



Victorian gallery: Louisa Tenison's photographic and mixed-media album, 1864-74

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DURING THE 1860S AND '70S, A SMALL CIRCLE OF ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN CREATED photo-collage albums which demonstrated a highly creative and sophisticated interaction with the photographic medium.¹ Their combination of photographic portraits, watercolours and line drawings to create elaborate page layouts can be viewed as an attempt to personalise the studio *carte-de-visite* format, the production of which reached a peak during the decades in which these albums were compiled. While some created fantastical and surreal scenarios, distorting perspective and scale and subverting the realistic nature of photography, others chose to arrange their images in highly complex geometric patterns. This cutting-up and rearrangement of photographs, when employed in the following century by fine artists, was heralded as a challenge to traditional practice, offering a new perspective on painting.² However, due to their domestic production and consumption, earlier female protagonists of photo-collage have traditionally been overlooked by historians and their output consigned to the maligned category of 'ladies' amusements'. This article will explore a rare surviving Irish album that uniquely combines the modern medium of *carte-de-visite* portraiture with traditional medieval manuscript illumination, constituting a singular example of Victorian photo-collage.

The album in question was created by Lady Louisa King Tenison (1819-1882) of Kilronan Castle, county Roscommon (Plate 1), between 1864 and 1874 (National Photographic Archive, Dublin, Album 295).³ Significantly, her novel use of illuminated medieval designs and patterns to augment the display of *cartes-de-visite* does not appear to have been employed by any of her contemporaries.⁴ Although Louisa created albums throughout her life, the one discussed here is the only volume held in a public institu-

1 – Lady Louisa Tenison, Album p.42 showing Louisa Tenison; border derived from *THE BOOK OF DURROW*, 1864-74, albumen print with watercolour and ink (National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy National Library of Ireland)



2 – Lady Louisa Tenison, *Album p.43 showing six carte-de-visite portraits of female sitters*
1864-74, albumen prints with watercolour and ink
(National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy National Library of Ireland)

tion and therefore readily available for consideration and study.⁵ Louisa used this album to create a narrative that was much broader than the story of her immediate family, and it includes images of her extended family in England, the landed gentry in Ireland, notable antiquarians and those she met while travelling.⁶ It also references political developments in north Africa and the conflicts in which the British Empire was involved during this period.

A common theme running throughout the album is that of social connections and ties. Louisa's decision to concentrate upon portraits of friends and family, in preference to her own artwork or the photographic views produced by her husband, the renowned amateur photographer Edward King Tenison (1805-1878), is perhaps a clue to her vision for the album. In many ways it is a visual record of her social circle and the component parts of her life. For this reason, photographic albums may be seen as the 'tools' through which society ladies demonstrated their family connections and accomplishments, providing a focal point for discussion and for social gatherings (Plate 2).

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUMS

UNTIL RECENTLY, VICTORIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUMS HAVE RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION from photographic historians, as their domestic production and consumption precluded their consideration in serious critical terms.⁷ Their use as a drawing room accessory, coupled with the historian's perception that they had little information to impart on political and economic events, has in turn relegated the format to a footnote in general photographic histories. Another reason for their omission is the fact that albums, by their very nature, can be unwieldy and difficult to display within the museum and gallery context, leading curators to choose individual prints or framed photographs for exhibition purposes.

In 2009 the Art Institute of Chicago redressed this situation in an exhibition and monograph which highlighted fifteen, mainly English, photo-collage albums, compiled during the period in which Louisa Tenison was busy creating her own volume.⁸ The accompanying catalogue recognised that

being a Victorian woman could involve a lot more humour and playfulness than is commonly acknowledged. The high-spirited energy and lavish care with which these volumes were made suggest that they were an important aspect of the visual culture of the 1860s and 1870s. Best understood as Society rather than family albums, they were not just private acts of consumption, but also culturally valued sites of women's creativity.⁹

Recent scholarship by Patrizia Di Bello, Elizabeth Siegel and Martha Langford have further explored the photographic album as a format, considering the interrelationship of images and the object as a whole.¹⁰ However, Irish photographic histories have continued to concentrate on individual images of famous events or people, with little consideration afforded the photographic processes utilised or, indeed, the album format.¹¹ This is despite the fact that albums were the main form of arranging, displaying and storing photographs throughout the nineteenth century.

Albums such as Tenison's have their genesis in the earlier keepsake and commonplace books compiled by women. Indeed, the celebrated eighteenth-century flower

collage work of Mrs Delany can be viewed as a precursor to the later photographic collages discussed here.¹² The creative energy divested by Delany in cutting up and reassembling paper into botanically accurate flower collages mirrors Louisa Tenison's accurate copying from manuscripts and the cutting-up of photographic portraits and scraps. Regardless of how sophisticated these creations were, activities such as collage and the making of silhouettes have long been dismissed as trivial domestic occupations:

Women's decorative work was undertaken increasingly in an isolated culture. Activities, such as carving, shell work, feather work and the naturalistic representation of nature in handiwork, ceased to align themselves with the interests of fashionable men. Once they had been stamped inherently feminine, the sort of occupations Mrs Delany loved so much, and which were enjoyed by an ever-increasing number of women, were heaped together under the epithet 'ladies' amusements', a label from which they have suffered ever since.⁽¹³⁾

Contemporary accounts show that eighteenth-century keepsake albums provided a focal point for conversation and social interaction, and functioned in much the same way as Victorian photographic albums. Early nineteenth-century albums were also likely to contain sections of transcribed poetry or compositions from popular authors of the day; later advances in lithography made colourful scraps, often with festive or romantic motifs, available for purchase and ready insertion into albums. Dried flowers, greeting cards, silhouettes, topographical prints and watercolours were also placed in albums. However, although it was a natural progression to include photographic portraits in albums, Louisa Tenison and others took this a step further and combined artistic and design skills with the photographic medium in order to produce a variety of narratives and scenarios.

THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUMS

A MATERIAL CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ALBUM PLACES AN EMPHASIS UPON THE materiality of the object, based on a close examination of its physical characteristics, and considers the performative nature of albums in general. Presentational forms, such as collage and albums, are integral to a full understanding of photographic images. In an album such as Tenison's, both the image and its surrounding decoration and layout interact to reveal the intent of its creator.¹⁴ The borders and motifs around the photographic portraits within the album have a direct relation to Tenison's life as an artist, to her travels and to her antiquarian interests. As such, recognition of the correlation between these elements is vital for an understanding of both the images placed within them, and of the interrelationship between the various pages within the object as a whole.

Louisa's collages are housed in a large-format album that was most likely purchased from a stationer's shop. It is bound in brown morocco, lined with purple, water-marked silk and has gilt-edged leaves.¹⁵ These point to a high-quality product which was

at the higher end of those commercially available at the time. The album contains over 120 pages, although only 56 were utilised by Louisa, demonstrating that it was a work in progress. The album, which contains 300 albumen prints, uses a diverse range of hand-painted decorative elements, particularly in the enclosing frames and embellishments. Certain motifs and page layouts are copied directly from medieval manuscripts (Islamic, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, Ottonian, late Gothic and Renaissance), while others are more fanciful adaptations. These intricate and complex page designs, and the unusual use of cut-up photographs to provide abstract elements within those patterns, indicate a highly skilled and creative use of photographic prints. Louisa's knowledge of medieval manuscripts and designs, selected and copied to act as borders for the albumen prints pasted therein, added meaning and strengthened the narrative themes within the album as a whole.

LOUISA TENISON, PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CARTE DE VISITE FORMAT

LOUISA TENISON WAS BORN INTO THE ACCOMPLISHED AND POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL Anson family of Shugborough House, Staffordshire, England.¹⁶ There is evidence that she was engaged in artistic endeavours prior to her marriage,¹⁷ at the age of nineteen, to Edward King Tenison, of Kilonan House, Roscommon, a landowner and keen amateur photographer.¹⁸ Upon her move to Ireland, Louisa immersed herself in the study of Irish culture and history, undertaking archaeological explorations and facilitating and contributing to the work of antiquarian societies and institutions.¹⁹

Louisa collaborated with and befriended several well-known artists, including the Orientalist painter John Frederick Lewis (1805-1876), the Swedish watercolourist Egron Lundgren (1815-1875), and Mayo native Michael George Brennan (1839-1871).²⁰ The Tenison's travelled widely, both in Europe²¹ and further afield, and Louisa also made a solo trip to Egypt and Jordan in 1843, views of which were shown in the Royal Hibernian Academy's annual exhibitions of 1846 and 1847.²² She published and illustrated two books on her travels, *Sketches in the East* (1846) and *Castille and Andalucia* (1854), both of which include detailed descriptions and illustrations of the designs she found at sites such as the Alhambra.²³ These designs and patterns were, in turn, utilised in the album layout and decoration, demonstrating that she brought all her artistic skills and sensibilities to bear on this project.

Louisa's engagement with the medium of photography was both a lengthy and highly evolved one. She is cited among the few early amateurs to receive a licence from Henry Fox Talbot to practice his negative-positive process,²⁴ and her circle included some of its foremost practitioners and critics, such as Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-1893). Louisa's husband Edward²⁵ practised many of the early photographic processes, including Henry Fox Talbot's Calotype, and used his camera to record antiquities and views of their travels.²⁶ Surprisingly, Louisa did not depend upon this output for the photographic content within this album, although she was undoubtedly aware and influenced by his

photographs of the antiquities held in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy²⁷ and his early photographs of the Alhambra palace in Spain.²⁸ Instead, the raw photographic element of Tenison's album is nearly entirely composed of studio portraits in the *carte-de-visite* format. This format is credited with the democratisation of photography, as its relatively inexpensive cost made photographic portraiture available to the middle classes. People collected portraits of their friends and families and also of famous people, including royalty and actresses; in this way, 'cartomania' emerged as a popular pastime.²⁹

Prior to the advent of the inexpensive *carte-de-visite* format, photography was indeed the preserve of the wealthy amateurs, like Edward Tenison. Many leading social commentators, including Lady Eastlake, debated the nature of photography and raised questions regarding its status with respect to the established Fine Arts.³⁰ Even though Louisa had access to the high-quality photography taken by her husband, she evidently preferred to work with the *carte-de-visite* format, albeit in a novel and accomplished manner which elevated them above the everyday.

