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EXHIBITION,

47, LEICESTER SQUARE.

ZODIAC OF DENDERA.

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EPITOME

OF THE CELEBRATED

SCULPTURED ZODIAC OF DENDERA,

SO FAMOUS IN

EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITY,

On which it is conjectured the present system of Astronomy was founded.

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CURSORY REMARKS
ON
THE ZODIAC OF DENDERA.

As a more ample publication respecting this extraordinary relique of antiquity is now in the Press, and will soon be ready for publication, the present cursory review of this subject is deemed sufficient for the purposes of the present exhibition.

The city of Dendera, formerly called Tentyra, or Tentyris, stood near the Cataracts of the Nile, on the boundary of the Desert, upon one of the Lybian Mountains, the base of which is watered by the overflowings of the Nile at the periods of its inundations. The existing city is not more than twenty minutes walk from the ancient ruins, and is called *Berbe*, a word equally applied to all vestiges of antiquity, by the inhabitants.

Dendera is particularly mentioned by Pliny, Strabo, Seneca, and many other ancient writers, while Bruce, referring to those magnificent ruins, says, "That monument creates a most singular and imposing effect, when first examined, but the impression produced is similar to that we experience on contemplating a very lofty mountain, of which we preserve but a confused idea."

In 1799, when the French proceeded up the Nile, for the purpose of penetrating into Upper Egypt, under the command of General Desaix, they arrived at the ruins of Dendera, on which occasion, says that General, the emotion produced throughout the army under my command was so extraordinary, that the whole force stood speechless, penetrated by one pervading sentiment of awe and admiration.

It was during the examination of those stupendous ruins that the virtuous and gallant Desaix discovered the circular Zodiac, which now forms so conspicuous a figure in the cabinet of antiques in the Royal Library at Paris. As from the period of the first discovery of the Planisphere, no idea existed of its removal to Europe, Bonaparte, on returning to France, from Egypt, felt desirous that a fac simile of that monument should be preserved, for which purpose M. J. J. Castex, of Toulouse, who had accompanied the Egyptian expedition and procured a model on the spot, executed this beautiful work in Carrara marble, which was completed in 1819.

After passing the grand entrance of the temple of Dendera, which is imposing beyond description, appears the great portico, presenting an entablature elevated sixty feet from the ground, and supported by six colossal statues, representing the divinity Isis. The exterior as well as the interior of the walls are ornamented by sculptures of their full heights, and all the pillars present similar carvings, that were originally coloured, as numerous specimens still remain, the painting of which has not been obliterated by the lapse of revolving ages.



One of the Zodiacs is placed beneath the portico, and sculptured on the lateral side, six of the signs appearing on a fillet that projects from the temple, headed by the sign of the lion, while the remaining six are sculptured on a parallel fillet entering the temple; so that the twelve signs, as delineated on that Zodiac, together with an immense number of emblematical figures, form a long procession of variegated objects.

On the terrace of the temple is a pavillion, consisting of three small chambers, in one of which was placed the original Zodiac, from whence the present sculpture was executed, forming part of the ceiling.

It was M. Saulnier who first conceived an idea of the possibility of detaching the original Planisphere from the place it had occupied for so many centuries in the apartment at Dendera. Circumstances intervening to impede that gentleman's undertaking the labour in person, he associated himself with M. Lelorrain, who, in 1820, repaired to Egypt, and after immense labour and difficulty, effected the removal of the monument in question. Some time subsequent to the arrival of the Planisphere in France it was purchased by Louis XVIII. for the sum of 150,000 francs, about £6500 sterling, and after being publicly exposed for a time at the Louvre, was ultimately consigned to the place it now occupies in the Public Library at Paris. Being thus in possession of the original Zodiac, the French Government declined ratifying the agreement previously entered into by Bonaparte for the purchase of M. Castex's sculpture, who, nevertheless, proceeded to finish his labour, soon after the termination of which he died. A spirited English speculator then presented himself as purchaser of this unique and

beautiful copy of the Dendera Monument, in order that it might become the property of the British nation, should Government think fit to purchase the same, or else fall into the hands of some private individual, being a unique gem worthy to grace the first collection in this or any other country.

Few monuments of antiquity have created so much noise in the scientific world as the circular Zodiac of Dendara; volumes, pamphlets, and countless memoirs, have issued from the French press on that interesting subject, of which we shall proceed to quote some of the most prominent.

M. Dupuis, in a Memoire that appeared in 1806, pretends that the Planisphere was coeval with the date of the renewal of the *solstitial period*, making its antiquity refer back to *thirteen thousand years anterior to the present time*.

M. Visconti, in opposition to the last-mentioned writer, conceives that the Zodiac was a work of the Greeks, and that it represents the sphere as laid down by *Eudoxus* and *Aratus* only, *thirteen hundred years prior to the vulgar era*. This dissimilarity of opinion gave rise to various pamphlets, wherein those gentlemen strenuously supported their respective assertions with that deep learning and acumen which might naturally be expected from such consummate talents.

M. Abbe de Halma, another opponent of *M. Dupuis*, displayed great warmth in his arguments, being, as an ecclesiastic, particularly incensed at the idea of the attack thus levelled by the latter gentleman at the Mosaic tradition of the creation of the world. He then proceeds to show

that the *Planisphere* must have been sculptured subsequent to the year 364 of the *Christian Era*, but with little appearance of truth, as in order to allow the feasibility of his arguments, we must admit, as facts, the premises on which he grounds his hypothesis, whereas no such proofs are adduced.

