or a dunce.

Salt now began an overseas odyssey with Lord Valentia which extended over four years, from leaving London in June 1802 till his return in October 1806, and which embraced the Cape of Good Hope, India and Ceylon, and the Red Sea region, the coastlands and interior of Ethiopia. The fruits of these voyages were written up by Lord Valentia in his *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt in the Years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*, published at London in 1809 in three thick quarto volumes, copiously illustrated with Salt's engravings, mostly topographical in subject, but also including some of local costumes and several impressions of inscriptions and other antiquities, all these being made from Salt's drawings and watercolours.³ Salt apparently enjoyed the companionship of Lord Valentia on a relaxed and intimate basis, and this further proved a means of introduction for him to the highest echelons of the administration and army in India. Their ship the *Minerva* sailed straight out to Bengal, and there Lord Valentia's party was suitably entertained by the Governor-General of the British possessions in India, Lord Valentia's

¹ See the Rev. H. R. Mayo, *The Annals of Arley* (Kidderminster, 1914), pp. 82-84. Arley Castle was demolished in 1962.

² He was especially interested in conchology and had what was reputedly the best collection of shells in England.

³ A more popular edition of 1811, in 4 vols. octavo, omitted all the illustrations.

fellow Irish peer, the Marquess Wellesley, brother of the later Duke of Wellington. Salt became busy sketching and painting scenes of native life on the Hooghly and Ganges, and Lord Valentia wrote concerning this period of time,

On the 18th [February 1803] Mr. Salt returned, much gratified by his visit, as he had not only been treated with an attention flattering to a young man, from a person of Lord Wellesley's elevated rank and acknowledged talents, but had also received the warmest applause from his Excellency and others, for the rapidity and fidelity with which he sketched the scenes from the river, whither he had accompanied them the day after my departure.¹

For the Near Eastern specialist, the interesting part of Lord Valentia's travels is the period spent investigating the region of the Bab el-Mandeb, the straits connecting the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and the adjacent coasts of Yemen and of Ethiopia and the Sudan. The expedition did, indeed, undertake useful hydrographic and other survey work, and it left a lasting record of its presence in the toponymy of the African shores, seen for example in a Valentia Island off the Eritrean coast just south of Massawa, an Annesley Bay and Port Mornington,² and a Wellesley Island off the Sudan coast near Suakin. Although the party touched in at Mocha, it proved impossible to penetrate the interior of Yemen, where the Zaidī Imāms were implacably hostile to all intruders, Turkish or Frankish. Their explorations were accordingly concentrated on the Eritrean coast and the off-shore islands of the Dahlak Archipelago, with an expedition by Salt into the Ethiopian interior. The latter region had of course been visited thirty-five years previously by James Bruce, who had started off from Massawa in November 1769 on his journey to Gondar, Lake Tana and the source of the Blue Nile. In 1805, while Lord Valentia was proceeding to England in order to publicize the benefits of trade between Britain and India, on the one side, and Ethiopia and the Red Sea coastlands, on the other, Salt began a trip, with three European companions, into the heart of northern Ethiopia. Before landing on the mainland, Salt had carried off from the great mosque in Dahlak al-Kabīr, the largest of the Dahlak Islands, those Muslim tombstones with

¹ *Voyages and Travels*, ed. 1809, i. 66, cf. Halls, op. cit. i. 77-78.

² Lord Wellesley had been the second Earl of Mornington in the peerage of Ireland before his elevation in 1797 to the marquessate.

Arabic inscriptions which were portable, and he made drawings of other, larger ones, two of which are reproduced in Lord Valentia's book.¹

Lord Valentia had already been in correspondence with the powerful Ras of the Tigre province of northern Ethiopia, Walda Sellasie. At the Ras's invitation, Salt's group travelled to his headquarters at Antalo, hoping to proceed afterwards from there in a south-westerly direction to the capital Gondar; but they were prevented from doing this by the internecine conflicts of the time (this being the period in Ethiopian history known as "the time of the judges", because, as during the age of the Old Testament judges, "there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes"²). Salt went therefore to Axum and Adowa, the ancient centres of the Ethiopian kingdom, and while there prepared plans of the site of Axum and drawings of such antiquities as the great church there and a granite obelisk, and made copies of Ethiopic and Greek inscriptions.³ At Makalle he witnessed a review by the Ras of the army of Tigre, and saw warrior chiefs with the genitalia of slain enemies dangling from their arms, such mutilation being a custom noted previously by Ludolf amongst the Galla and one still practiced by the Ethiopians during the warfare of 1895 against the Italians.⁴ He also saw the consumption at feasts of the raw beef and hearts of freshly-killed cattle, confirming Bruce's evidence.⁵ Salt was, however, concerned to correct some of the inaccuracies in Bruce's reports.

¹ At pp. 234-5 and 236-7 in vol. i of the *Voyages and Travels*. Four of the Arabic inscriptions of Dahlak, including the two illustrated by Salt, were discussed by R. Basset in his article, "Les inscriptions de l'île de Dahlak", *Journal Asiatique*, 9th series, i (1893), 77-111, more valuable for the history of the island than as an exhaustive account of their epigraphy.

² See E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians, an Introduction to Country and People* (London, 1960), pp. 81-83.