Louisa was no doubt aware of the detractors of this immensely popular format: while some denounced the blurring of carefully delineated social hierarchies, which allowed even the most modest families to include photographs of titled gentlemen and women within their albums,³¹ others decried the fact that many of the poses and portraits (because of the use similar props and focal length) had a sameness which rendered them insipid. Many of these criticisms were directed toward those elements of modernity that were a feature of this technological innovation, such as mass production, standardisation and circulation.³² However, it is precisely those features of mechanisation that women such as Louisa attempted to overcome through their watercolour and collage work. Their attempts to personalise and reappropriate these photographs have similarities with the work of avant-garde artists such as George Braque, Max Ernst and Pablo Picasso, who, in the early twentieth century, reworked the mechanically produced images of the mass media.³³

In turn, the artistically decorated albums made by elite Victorian women were copied and repackaged for mass consumption. These later, commercially produced albums included preprinted chromolithographed floral borders and decorations, as well as individual slots into which cartes could be inserted. These were readily available for those who had neither the accomplishment nor leisure to devote to album decoration in the manner enjoyed by Louisa and her privileged social circle.³⁴

TENISON'S TREATMENT OF THE *CARTE-DE-VISITE*

UNLIKE OTHER VICTORIAN PHOTO-COLLAGE ALBUM MAKERS, LOUISA RETAINED THE studio backdrops of the individual *carte-de-visite* images that she used. For that reason, her work is more faithful to the source material than those who cut out any reference to the studio and placed their 'sitters' against more fanciful backgrounds. Louisa's keen sense of colour compensated for the fact that photography could only ren-

der subjects in black and white or sepia. She did not, however, resort to colouring or tinting the photographic portraits, and her use of colour within the album was reserved for the designs into which these monochrome images were inserted.

Louisa and her contemporaries did not have precedents in the printed medium upon which to base their designs. During this period, photographic reproduction technologies were not sufficiently advanced to permit the widespread inclusion of photographs within books and journals; when photographs were included in a publication they had to be tipped-in by hand. This makes the Victorian album-makers approach all the more novel and innovative as it would not be until the early twentieth century that photographs and other forms of illustration were widely reproduced in books and magazines.³⁵

One of the most unusual and progressive aspects of Louisa's album is her use of abstract details, cut from photographs and incorporated into her page layouts. It is probable that Edward Tenison supplied some of the photographic scraps that Louisa cleverly assimilated into her designs. Photographic backgrounds of a uniform pattern, such as pebble-dash, a brick wall, cobblestones, fabric and human hair, were cut out and formed part of the overall page designs; a detail from a wrought iron garden seat, for example, features in several photographs taken at Kilronan. In these particular examples, the overall page layout resembles a stained-glass window, and Louisa's keen eye has identified the seat detail as a suitable element for incorporation into the design. In this manner, she pre-figured the much later use of the medium's abstract qualities in page layout and design, her innovative technique being comparable to the photographic details and close-ups used by Alvin Lustig in his book of cover designs of the 1940s and 1950s.³⁶

OTHER PHOTO-COLLAGE ALBUMS

– LOUISA'S CONTEMPORARIES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT LOUISA WAS AWARE OF THE COLLAGE WORK PRODUCED BY OTHER aristocratic women in the 1860s and 70s. Album-makers like Francis Elizabeth, Viscountess Jocelyn (1820-1880), Georgina Berkeley (1831-1919), Lady Filmer (1838-1903) and Constance Sackville-West (1846-1929) were all part of the 'Upper Ten Thousand' who partook in high society and, like Louisa, attended the Season in London. Indeed, Louisa's London residence in Mayfair was in close proximity to many of the fifteen women whose albums were featured in the 2009 exhibition in Chicago.³⁷ There are many similarities between the approaches and practices adopted by these women and those employed by Louisa. All combined the traditional feminine skills of drawing and painting with the new photographic format, producing albums that reappropriated and countered the medium's standardisation.

The collage work which bears the closest resemblance to Louisa's is that produced by Frances Elizabeth, Viscountess Jocelyn. Both women used intact *cartes-de-visite* and also used abstract details cut from other photographs. It is also highly likely that they

knew each other on a personal basis, as portraits of Jocelyn's family, including her brother William Francis Cowper, feature in several pages of Louisa's album. Jocelyn and Edward Tenison were also members of the London Photographic Society and contributed photographs to various international exhibitions.

Within an Irish context, although there are few photo-collage albums in public collections, there are enough to indicate that the methods and processes utilised by English women were adopted by a smaller circle in Ireland. An album created by an unidentified member of the Godley family of Killegar, county Leitrim, for example, includes highly elaborate collages, many of which are made from a *mélange* of chromolithographic scraps, cut-out *cartes-de-visite* and pen-and-ink drawings.³⁸ The Godley family's home was located relatively near to Kilronan Castle, and it is highly probable that the families knew each other. However, the Godley album does not display the same complexity of design, careful choice of decorative motifs, or thoughtful execution as that produced by Louisa Tenison. In fact, it appears to be the work of one or several authors who experimented with a variety of styles over many decades: some of the pages bear a strong resemblance to the *découpage* screens which were popular during the period; others include later, documentary-style photographs inserted in a more straightforward manner.

Another of Louisa's contemporaries, Augusta Crofton Dillon, shared her interest in photography and antiquities. Augusta was a talented amateur whose photographic output, using the wet plate collodion process, was of a very high standard. She corresponded with the antiquarian William Wilde and provided some of her own photographs to illustrate his writings on the antiquities of Roscommon.³⁹ This use of photography to illustrate archaeological or antiquarian texts is very similar to Louisa's use of her husband Edward's photographs for the facsimile of *The Book of Fenagh*, which she funded in 1875 (Plates 3, 4). Augusta also compiled personal albums, demonstrating that both women were aware of the multiplicity of uses to which the photographic medium could be put: high-quality amateur prints were used to augment their antiquarian studies, while the *carte-de-visite* was the format of choice for presentation of their social circle and status.