In his vindictive rage, the *Abbe Halma* calls the *Planisphere* a *nasty black stone*, while he laments it was ever conveyed to France, as on that account so much admiration has been excited for the reliques of Egypt, which, according to that writer, present no one object worthy of imitation, while the study of Greek and Roman antiquities is, in consequence, completely abandoned.

In 1822, *M. St. Martin* read a disquisition to the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres, in the course of which he endeavoured to show that the *Sign* of the *Balance* was an invention of the Egyptians, only 1200 years before Christ; that they placed that Constellation in the part of the heavens previously occupied by the claws of Scorpio, and that consequently the *Balance* being delineated on the *Planisphere* it could not date antecedent to the above period. These arguments, however, of *M. St. Martin*, with others who endeavoured to show that the *Balance* was invented to compliment *Augustus*, were completely refuted by *M. Dupuis*, who, in a most elaborate work on the origin of the Constellations, proves, to demonstration, the remote antiquity of the sign of the *Balance* found in Egyptian and Indian monuments; while to invalidate the idea of the *Balance* being introduced in the Augustan age, Tarrutius Firmanus predicted the future glory of Rome, in consequence of its having been founded when the Moon was in the sign of the *Balance*.

M. Biot, another literary gentleman, who entered the lists, concluded, from his observations on several of the leading objects delineated on the Zodiac, that it referred to the year 716 before Christ.

M. Champollion, the younger, asserts that the Planisphere is not a monument of Astronomy, but refers to *judicial Astrology*, and that an object of Egyptian worship has, therefore, been misconstrued as an *Astronomical sign*.

In the arguments of *M. Francœur*, who supports the antiquity of the Zodiac, he arraigns the opinions published by *M. Visconti*, stating that the Greeks were unacquainted with hieroglyphic symbols, and that consequently it was impossible they should have covered thousands of square feet with sculptured characters of that description. He moreover states, that the Zodiacs of Dendara bear no similitude to those of the moderns, and that the *Greek Sagittarius*, as in the Planisphere, is neither *winged*, nor does it display *two faces*, &c. &c.

M. Jomard, who combats the opinion of *M. Biot*, respecting the Zodiac being a developement of the celestial spheres, concludes by inclining towards a belief of the *remote antiquity of the sculpture*, and adds, that it would be extremely difficult to support the opinions of *M. Visconti* in regard to its Greek origin.

M. Le Prince is of opinion that the Planisphere represents the heavenly bodies as they appeared to the natives of Egypt, *eight centuries prior to our æra*, when the *solstitial colure* divided *Cancer* in the *middle*.

M. de Paravey after endeavouring to refute the calculations of *M. Biot*, and the system of *projection* indicated by *M. Delambre*, conceives that the Dendera Zodiac presents only the plan laid down by *Hipparchus*, the same as appears figured on the *Farnesian Globe*.

M. Alexander Lenoir considers the monument of Denderah a calendar, wherein are traced the solar, rural, and civil or religious years, and ascribes to it no greater antiquity than the age of *Bocchorus*, who reigned over Egypt about 770 years previous to our æra.

Independent of the above Gentlemen, many learned foreigners have also occupied their attention on the subject of the Dendera Planisphere, and in particular, *M. L'Abbe Testa*, as well as *M. Sickler*, who inserted a learned dissertation in the *Algemein Litteratur* of Halle.

SUMMARY.

After the numerous disquisitions that have appeared, the general opinion entertained by the *Savans* of Paris concerning the Circular Zodiac of Dendera, is, that the monuments of antiquity in Egypt present three stages of

Architecture. The first, and most ancient being apparent in the ruins of the palaces of *Karnac*, *Luxor*, *Medinet-Abou*, and *Thebes*, with the temples of *Isamboul*, *Derhi*, *Amada*, and *Girsghi*, in Nubia, wherein are sculptures which, by means of the *Phonetic Alphabet of Hieroglyphics*, are found to contain the names of the earliest kings of Egypt. The next remains are those of *Dakhi*, *Calabschi*, *Ombos*, and *Etfu*, belonging to the second period of Egyptian Art, which display names of the Grecian Kings and Queens who reigned while Egypt continued under the dominion of the Greeks, and lastly, the ruins of edifices erected during the sovereignty of the Roman Emperors, among which is ranked the *Temple of Dendera*, supposed to have been built under the reigns of *Tiberius*, *Claudius*, *Nero*, and *Domitian*. Without seeking to annex to that magnificent ruin the high antiquity ascribed to it by *M. Dupius* and others, we cannot, however, refrain from stating that this general belief entertained on the part of the French, does not appear by any means conclusive. Under the dominion of the Emperors above specified, there existed so many historians—and the most trifling events are so minutely recorded, that it appears not merely improbable, but almost impossible, a structure of such immense magnitude as the Temple of Dendera, and which must necessarily have occupied so much time in the building, should have remained unnoticed by all the writers who flourished during the progress of its completion. As the present is intended for a mere outline of the numerous statements elicited by the leading men of science respecting the subject in question, and as the limits of this pamphlet do not enable us to extend the subject matter, we refer the curious and critical enquirer to the volume that will very shortly appear, accompanied by a view of the entrance of the temple, and a fac

simile of the Zodiac, wherein the arguments on all sides are more enlarged upon, accompanied by additional statements, that may tend perhaps to throw some new lights on the subject of the Zodiac of Dendera.