³ See the plan of the ruins of Axum in Lord Valentia, *Voyages and Travels*, ed. 1809, iii, at pp. 82-83. Salt's first impression of the church was "its great resemblance to the Gothic seats of noblemen in England" (ibid. iii. 87).

⁴ And, according to press reports, by the Syrian troops in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 with Israel. Salt's companion in Ethiopia during his travels of 1809-10, Captain Pearce, saw the mutilated genitalia of 1,865 Galla thrown down as battle trophies before the Ras at Zingilla; see Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (see below), pp. 292-3.

⁵ Lord Valentia, *Voyages and Travels*, ed. 1809, iii. 131 ff.

At Dahlak al-Kabīr he could only find less than twenty of the 370 rock-hewn cisterns reported there by Bruce, and doubted whether the latter had really set foot on the island.¹ When at Axum, he was glad to be able to show that the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* was correct in asserting a knowledge of Greek culture at the Axumite court, shown one or two centuries after the *Periplus* by the inscriptions of the Emperor Ēzānā, the Constantine the Great of Ethiopia, some of which Salt examined and recorded. He also poured cold water on the view of Bruce that the ruins of Axum demonstrated cultural connections between Axum and Pharaonic Egypt. Yet although Salt made it his business on this journey into Ethiopia, and on his subsequent one, to verify as much of Bruce's information as he could, and did succeed in correcting various inaccuracies, he gave on the whole a favourable verdict on Bruce's powers of observation.²

As implied above, Lord Valentia's prime aim in despatching Salt into the Ethiopian interior was not scientific investigation so much as the establishment of direct trade with the ancient Christian kingdom, which had been an embattled, isolated power since the Turkish occupation of Massawa and the Eritrean coastlands in the sixteenth century, the period of intense Muslim military pressure, and since the expulsion in the early seventeenth century of the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuits, with its consequent awakening of xenophobia and religious exclusiveness. That nobleman thought that Valentia Island could become a great emporium, as Surat, Bombay and Calcutta had become in India, and he therefore laid a memorial on the subject before the Court of Directors of the East India Company.³ Salt had brought back from Ethiopia a letter from the Emperor Egwāla

¹ Ibid. ii. 236.

² It was an opinion of the editor of Bruce's *Travels*, the Rev. Alexander Murray (on whom see further, below, p. 76), expressed to Salt in a letter of August 1811, that the criticisms of Bruce expressed in Lord Valentia's book were not always merited, and that "Lord Valentia has rather displayed a kind of ostentatious and triumphant pride in conquering Bruce, which resembles that species of glory which the Abyssinian soldiers show when they brandish their spears over the head of the Ras, and throw down the trophies taken from the enemy" (Halls, i. 283-4, see also pp. 315-16).

³ The Directors were not apparently impressed by Lord Valentia's arguments, though they allowed one vessel to be sent direct to the Red Sea, see Halls, i. 140-2.

Şeyon¹ to King George III, together with a present of fine cloth. Lord Valentia now urged that an official embassy from the court of St. James should be sent to that of Ethiopia, and he recommended to the Foreign Secretary, Canning, that Salt was the obvious man to be entrusted with this mission.

Salt accordingly left for Ethiopia in January 1809, charged with the opening of diplomatic relations and with making detailed reports on the state of the country and on the Red Sea coastlands, and especially on their potential as ports of entry for trade.² Unfortunately, internal convulsions again prevented him from penetrating to Gondar, but he was able to hand over the official presents from Britain of richly-ornamented firearms, two light cannon and some ammunition to the Ras of Tigre, Walda Selassie, whom he delighted with a display of fireworks; the first official diplomatic communications between Great Britain and Ethiopia were thus established. During the two years in which he was away from England, he travelled extensively in Tigre and again visited Axum to study its antiquities and inscriptions.³ The topographical and archaeological results of his researches were embodied in his book, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of that Country executed under the Orders of the British Government in the years 1809 and 1810*, published at London in 1814 as a quarto volume, and dedicated to the Prince Regent; as with Lord Valentia's book, this book of Salt's was illustrated with engravings from his own drawings and with many charts and plans.

There was a keen interest at this time in Near Eastern and African exploration, attested by such events as the formation in 1788 of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior of Africa (commonly known as the African Association)

Halls himself points out that Britain's capture from the Dutch of Java in 1811 promised to afford a more convenient source of tropical products, rendering the opening of trade relations with Ethiopia less pressing (i. 232).

¹ Ruled 1801–12; also known in Ethiopian history by the hypocoristic Gwālu and the alternative name of Newāy Sagad, see the tables in M. Chaîne, *La chronologie des temps chrétiens de l'Égypte et de l'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1925), p. 248, and I. Guidi, [*Breve*] *Storia della letteratura etiopica* (Rome, 1932), p. 103.

² Canning's memorandum to Salt is reproduced in Halls, i. 144–6.

³ Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, pp. 221–447; Halls, i. 190–229.

with the aid of Salt's patron and friend, Sir Joseph Banks.¹ It has been mentioned (above, p. 71, n. 3) that Lord Valentia's book was soon reprinted in a cheaper edition; Salt's own travel narrative gained him a lump sum of £800 from the publishers, Rivingtons, plus a royalty on the profits from sales, and in the following year (1815) a German translation was published in Weimar. The value of Salt's book for Ethiopian studies is considerable, not only for his careful elucidation of the geography of northern Ethiopia, but also because, although he never acquired any knowledge himself of the Ethiopian languages,² he was interested in linguistic matters in general, and with the help of local informants collected lists of the basic vocabulary of the two main spoken Semitic languages of Ethiopia, Amharic and Tigrinya, and, furthermore, of such non-Semitic languages as Agaw, Galla and Somali.³ Finally, Salt brought back with him a letter from the Emperor of Ethiopia to George III, written in classical Ethiopic or Ge'ez; this was sent on Salt's advice for translation by the Rev. Alexander Murray of Urr in Kirkcudbrightshire, the editor of Bruce's *Travels*, a scholar in both Ge'ez and Amharic, and subsequently Professor of Oriental Languages in the University of Edinburgh.⁴

With these diplomatic and scholarly attainments behind him at the age of thirty-four years, Salt was a figure of some consequence. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Wellesley, expressed his approbation of Salt's successful conduct of the mission, and the government rewarded him by a grant of £1,000.⁵ Moreover, since he was not yet married, he was free of family responsibilities. It was shortly after the publication of his book that it became known that the Consul-Generalship in Egypt would shortly fall vacant. Colonel Edward Missett, a former officer in the Enniskillen Dragoons, had been British Agent in

¹It was the African Association which was financing the Near Eastern and African journeys of John Lewis Burckhardt (concerning whom see below, p. 80), Burckhardt's great goal in life being that of crossing the Sahara from Egypt or the Maghrib to the Niger.

²And was in this wise inferior to Bruce, who did learn some Amharic.

³*A Voyage to Abyssinia*, Appendix I, pp. i-xxvii.

⁴Halls, i. 238-65, where Murray's translation of the letter is given.

⁵Ibid. i. 231-4.

Egypt since 1803 and then Consul-General there; during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, he had been largely engaged in countering French machinations in the Levant and in extending British influence at the court of the Pasha Muḥammad 'Ali. However, increasing paralysis of the limbs compelled him to resign his position. Salt heard about this, and solicited the interest of friends in high places, including that of Lord Valentia (who had recently become a ministerialist M.P. in the House of Commons and held the government office of governor of County Wexford), the Rt. Hon. Charles Yorke, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, and Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society. Their intercession with the Foreign Secretary Castlereagh was successful, and in May 1815 Salt heard that his claims had been recognized and the appointment secured.¹

The British Consular Service had grown out of the "mercantile consuls" appointed from within their own ranks by locally resident merchants trading in the Mediterranean basin, in northern Europe, etc. Only from 1649 onwards, during the Commonwealth, did the state take a hand in making appointments, so that after this date the consuls, most of whom were stationed at ports around the Mediterranean shores, henceforth had a double allegiance, not only to the concerns of the local English merchants, but also to the wider national interest, its political as well as its commercial aspects. From now onwards until the early decades of the twentieth century, entry into the Consular Service (organized in 1825 by Canning into a salaried and pensioned service, with a separate Consular Department in the Foreign Office) came through nomination and the exercise of the patronage of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. It is not surprising that the Consular Service tended to become in general a haven for younger sons and others less well-provided for by their own families, or else for second-raters who could not make the grade in diplomacy proper; it was low in status compared with the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service, and often wretchedly paid. Nevertheless, it offered a job for life—provided that one could survive in such unhealthy parts of the world as South America, Africa and the Far East—and it furnished

¹ Ibid. i. 403-7.

some local status. Indeed, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Service included in its ranks men of such talents as David Livingstone, Richard Burton, Henry Rawlinson, William Gifford Palgrave, Gordon, Kitchener and James Elroy Flecker.¹

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the consulates of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East were still to a considerable extent establishments of the Levant Company, which was not wound up till 1825; those of Iraq, Persia and the Persian Gulf were wholly maintained by the East India Company down to the 1830s.² However, there was a perceptible tendency for the Crown to involve itself in major consular appointments in the Levant, and British official representation in Istanbul had by the end of the eighteenth century become the province of ambassadors or ministers plenipotentiary largely financed by the government; a complete severance of the diplomatic business in Istanbul and the Levant Company commercial interests was made in 1804.³ The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars had for the first time thrown into relief the strategic importance to Britain of the Near East as the first bulwark of defence for her Indian possessions; Britain had actually fought on Near Eastern soil to foil French designs on Egypt and Syria, and was soon to embark on a diplomatic policy of propping up the moribund Ottoman empire as a barrier to Russian expansionism. It was essentially these strategic considerations which led, for instance, to such a disproportionately large inflation of the British consular and residentiary establishment in Persia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As was the case with Istanbul, Egypt was now seen to be of too great strategic importance for British representation there to be left solely in the hands of the Levant Company. In 1804 also, the Crown appointed Charles Lock to be Consul-General in Egypt, with

¹ For the general background to the development of the Consular Service, see D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825* (London, 1971), chs. 1 and 2.

² *Ibid.* pp. 125 ff.

³ See A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 181-4. Even so, the dragomans attached to the Istanbul Embassy, so vital for the transaction of business with the Porte, continued after 1804 to be appointed and paid by the Company, see A. Cunningham, " ' Dragomania ' : the Dragomans of the British Embassy in Turkey ", *St. Antony's Papers*, xi (1961), 83-4.

salary and expenses to be defrayed by the government; the Levant Company made him free of the Company, elected him as their consul in Cairo also, and placed the vice-consulate in Alexandria under him; Salt was to be similarly treated by the Company.¹ Hence it is clear that the appointment in 1815 to the Cairo post was regarded in Whitehall as one of great importance, and it seems that candidates for it were the object of close scrutiny by the Foreign Secretary. Thus Salt's undoubted capabilities must have weighed considerably in Castlereagh's mind when he appointed him.