Augusta Crofton Dillon diligently recorded her photographic activities, and her diary entries and correspondence indicate that she spent considerable time compiling and arranging her photograph albums. On 20th April, for example, she records 'Making up my book and photos: all the old places', while on 19th July in the same year she was busy 'Putting photos in my book all morning'.⁴⁰ The 'book' referred to here is almost certainly the large album lent by the descendants of this family to the National Photographic Archive in 2002, which has a handwritten frontispiece entitled 'My Book' and includes many of the images referred to in Augusta's diaries.⁴¹ Although this album contains some examples of photo-collage, Dillon, unlike Tenison, did not add colour or borders to her pages, the majority of which are arranged along more traditional forms of presentation.

The compilation of Louisa's album was a collective activity, aimed at forming and strengthening bonds of identification and belonging. The close links between landed families from the surrounding Irish counties are reflected in the Tenison album. *Cartes-de-*



3 – Edward King Tenison, *FENAGH*, 1858, salt print
(National Photographic Archive Album TEN90; courtesy National Library of Ireland)

4 – *THE CROMLEC AT FENAGH*, unnumbered plate based on salt print by Edward King Tenison from
W.M. Hennessy (ed.), *THE BOOK OF FENAGH IN IRISH AND ENGLISH BY ST CAILLIN* (facsimile), 1875
(Library collection copy number 0026893; courtesy National Museum of Ireland)



visite were evidently exchanged and circulated, and portraits of neighbouring families were included both in Louisa's album and in similar volumes compiled by the Godleys of Killegar, and the Dillons of Ahascragh, county Galway; a portrait of Augusta Crofton Dillon leaning on a large box camera, for example, is featured on the second page of Louisa's album. Other Irish families represented in the album include the Croftons of Mote Park and the King-Harmans of Rockingham. This demonstrates the social function of photographic albums, one that allowed their compilers to mark their place within a social network – in this instance, the large landowning families of counties Galway, Leitrim and Roscommon.

MEDIEVALISM AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY DESIGN REFORM

THE COMBINATION OF *CARTE-DE-VISITE* PORTRAITS WITH DECORATIONS DERIVED OR copied from medieval manuscripts is one of the outstanding features of Louisa's album. An interest in medieval manuscripts was part of a wider trend in mid-Victorian society, which saw designers and artists looking to earlier eras for sources of ornament and design.⁴² This practice was advocated by design reformers and critics such as John Ruskin (1819-1900), A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852) and William Morris (1834-1896), and was to have a direct influence on Louisa's album.⁴³ Her novel decision to combine such motifs with the modern medium of the *carte-de-visite* portrait marks this album as both highly unusual and inventive.

In the mid-nineteenth century, newly available technologies such as chromolithography allowed colour reproduction of manuscripts on a mass scale for the first time. Direct access to these volumes allowed Louisa to accurately reference medieval manuscripts within her photographic album. She copied from works compiled by Owen Jones, J.O. Westwood and Noel Humphreys. All of their published works were to be found in the library at Kilonan Castle, and many of the pages of the photographic album are in fact based on designs derived from chromolithographic titles.⁴⁴ Indeed, the title which she copied from most often, Humphrey's *The Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (1849), was considered to be the most difficult to copy from – an indication of Louisa's considerable draughting and design skills.⁴⁵

Through her involvement with the Illuminating Arts Society, Louisa honed the skills necessary for the execution of the borders and decoration of her album. Along with several other aristocratic women, Louisa was a patroness of the Illuminating Arts Society, which had been established in London in 1858 with the aim of 'promoting and encouraging the Medieval style of illuminating, on vellum, adaptable for modern purposes, either sacred or secular, by annual exhibitions, and by publishing one or more subjects yearly from the chromo-lithographic press, for distribution among its members'.⁴⁶ The Society's manager, David Laurent de Lara, gave correspondence courses and advocated copying from chromolithographic facsimiles of medieval manuscripts. His main manual,

Elementary instruction in the art of illumination and missal painting on vellum, a guide to modern illuminators, was published in seven editions between 1850 and 1863, and included advice on composition, colouring and source manuscripts. Louisa's album utilised the skills promoted by the society and made the novel decision to combine them with photographic portraits. In some instances, she adapted the layout of the pages to incorporate the standard *carte-de-visite* size. A good example of this is seen in her transcription of a fragment of ornament from a tenth-century bible written for Charles the Bald and illustrated in *The Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages*. Here, she cleverly altered the design so that instead of two lozenge-shaped spaces, as illustrated in Humphreys' title, there are three, evidently designed specifically to incorporate the cut-up *cartes-de-visite* (Plates 5, 6).

The Victorian taste for whimsy and playfulness is demonstrated in a full-page photograph of a dog inserted within a border from *The Salisbury Book*, which, according to Humphreys, was one of the 'finest and most interesting existing monuments of the art of illumination at the close of the fourteenth century'.⁴⁷ The chief illuminator for this book was John Siferwas, who was assisted by a team of at least four other artists. The book is also known as the 'Lovell Lectionary' as it was commissioned by John, Lord Lovell, for Salisbury Cathedral. Louisa copied this page exactly and did not alter either the colouration or layout. The incongruous inclusion of a family pet in a border selected from a sacred manuscript is both playful and humorous.