He arrived at Alexandria, after a leisurely journey via Italy and Malta, in March 1816, and was welcomed by Colonel Missett, who was soon to leave Egypt and die in Italy, and by Peter Lee, the Levant Company's Vice-Consul in Alexandria. This was a time when British influence was in the ascendant at Muḥammad 'Alī's court, an obvious reflection of the Allies' success in crushing Napoleon's attempted *revanche*. But the maintenance of this influence was also to be favoured by the fact that Salt, as the British Consul-General, was able to reside in Cairo, the seat of the Pasha's court, whereas the other powers, with commercial factors still uppermost in their minds, tended to insist on their Consuls-General being stationed at Alexandria.² Moreover, the interests of Britain's arch-rival France had suffered by the violent changes of régime in France during recent years, the Bourbon Restoration, the Hundred Days, and the second Restoration; the French Consul-General Bernardino Drovetti, being an enthusiastic Bonapartist who only reluctantly re-hoisted the Bourbon white flag on his consulate when the news of Waterloo came through, not surprisingly lost his job in favour of someone more *persona grata* to Louis XVIII.³

¹ Wood, *op. cit.* pp. 185-6.

² Halls, i. 469-70. Ten years later, when Salt was obliged to look after both the Cairo and Alexandria consulates, the Levant Company's vice-consul in the latter port having died suddenly, he had to reside in Alexandria because of commercial needs, but he complained to Lord Mountnorris in a letter dated 10 April 1826 that this was very much to the detriment of British interests, "as the Pasha now stays entirely at Cairo, and is surrounded by French agents and partizans" (Halls, ii. 261).

³ See the article on Drovetti in *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, xi (Paris, 1967), cols. 836-7.

When Salt took up his post, there was no special consular building in Cairo; all through the nineteenth century, indeed, consuls in many of the smaller centres had to conduct official business from their own homes. Salt established himself temporarily in a ramshackle and excessively hot house in Būlāq, but then, after five uncomfortable months there, he secured from the Pasha the lease of a house which was more commodious and more suitable as a consulate, and which was situated in the rapidly-expanding Frankish district of Ezbekiyya and Mūsķī. The contemporary Egyptian historian ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Jabartī records under the year 1817 that he went in the company of another Egyptian shaikh and “Shaikh Ibrāhīm”, sc. the Swiss explorer and traveller John Lewis Burckhardt, to visit the English consul in the “Street of the Nubians”, *Darb al-Barābira*, near Ezbekiyya; the street is still known as such today, though the buildings now on it obviously date from a later period than this.¹

Salt had understood that his emoluments as Consul-General would be in the region of £1,700 per annum. Until Canning’s Consular Act of 1825, consuls were remunerated partly by official salaries paid out of the Civil List, but mainly by fees extracted from merchants and other British nationals and protected persons in need of consular services.² Salt’s diplomatic efforts in Ethiopia and his work as an author had brought him some money, but he was not a rich man, and the death of his father in May 1817, bringing him £5,000, was in this respect welcome. His official salary proved in practice to be only £1,500. He had paid £400 to the outgoing Consul-General Missett for the latter’s furniture and effects; his house in the Mūsķī required extensive repairs; and he had to keep an extensive household of servants. By December 1816 his salary was three-quarters in arrears, and he seems to have struggled through only by means of financial help from Samuel Briggs, doyen of the British merchant community in Alexandria.³

¹ ‘*Ajā’ib al-āthār*, ed. Cairo 1322/1904, iv. 304 = ed. Cairo 1377-86/1958-67, vii. 419.

² See Platt, *op. cit.* pp. 30 ff.

³ Halls, i. 462, 467-8, 484-5. For Briggs, see S. Searight, *The British in the Middle East* (London, 1969), pp. 97-8; it was he who in 1821 took a consignment of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s long-staple cotton to Lancashire, thereby initiating a link between the cotton plantations of the delta and the Lancashire industry.

However, he soon became secure enough financially for him to be able to pursue his archaeological and Egyptological interests. He had to keep British political and commercial interests before Muḥammad 'Alī's eyes, but this responsibility and the care of the small British community in Cairo¹ left him plenty of time for his own pursuits, above all for the searching-out of Egyptian antiquities. In later years, Salt was to claim that his expenses for the excavation and transportation of antiquities back to Europe were so great that he was a net loser rather than gainer from all these transactions, despite the high prices which he received at the end of his life. His French counterparts, such as Drovetti and the Vice-Consul Asselin de Cherville, were driven almost willy-nilly to the commercial exploitation of the ancient Egyptian heritage, since, on account of the political upheavals in France, their official salaries rarely came through at all.