5 – Noel Humphreys, detail from a fragment of a tenth-century bible written for Charles the Bald illustrated in *THE ILLUMINATED BOOKS OF THE MIDDLE AGES*, 1849 (library collection copy number 025803, courtesy National Museum of Ireland)

DESIGN PROCESS AND CHOICE OF ORNAMENTAL MOTIFS

AS THE ALBUM CONTAINS SEVERAL UNFINISHED OR PARTIALLY FINISHED PAGES, IT IS possible to formulate an idea of Louisa's working methods. She evidently began by using her compass to compose a formal pattern in pencil. She then drew over the outline in ink before proceeding to add her design motif, using colour and gold ink if desired. The complicated page layouts demonstrate her skills as a draughtsman and, as she had published and illustrated two books on her travels, it is reasonable to surmise that her artistic training and skill was above the usual level attained by society women during this period.⁴⁸ The last part of the process was the addition of the photographs. Several of the pages are incomplete, and empty spaces await particular portraits to complete pages themed on individual families or groups. They indicate the social nature of album com-



6 – Lady Louisa Tenison, Album p.44 showing three *carte-de-visite* portraits of unknown sitters enclosed in a border based on a fragment from a tenth-century bible

1864-74, albumen prints with watercolour and ink (National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy NLI)

pilation which depended upon the exchange and circulation of *cartes-de-visite*. The lengthy period over which this album was compiled provides an indication of the time, skill and commitment which went in to the process.

Hand-drawn Celtic motifs appear on four pages of Louisa's photographic album, providing borders for photographs of family and friends. Instead of using generic or non-specific Celtic motifs, she referenced *The Book of Durrow* and *The Book of Kells*, as well



7 – Lady Louisa Tenison, Album p.41 showing Louise Dormer and Jeanne Van Bueren

1864-74, albumen print with watercolour and ink

(National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy NLI)

as other medieval Irish manuscripts (Plate 1). Louisa selected only three photographs of her herself for inclusion in her album, and the fact that she chose Celtic pattern types to decorate two of them points to a strong identification with Irish art and ornamentation. Although English-born, Louisa spent the majority of her life in Ireland and immersed herself in the Irish language and in the study of Irish history and culture. Her preference for this style of decoration ties in directly with her archaeological and antiquarian activ-

ities,⁴⁹ her association with groups such as the Ossianic Society,⁵⁰ and with scholars such as William Maunsell Hennessy, John O'Donovan⁵¹ and Margaret Stokes.⁵² The latter was an early advocate of the revival of Celtic design and illustration, and was chosen by Louisa to design the title letter for the introduction to the *Book of Fenagh* facsimile in 1875, for which she had been the sponsor.

Louisa's album is also strongly influenced by the symmetrical designs of Arabic culture. She absorbed the regular mathematical patterns which she saw in the Alhambra and customised and redrew them into shapes which could accommodate the *carte-de-visite* format (Plate 7). In this respect, she was undoubtedly influenced by her friend, the notable Orientalist painter John Frederick Lewis, whose paintings are littered with authentically reproduced interiors featuring the patterns he witnessed in Egyptian houses.⁵³ Geometric patterns are also visible in a print entitled *Gate at the Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai* (1843) by John Frederick Lewis, which was a gift from the artist to Louisa Tenison.⁵⁴

The Tenison library included Bourgoïn's *Les Arts Arabes* (1878), which analysed the mathematical origins and the repetition of complex patterns characteristic of Arabic design. His theoretical approach took a stand against Orientalist interpretations of Islamic architecture which emphasised the fanciful and seductive nature of such patterns. Instead, Bourgoïn highlighted the fact that such design was based on rules and formulas rather than instinct.⁵⁵ The Tenison's possession of this title intimates a scholarly interest in design from these regions.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND EMPIRE

LOUISA'S ALBUM WAS MORE THAN A STRICTLY PERSONAL COLLECTION OF FAMILY PORTRAITS, and like many others from the period, it served as a vehicle to display local, cultural and national identities. Combining portraits of loved ones with those of celebrities and national heroes, the images as a whole demonstrate how national events resonated in the parlour and impacted on personal lives. Even within this single album there existed a variety of photographic portraits which were valued for different reasons.

While the album is nearly entirely composed of studio *carte-de-visite* portraits, it does also include several large-scale portraits. These larger portraits provide breaks in the narrative and mark thematic changes within the album. Doubtless, the difference in quality between these full-plate portraits and the *carte-de-visite* was evident to Louisa. Two of the larger portraits refer to concerns beyond Louisa's immediate domestic realm and feature public figures. Both were protagonists in imperial battles in Algeria and the Crimea – the Algerian Islamic scholar and military leader Abd al-Qadir (1806-1883), and a Catholic Roscommon-born recipient of the Victoria Cross, Lieutenant Colonel Luke O'Connor (Plates 8, 9).⁵⁶ The theatrical nature of such posed photographs and tableaux highlights the performative nature of photography and mirrors the drawing room enter-



8 – Lady Louisa Tenison, Album p.55 showing Abd al-Qadir

1864-74, albumen print with watercolour and ink

(National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy NLI)

tainments which were popular during the period.⁵⁷ More particularly, their inclusion in Tenison's album reveals both her awareness of international conflicts and recalls her own family's tradition of military service. Her brother, Augustus Henry Anson V.C. (1835-1877), had fought in the Crimean War, which was the conflict for which O'Connor was awarded the Victoria Cross. It further demonstrates her pride in a local hero who rose to the upper ranks of the British Army.



9 – Lady Louisa Tenison,
*Album p.37 showing Lieutenant Colonel Luke O'Connor and Captain Paterson, 23rd Fusiliers
1864-74, albumen print with watercolour and ink (National Photographic Archive Album TEN295, courtesy NLI)*

The full-page photograph of Abd al-Qadir, who led a struggle against the French invasion in the mid-nineteenth century, is surrounded by a border copied from the Moorish designs in Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* (1856). Again, this demonstrates how Tenison carefully matched the decoration to the subject matter and themes suggested by the photographic portraits. Louisa had in fact lived in Algeria during the 1870s, and devoted another page within the album to portraits taken in Algiers in 1872.⁵⁸ This latter page features Anna Leigh Smith, the sister of Barbara Bodichon, the educationalist, artist and feminist, whose home in Algiers was a point of call for artists and travellers, and whose guests included the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll.⁵⁹ This confirms Louisa's connection with the expat intellectual circle in that country.

Al-Qadir was very much championed by a section of the English community who identified with his struggle for independence, and he was a much sought-after celebrity by European travellers while exiled in Damascus, which may possibly be where Louisa encountered him.⁶⁰ His actions contrast with the role of individuals, such as O'Connor, who defended the right of empire against indigenous people in India (al-Qadir was attempting to oust an empire, albeit the French rather than the British). The inclusion of these two portraits points to an awareness of events beyond the drawing room and to knowledge of the interplay of empires both at home and abroad.

THE ALBUM IN THE DRAWING ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS REVEAL THAT THE DRAWING ROOM WAS THE SITE FOR THE consumption of photographic albums in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by a photograph depicting the drawing room at Clonbrock House, Ahascragh, county Galway, in which a male figure consults a large format photographic album (Plate 10).⁶¹ Photographic albums were well established as drawing room accessories, providing entertainment and a focus for interactions between guests. The drawing room at Kilronan Castle is most likely where Louisa's album was compiled, stored and consulted.

The novels written by Edith Somerville and Violet Florence Martin (Somerville and Ross) contain numerous references to photographs within an Irish context, and provide a contemporary insight into how albums were examined and used within the late-nineteenth century domestic environment. The following extract from *The Real Charlotte* (1894) describes a naive young girl, Francie Fitzpatrick, examining an amateur album in the drawing room of the house of the local aristocratic family:

Soon afterwards she saw him, in evident obedience to a hint from his sister, get up and come towards her with a large photograph book under his arm... He had not, however, turned many pages before he found that Francie's comments were by no means of the ordinary and perfunctory sort ... Francie began to learn something of the discreetness that must be observed in inspecting amateur portrait photography,



10 – Clonbrock House, drawing room, 1860s (courtesy George Gossip)

and Christopher, on his side, found he was being far better entertained by Miss Mullen's cousin than he could have believed possible. They turned page after page steadily and conversationally, until Christopher made a pause of unconscious pride and affectation at a group of photographs of yachts in different positions.⁶²

This positions the photographic album within the drawing room and confirms that the perusal of photographic albums was a suitable after-dinner activity. It also demonstrates the sociability associated with the examination of a photographic album and the conversational nature of the interaction. The nineteenth-century drawing room was both a public and a private space, used for greeting and entertaining guests as well as the pursuit of solitary activities such as needlework and reading. As the preferred meeting ground for men and women of polite society, the viewing of photograph albums within this social

space emerged as a group activity, providing an opportunity for social interaction. Just as the drawing room reflected the family's standing and taste, the photographic album was a signifier of a family's position and a measure of how they wanted to present themselves to others.

Not all of the portraits within Louisa's album were captioned and many would have required narration and interpretation. Given that her album brings together, in one volume, portraits which reflected the varied strands of her life, it is highly unlikely that any potential viewer would be familiar with all of the sitters. As a result, Louisa's mediation and commentary would have been required. Doubtless, too, her elaborate decorations and layouts would have provided further points of interest and provoked conversations which, if contemporary accounts are to be believed, would have been lively and unconventional.⁶³

CONCLUSION

PHOTO-COLLAGE ALBUMS PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-PRESENTATION AND A place to display one's character, social network and status. Louisa's cutting, reposition and decoration of photographic portraits also countered the standardisation of the *carte-de-viste* format and represented a complex interaction with the medium of photography. Her skill as an artist and her knowledge of design history led her to combine photographic prints with decorative motifs derived from medieval manuscripts. This combination of traditional decorative motifs and modern technology makes her album both absolutely characteristic of contemporary trends, yet also highly unusual in that most photo-collage artists used non-specific patterns to illustrate their volumes.