Before leaving England, Salt had been commissioned by Sir Joseph Banks to collect "antiquities and curiosities" for the British Museum, of which Banks was one of the Trustees, a task which Salt took up, says his biographer, "with all the natural warmth and ardour of his character".² William Hamilton, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office and author of a comprehensive work on Egyptian antiquities, his *Remarks on Several Parts of Turkey. Part I. Aegyptiaca: an Account of the Antient and Modern State of Egypt, as obtained in the years 1801, 1802* (London 1809), encouraged him officially also, and a Foreign Office memorandum of August 1815 stated that "whatever might be the expense of the undertaking, whether successful or otherwise, it would be most cheerfully supported by an enlightened nation, eager to anticipate its Rivals in the prosecution of the best interests of science and literature", an airy statement which was later to conflict sharply with the

¹ It is worth noting, however, that though there were few British people in Cairo, the inflation in number of those entitled to British consular protection and capitulatory privileges, the rights which were to be so strongly defended by Palmerston in the Don Pacifico case, was already beginning; Salt wrote in 1822 that he had under his care in Cairo some 300 Levantines, Maltese, Ionians, etc. (Halls, ii. 195).

² Ibid. i. 485.

realities of official niggardliness.¹ Salt had further been asked by Lord Valentia (who had in July 1816 succeeded to the earldom of Mountnorris) to collect Egyptian antiquities for his museum at Arley Hall, and ancient coins for his young son George, the new Viscount Valentia.²

Egypt was already in the eighteenth century well on the way to becoming a happy hunting ground for antiquarians, and few travellers who passed through the land and sailed up the Nile to Upper Egypt or even Nubia failed to have their enthusiasm fired by the tangible and visible relics of ancient Egyptian civilization. Several of these travellers published reproductions of hieroglyphs, and already in 1768 James Bruce, en route from Alexandria to Aswan, identified the three stages in the evolution of Egyptian writing, the hieroglyphic, the hieratic and the demotic, though he called them "hieroglyphics, the Mummy character, and the Ethiopic". Medical men had dissected mummies in an endeavour to ascertain the embalming secrets of the Egyptians. Above all, the Pyramids had already exercised their fascination for the credulous and cranky. Swayed by reminiscences of the contest before Pharaoh between Moses and Aaron on one side, and the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt on the other (Exod. vii. 8-12), these people often saw in Egypt the home of all ancient magical lore and regarded the Pyramids as its supreme embodiment, the elucidation of whose real significance would prove a source of illumination to mankind. Thus well before the appearance of the band of French savants accompanying Napoleon's expedition of 1798, and their heroic work of recording and investigation later embodied in the *Description de l'Égypte*, the bases of modern Egyptology had been well laid.³

Indeed, Salt was very soon complaining to his gentlemanly

¹ Cited by Mayes, *The Great Belzoni*, p. 114.

² Halls, i. 464-5. A further interesting commission to Salt was that of the Earl of Morton and some other gentlemen, who asked Salt to procure some stallions and mares of the Sudanese Dongola breed; over the following years, Salt managed to send back, in British naval vessels, various horses of this type, see Halls, ii. 172-3, 246, 265-7.

³ See for a brief survey of the development in this period of the science of Egyptology, J. D. Wortham, *British Egyptology 1549-1906* (Norman, Okla., 1971). pp. 24 ff., and also Searight, *op. cit.* pp. 145-9.

patrons back in England that the field for antiquities—he probably meant the more easily portable ones such as coins, figurines and similar objets d’art—was drying up, and that the activities of seasoned collectors like Drovetti and Asselin had skimmed off the cream. In a letter to Lord Mountnorris dated 28 December 1816, Salt wrote that:

For some time after my arrival, owing to the plague, I met with no antiques, which are become difficult to purchase; and I found that Monsieur Drovetti, the quondam French consul, was in Upper Egypt, buying up everything there to complete a collection upon which he has been engaged some years. This collection, which I have lately had an opportunity of examining, contains a great variety of curious articles, and some of extraordinary value. . . . The whole is intended for sale, and I have tried to persuade him to send proposals to the British Museum: but do not know whether it is rich enough to buy it. The collection, I imagine, will not be sold for less than three or four thousand pounds.¹

Two years later, Salt wrote in another letter sent back to Arley of “all the world having begun to look after antiques, and Drovetti having employed half a dozen agents”.² In 1819 there was, in fact, a fracas at Karnak, in which firearms were put up and fired, between Salt’s colleague Belzoni (on whom see below) and Drovetti’s men.³ In the same letter of December 1816, Salt wrote that he had got some coins for the young Lord Valentia, but that good ones were scarce.⁴ Lord Mountnorris had obviously enquired about the possibility of getting a mummy sent from Egypt to England, and the problems involved in this had been exercising Salt’s mind. He wrote back,

As to sending a mummy entire, it is almost impossible, owing to the objections made by the captains of ships to carry them. There are some at Alexandria that have waited four years. If I can get a good head, you may depend on having it, and with respect to the cases I hope there will be no difficulty. . . .⁵

Transporting the plundered antiquities back to Europe was, indeed, the great problem facing all collectors. By the spring of 1817, Salt had procured through his agent in Upper Egypt, a Mr. Riley, many specimens from Nubia and Thebes for Lord Mountnorris; these were carefully packed on despatch from Alexandria, but the cases were opened up at Malta and the

¹ Halls, i. 472–3.

² Letter of 7 August 1818, cited *ibid.* i. 494.

³ *Ibid.* ii. 215.

⁴ *Ibid.* i. 473, see also ii. 219, 221.

⁵ *Ibid.* i. 473–4.

specimens badly damaged.¹ A similar fate befell antiquities gathered in Upper Egypt by another of Salt's contacts, the Earl Belmore and his family, who in 1817 successfully travelled up the Nile beyond Aswan to the Second Cataract, being the first British travellers to enter the Pyramid of Chephren and to see the tomb of Seti I at Thebes. Again at Malta, Lord Belmore's cases were opened up, figurines broken to pieces and papyri ground to dust; from an apparent dread of handling such articles in quarantine, these had all been simply tipped out on the ground.²

Nevertheless, despite Salt's gloomy forecasts and the hazards of return transport, his work both for Lord Mountnorris and in the assembling of a personal collection proceeded apace. Over the next few years, Salt's fortunes as a collector were to be closely intertwined with the remarkable personality of Giovanni Battista Belzoni. Belzoni was a native of Padua who had come to England in 1803, where he had performed in theatres for Charles Dibdin, as a strong man, the "Patagonian Sampson", and as the Giant (with Grimaldi as his dwarf) in *Jack the Giant Killer* at the new Saddlers' Wells. He eventually returned to Italy, and in Malta was recruited by an agent of Muḥammad 'Alī's as an expert on hydraulic machinery for irrigation purposes, this being an interest from his early years in Italy. Belzoni planned to construct an improved type of water-wheel which, with only a single ox to work it, would raise as much water as five or six of the usual Egyptian *sāqiyas* and would irrigate the Pasha's gardens. He installed himself in Cairo, but through prejudice and misfortune, his project came to grief, and he was left with his wife stranded and penniless in a foreign land.³

¹ Some more robust specimens reached England safely, however; Mayo, in his history of the parish of Arley, mentions concerning Lord Mountnorris's seat there that "Two hawk-headed statues of Egyptian Deities in black basalt guarded the entrance of the Castle" (*The Annals of Arley*, p. 82 note). Salt was also successful eventually in transporting some mummies back to England; the catalogue of the posthumous sale of his third collection (see below, p. 91) contains half-a-dozen or more mummies, one of which, the mummy of a lady and case (No. 150 of Sotheby's catalogue, given in d'Athanasī's book, see below, loc. cit.), fetched £105.

² Halls, i. 486-9.

³ For Belzoni's early life, and also his subsequent activities in Egypt, see Mayes's biography, *The Great Belzoni*.

It was a stroke of fortune that the interests of Belzoni, Salt and the third member of this trio of pioneer explorers of Egypt and its antiquities, John Lewis Burckhardt, came together at this point. Burckhardt and Belzoni, both of them refugees from French aggression in their native lands, had already become friends, and now in 1816 Salt and Burckhardt evolved the design of employing Belzoni's engineering skills for cutting away and transporting down the river the massive granite head at Thebes of the so-called 'Young Memnon', actually Ramses II, in the temple of Ramses II which Strabo had called the Memnonium and Diodorus Siculus the Tomb of Ozymandias. With the aid of timber baulks and rollers, and of palm-fibre ropes, sent up the Nile from Būlāq, Belzoni managed within only six weeks to transport the massive head, weighing some seven or eight tons, on a primitive trolley to the river bank, whence it was shipped downstream to Alexandria and was eventually presented by Salt and Burckhardt to the British Museum.¹

The whole operation constituted a tour-de-force on Belzoni's part. Unfortunately, it marked the beginning of acrimony and squabbles between him and Salt which went on till Belzoni's tragic death in Benin in 1823. The actual details of the business relationship between Salt and Belzoni had been left regrettably vague. Salt had promised him all reasonable expenses and gave him a small sum with which to purchase antiquities in Upper Egypt, for whom or for what institution was not made clear. A signed agreement made at the Cairo consulate in April 1818, whereby Salt undertook to pay Belzoni £500 over and above his expenses and within the next twelve months, did little permanently to clarify the situation.² Salt later insisted that Belzoni had been merely his paid agent. Belzoni gave a preliminary report of his successes in Egypt in a communication to *The Quarterly Review* of Spring 1818, thereby acquiring a great contemporary fame in Europe, and later in his book he claimed that since no specific payment for his services was mentioned, he could not be considered as a hired servant. But in 1821, after the publication by John Murray in the previous

¹ Halls, i. 489 ff., ii. 31-6; Mayes, op. cit. pp. 115-31.

² Halls, ii. 27-30; Mayes, op. cit. p. 208.

year of Belzoni's *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs, and Excavations, in Egypt and Nubia . . .*, with its criticisms of Salt, Salt published a rebuttal, "A Plain Statement of Facts", explaining Belzoni's rôle as essentially that of agent and employee.¹ A complication was the fact that both Burckhardt and Salt had given Belzoni a total of £100 in the latter part of 1816, and it was unclear what the sum represented; was it for the acquisition of objects for Salt's private collection of antiquities, or was it for a national collection like that of the British Museum, as Belzoni thought, visualizing his name being as firmly attached to a great Egyptological collection as was the name of Lord Elgin to the collection of sculptures which that Scottish nobleman had brought back only a few years previously? The entire controversy was a portent of the confusions and difficulties which were to surround Salt in his later years. Was he a purely private collector, for himself and his aristocratic patrons, or did the vague commissions given to him by Hamilton and Bankes imply that the nation, in effect the British Museum, had a prior claim on his acquisitions, and that it accordingly had a moral obligation to reimburse Salt for what were undoubtedly heavy expenses in obtaining and shipping home the antiquities?