Albums also acted as a site in which to preserve both personal and national histories, as demonstrated by Louisa's commemoration of the military career of a Roscommon soldier. In conclusion, this examination of one of Louisa's albums places her work firmly within the context of photographic and design history, revealing a multilayered interpretation of this traditionally overlooked presentational format.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Recent scholarship has drawn comparisons between the work of mid-Victorian collage-makers and later fine artists. See Patrizia di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: ladies, mothers and flirts* (Burlington VT, 2007), and Elizabeth Siegel with Patrizia Di Bello, Martha Weiss and Miranda Hofelt, *Playing with Pictures: the art of Victorian photocollage* (New Haven, 2009).
- ² Brandon Taylor, *Collage: the making of modern art* (London, 2006).
- ³ The National Photographic Archive purchased Album 295 from Christie's in 1999. A second lot of two similar albums, created 1862-67, sold to a private collector, Christie's, *Photographs, Friday 7 May* (London, 1999) 46.
- ⁴ An exhibition held by the Art Institute of Chicago in 2009 featured the work of fifteen collage artists, none of which directly referenced medieval manuscripts in the same manner as Louisa Tenison. The author has also surveyed the collection of the National Library of Ireland's Photographic Archive and consulted photo-collage albums held by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The publications cited above by Di Bello, Siegel and Weiss do not include reference to the use of manuscripts as sources for patterns in photo-collage albums, nor does an earlier French publication, François Heilbrun and Michael Pantazzi, *Album de collages de l'Angleterre Victorienne* (Paris, 1997). The following journal articles deal with photo-collage albums, none of which mention copying from manuscripts: Michael Charlesworth 'The Group Portraits of Charlotte Milles: Staging by Photo-Collage', *History of Photography*, 23, no. 3, 1999, 254-59; Isobel Crombie, 'The Work and Life of Viscountess Frances Jocelyn: Private Lives', *History of Photography*, 22, no. 1, 1998, 123-40; Patrizia di Bello, 'The Female Collector: Women's Photographic Albums in the 19th Century', *Living Pictures*, 1, no. 2, 2001, 3-20; Lynda Roscoe Haritgan, 'The house that collage built', *American Art*, 7, no. 3, 1993, 88-91; Bernard V. and Pauline F. Heathcote, 'The Feminine Influence: Aspects of the Role of Women in the Evolution of Photography in the British Isles', *History of Photography*, 12, no. 3, 1988, 269; and Marina Warner, 'Parlour made: Victorian family albums', *Creative Camera*, 315, 1992, 29-32.
- ⁵ In addition to the two collage albums sold at Christie's in 1999, Louisa Tenison also compiled and exchanged an album of her husband's photographic views with Sofia, Duchess of Malakoff. It contains a dedication in Spanish from Louisa, and is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, RESERVE VF-268-FOL.
- ⁶ Louisa was born into the wealthy landowning Anson family, who were known for their part in Whig politics and for her great grand-uncle's library and gardens. See James Lees-Milne, 'Shugborough, Staffordshire: Part 1, The park and its monuments', *The Connoisseur*, 164, no. 662, 1967, 211-15.
- ⁷ The following standard histories of photography have paid scant attention to photographic albums: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the present day* (New York, 1949); Alison and Helmut Gernsheim, *The history of photography from the earliest use of the camera obscura in the eleventh century up to 1914* (London, 1955); Michel Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (Köln, 1998); and Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York, 2008).
- ⁸ Siegel et al., *Playing with Pictures: the art of Victorian photocollage* was published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title organised by the Art Institute of Chicago, 10th October 2009 – 3rd January 2010.
- ⁹ Patrizia Di Bello, 'Photocollage, fun and flirtations', in *ibid.*, 50.
- ¹⁰ di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*; Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: the afterlife of memory in photographic albums* (Montreal, 2008); and Elizabeth

- Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: a history of nineteenth-century American photograph albums* (New Haven, 2010). See also Heilbrun and Pantazzi, *Album de collages de l'Angleterre Victorienne*, and Elizabeth Siegel and Martha Packer, *The Marvelous Album of Madame B being the handiwork of a Victorian Lady of considerable talent* (London, 2009).
- ¹¹ Edward Chandler, *Photography in Ireland: the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2001); Liam Kelly, *Photographs and Photography in Irish Local History* (Dublin, 2009); and W.A. Maguire, *A Century in Focus* (Belfast, 2000). These titles provide excellent guides to the history of photography in Ireland; however, they do not address the medium of albums.
 - ¹² Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (eds), *Mrs Delany and her Circle* (New Haven, 2009).
 - ¹³ Katherine Sharp, 'Women's creativity and display in the eighteenth-century British Domestic interior', in Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke (eds), *Interior Design and Identity* (Manchester, 2004) 1-10.
 - ¹⁴ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds), *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images* (London, 2004) 2.
 - ¹⁵ Christie's, *Photographs, Friday 7 May*, 46.
 - ¹⁶ Lees-Milne, 'Shugborough, Staffordshire', 211.
 - ¹⁷ Roscommon County Library's Local History Collection contains a file entitled 'Lady Louisa Tenison', which refers to a watercolour album created by Louisa Anson in the 1830s. The album included views of the English Lake District and Kirkstall Abbey (near Leeds).
 - ¹⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 4th January 1839.
 - ¹⁹ Louisa undertook excavations at a Mesolithic site called Suidh Lugaid or Lewey's seat in county Sligo, and at a cist grave in Coolmury, also in Sligo. These excavations are referred to in William Gregory Wood-Martin, *The Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland* (Dublin, 1888) 186.
 - ²⁰ For information on Louisa's patronage of Michael Brennan and the time he spent at her home in Algiers, see Máirín Allen, 'The boy from Castlebar: Michael George Brennan, painter, 1839-1871', *The Capuchin Annual* (Dublin, 1945) 131-37.
 - ²¹ For further information on the Tenison's travels in Europe, see the biographical entry for Edward Tenison in Roger Taylor, *Impressed by the Light: British photographs from paper negatives, 1840-1860* (New York, 2007) 380-81, and Javier Pinar, *Images in Time: a century of photography at the Alhambra, 1840-1940* (Granada, 2003) 20-21.
 - ²² Ann M. Stewart, *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts – Index of exhibitors 1826-1979, Volume iii, N-Z* (Dublin, 1987) 205.
 - ²³ In addition to her own works, Louisa also contributed drawings of the Alhambra for inclusion in a show which took place in 1853 at the Panorama, Leicester Square, London. The National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum (NAL) houses the panoramic view of Granada which was exhibited at this venue. NAL, Catalogues Collection, Pressmark 200.B.271. See Robert Burford, *Description of a view of the city of Granada; with the celebrated fortress and palace of Alhambra, and the surrounding beautiful Vega or plain, now exhibiting at the Panorama, Leicester Square, painted by the Proprietor, Mr. Robert Burford, assisted by H.C. Selous from drawings by J. Unwins, Esq., kindly assisted by Lady Louisa Tenison* (London, 1853).
 - ²⁴ Sarah Rouse, *Into the Light: an illustrated guide to the photographic collections in the National Library of Ireland* (Dublin, 1998) 52-53.
 - ²⁵ 'Photographic Society of Ireland', *The British Journal of Photography*, 1st March 1860, 67-68. This report from Dublin includes an overview of a paper written by Edward Tenison in which he outlined his experience of a wide variety of photographic techniques.
 - ²⁶ Taylor, *Impressed by the Light*, 380-81.
 - ²⁷ In addition to the album under consideration (Album 295), the National Photographic Archive holds