Meanwhile, spurred on by fears that the former French Consul Drovetti, now in the employment of Muḥammad 'Alī, would make a clean sweep in Upper Egypt, and in particular, at Thebes, Salt in the latter part of 1816 further commissioned Belzoni to work at Thebes. Drovetti had secured a monopoly of all local labour at Karnak, but Belzoni nonetheless managed to get a foothold and obtain several important specimens, including a colossal head of red granite and an arm, later known to be those of Thothmes III, which he transported to his riverside dump at Luxor. His greatest triumphs at this time were, however, at Abu Simbel, where he and Salt's agent Henry Beechey in July-August 1817 cleared the façade of sand and excavated the great rock temple of Ramses II, and penetrated to its interior. The mural painting of this tomb's interior were to prove of immense importance for our knowledge of Egyptian history,

¹ This is printed in Halls, ii. 3 ff., see also i. 497-8.

even though the tomb did not yield for Belzoni very many of the portable objects especially sought after by collectors. But above all, Belzoni discovered in October 1817, at the Valley of the Kings, in the western part known as Bībān al-Mulūk, the most magnificent of all the tombs there, that of Seti I, father of Ramses II, buried c. 1300 B.C.¹ The superb, translucent alabaster sarcophagus was eventually in 1824 sold by Salt's London agent for £2,000 to Sir John Soane for his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where it can still be seen in the Soane Museum.

Salt came himself to Upper Egypt at the end of 1817, accompanying Lord Belmore's party, and made sketches and plans which he sent back to England (many of these were regrettably lost). Salt and Briggs of Alexandria also financed in 1818 the excavations of a Genoese sea-captain with antiquarian interests, G. B. Caviglia, around the Sphinx at Giza, a work begun several years before by French engineers, but abandoned on their departure in 1801. The intrepid Caviglia had already in January 1817 worked in the Pyramid of Cheops, descending over 120 feet on ropes into the so-called "well", and penetrating to the so-called "descending corridor". Salt and Briggs had therefore agreed to pay the expenses of Caviglia's making a proper examination of the well and corridor, although the first investigation had shown that the burial chamber had long since been denuded and robbed of treasures. The clearing-away of immense quantities of sand from the Sphinx's forequarters turned out to cost 18,000 piastres, some £4,500 sterling. Caviglia, to whom the disposal of all portable objects had been conceded, generously presented his finds at various sites in Giza to the British Museum, since he had sailed under the British flag.²

Salt further employed in the period after he had broken with Belzoni a Greek consular attendant from Lemnos called Yanni Athanasiou, better known under the italianized form of his name, Giovanni d'Athanasi, who had passed from the service of Colonel Missett into that of Salt. He acted as interpreter for

¹ For Belzoni's remarkable achievements at this time, see Mayes, *op. cit.* pp. 132 ff.

² For these activities of Caviglia, see Halls, ii. 64-103, and Mayes, *op. cit.* p. 154. There is no entry on Caviglia in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, and the new *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* has not yet reached letter C.

Belzoni and Salt in Upper Egypt in 1817, and after Salt's death in 1827, came to England to supervise the sale of Salt's third collection of antiquities and the preparation of the catalogue. He was subsequently to publish a book, *A Brief Account of the Researches and Discoveries in Upper Egypt made under the Direction of Henry Salt, Esq.* (London, 1836), which is in reality semi-autobiographical; he plays up his own role in events as Salt's faithful agent, and denigrates the work of Belzoni.

By 1818 Salt's thoughts were turning to the disposal of his first collection of antiquities, for he had in his two years in Egypt laid out a great deal of his own money, spending half of his father's legacy within one year. He wrote to his old friend William Hamilton at the Foreign Office in June 1818 enclosing a roughly-calculated price list, with such items as the head of Thothmes III and its arm at £500 and £50 respectively; but he suggested that if the government would agree to buy his collection, for the British Museum and the Royal Academy, then Hamilton himself or any other scholar nominated by the government should value it properly. The estimated value of the whole collection was c. £8,000, which Salt recognized was probably an exaggerated figure. Unfortunately for him, when the contents of the letter were injudiciously publicized in Britain, there was an outcry in London that Salt was a second Lord Elgin trying to foist on the country an over-valued collection (in reality, Lord Elgin had spent on his marbles more than the £35,000 which he received for them). In the period of post-war financial economy, and with the British Museum building already over-crowded, the Trustees rejected Salt's collection, Sir Joseph Banks being adamant against its purchase. Even so, Charles Yorke told Banks that it would be "an indelible disgrace" if the collection were to go to a foreign museum. Salt, for his part, having so far received nothing at all for his efforts, was ready to accept unconditionally any offer which the Museum might make, especially as in December 1819 he married an Italian lady of Alexandria, and with the speedy birth of a daughter, he acquired family responsibilities. Between 1819 and 1821 his treasures were brought to the Museum from Alexandria in British naval vessels; Banks died; and protracted negotiations went on till

February 1823, when Salt agreed to accept £2,000 making a total received by him of £4,000, half from the Museum and half from Sir John Soane for the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I.¹

Salt's last years were clouded with ill-health and personal misfortune. He felt embittered over the way in which the British Museum Trustees had treated him, since he believed that Bankes in particular had specifically commissioned him to collect for them. He also considered that Belzoni, with his success over his book (which had been immediately translated into French, German and Italian, the first of these versions with the anti-French references somewhat toned down) and his renowned exhibition of Egyptian antiquities at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly,² had enjoyed all the credit for the discoveries, and he referred to Belzoni in a letter to Bingham Richards, his London agent, as "that prince of ungrateful adventurers". He suffered the loss of his wife in 1824, leaving him with his young daughter, and his consular colleague in Alexandria, Peter Lee, also died.³

He busied himself by writing a long, descriptive poem in three cantos called *Egypt*; it was privately printed at Alexandria in 1824 under the *nom-de-plume* of "A Traveller", and in the foreword he stated that "This Poem was printed with a view to divert the Author's attention whilst suffering under severe affliction . . .".⁴ He had for some time been attracted by the question of the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, after the pioneer work of Thomas Young, who had worked from a bilingual Greek and hieroglyphic inscription on an obelisk belonging to William John Bankes, and had correctly identified certain proper names and enunciated several of the basic rules about hieroglyphic writing and its connection with the scripts later developing from it. He was also much impressed by Champollion's progress in the field, and in 1825 he published in London his own *Essay on Dr. Young's and M. Champollion's*

¹ Halls, ii. 238. For the whole story of Salt's attempts to sell his first collection, see Mayes, *op. cit.* pp. 264-8, 272, 275-7, 289-90.

² For details of this Exhibition, which was remarkable for its time in that Belzoni, with characteristic showman's flair, had plaster models made of the Second Pyramid, Abu Simbel, the tomb of Seti I, etc., see *ibid.* pp. 257 ff.

³ Halls, ii. 225 ff.

⁴ It is printed, as an appendix, in *ibid.* ii. 387-420.

Phonetic System of Hieroglyphics; with some additional discoveries, by which it may be applied to decipher the names of the ancient kings of Egypt and Ethiopia. Publication of this book had been delayed by his family troubles, and Salt realized that Champollion had secured in his *Précis du système hiéroglyphique* (Paris, 1824) prior publication of several conclusions reached by both of them independently; nevertheless, he wanted the intellectual satisfaction of seeing his own views in print.¹

Between the years 1819 and 1824 Salt had managed, with the help of d'Athanasi, to put together a second collection of Egyptian antiquities. He was willing at one point to present this collection to the British Museum in return for a government pension of £600 per annum,² but in the end it was the French crown which bought it in 1826 for £10,000, Champollion himself acting as the agent, and this collection came therefore to enrich the Louvre.³

Salt seems to have borne the burden of looking after both the Cairo and Alexandria consulates for the remaining three years of his life. The last of these years was momentarily brightened by the arrival in Cairo on a mission from the ruler of Tigre, Dejatch Sabagadis, of his old friend William Coffin, who had elected to stay behind at Adowa with the Ras Walda Sellasie in Ethiopia seventeen years previously when Salt was there on his diplomatic mission.⁴ Coffin was actually with Salt when the latter died of a chronically-diseased spleen at Dasūq in the Nile Delta in October 1827 aged only 48 years. He was buried at Alexandria, his kinsman the Rev. Thomas Butt composing a lengthy, eulogistic epitaph for his grave.⁵

Hence like so many of His Majesty's consuls who spent long periods of their service in unhealthy stations—and Salt had been

¹ See Salt's letter to William Hamilton on this subject, in Halls, ii. 239–41. It is interesting to note that en route for Egypt in 1816, Salt had met the Swedish diplomat Johan David Åkerblad, one of the pioneer scholars who attempted to decipher hieroglyphics, see *ibid.* i. 441.

² *Ibid.* ii. 245–6. Since Salt's life was so prematurely cut short, this arrangement would have proved an excellent bargain for the British government.

³ *Ibid.* ii. 251–2, 259–60, 262–5.

⁴ *Ibid.* i. 213, 482, ii. 270–1; the frontispiece to the second volume of Halls shows Coffin in Ethiopian dress.

⁵ Reproduced in Halls, ii. 287–8.

in Egypt for over eleven years continuously¹—Salt fell victim to disease. He did, however, gain two worthwhile minor niches in history, the first on the British scene as the first British envoy to Ethiopia, “that barbarised Christian Land” as his epitaph put it, and the second one in the wider cultural sphere as a collector of and entrepreneur in Egyptian antiquities, enriching the museums of both London and Paris (a third collection of antiquities put together by Salt during his last years was sold posthumously by Sotheby’s in 1835 for £7,168 18s. 6d.; and two-thirds of this were acquired by the British Museum²; he also forwarded to Britain at various times collections of Egyptian flora, algae and minerals, much of which eventually passed into the possession of the nation³). To sum up, Henry Salt is a figure of interest both as a minor British proconsul and as a pioneer Egyptologist.

¹ He had obtained home leave from Castlereagh in December 1820, but had been unable to take it because of diplomatic apprehensions over Russian designs in the Near East.

² A lengthy appendix to d’Athanasī’s *A Brief Account of the Researches and Discoveries in Upper Egypt made under the Direction of Henry Salt, Esq.* (see above, p. 88), at pp. 149–226, comprises a catalogue of the three days’ sale at Sotheby’s, with the selling prices marked.

³ See *DNB*, art. s.v. Some of the mineral specimens forwarded by Salt in May 1820 had been actually collected by Burckhardt and entrusted to Salt, see Halls, ii. 165–6.