four other albums relating to the Tenisons. Albums 1 and 2 include calotype prints of Irish country houses and topographical views. Album 384 includes Spanish views and portraits created by Edward King Tenison, Olympe Aguado, Hippolyte Bayard and Charles Clifford using the Calotype process. It also includes the collection of the Royal Irish Academy. Album 333 is a scrapbook containing some Spanish and possibly Middle Eastern views.

²⁸ See Pinar, *Images in Time*.

²⁹ For an overview of the *carte-de-visite* phenomenon, see Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A.A.E. Disdéri and the carte de visite portrait photograph* (New Haven, 1985), and Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: commercial photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven, 1994).

³⁰ The following newspaper notices list both Louisa Tenison and Lady Eastlake as patronesses of the Dublin Amateur Artists' Society: 'Dublin Amateur Artists Society', *The Irish Times*, 8th December 1876, and 'Dublin Amateur Artists Society', *The Irish Times*, 5th December 1878. Charles Eastlake was president of the Royal Academy and the London Photographic Society. Edward Tenison was a member of the latter society and a regular contributor to its exhibitions.

³¹ Elizabeth Eastlake, 'Photography', in Beaumont Newhall (ed.) *Photography: essays and images* (New York, 1981) 81-95.

³² Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame*, 7.

³³ Taylor, *Collage: the making of modern art*.

³⁴ This phenomenon is noted by in Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, 75-76.

³⁵ Ruari McLean, *Victorian Book Design and Coloured Printing* (London, 1972) 3.

³⁶ Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger, *By its Cover: modern American book cover design* (New York, 2005) 48.

³⁷ 'Fashionable Intelligence', *The Irish Times*, 21st May 1862. This refers to a house party in Louisa Tenison's home in Grosvenor Street, London.

³⁸ NLI, National Photographic Archive, Godley family album, Album 146.

³⁹ The woodcut in question was reproduced in Sir. W.R Wilde, 'Memoir of Gabriel Beranger, and his labours in the cause of Irish art, literature, and antiquities from 1760 to 1780, with illustrations', *Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland: originally founded as the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*, I, 1871, 252. See also NLI, Clonbrock papers MS 35, 792 (13) for correspondence between Augusta Crofton and Wilde.

⁴⁰ NLI, Clonbrock papers, MS 35, 787 (1), 1865, and MS 35, 788 (4), 1877.

⁴¹ Album lent by the family for the exhibition *Heirs and Graces* which took place at the National Photographic Archive, Dublin, in June 2002. A copy of this album is held by the National Library of Ireland's Photographic Archive but it is not available for reproduction. National Photographic Archive, transparencies 502-800.

⁴² Rowan Watson, 'Publishing for the leisure industry: illuminating manuals and the reception of a Medieval Art in Victorian Britain', in Thomas Coomans & Jan De Maeyer (eds), *The Revival of Medieval Illumination* (Leuven, 2007) 79-107.

⁴³ The Tenison's library included copy of Pugin's major resource for church decoration: *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume* (London, 1846). Louisa was instrumental in choosing J.J. McCarthy, an Irish advocate of Pugin's teachings, as the architect for the local Catholic Church in Keadue, county Roscommon. See *An Introduction to the Architectural Heritage of County Roscommon* (Dublin, 2004) 75.

⁴⁴ Battersby and Co., *Catalogue of the valuable library of books to be sold by auction, together with antique furniture, oil paintings, etc. commencing on Tuesday 22nd April 1941 at Kilronan Castle*,

- Ballyfarnon, Co. Roscommon* (Dublin, 1941).
- ⁴⁵ David Laurent de Lara, *Elementary instruction in the art of illumination and missal painting on vellum, a guide to modern illuminators* (7th ed., London, 1863) 11-12.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 74.
- ⁴⁷ Noel Humphreys, *The Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (London, (1849) 1995) 61.
- ⁴⁸ Lady Louisa Tenison, *Sketches in the East* (London, 1846) and *Castille and Andalusia* (London, 1853).
- ⁴⁹ See note 19.
- ⁵⁰ Louisa received a copy of the proceedings of the Ossianic Society for 1854 from its then president, William Smith O'Brien.
- ⁵¹ Both Louisa and Edward donated £5 towards a fund for the family of this renowned Celtic scholar who died in December 1861. 'The late John O'Donovan', *The Irish Times*, 3rd March 1862.
- ⁵² The antiquarian and artist Margaret Stokes designed the title letter of the introduction to the *Book of Fenagh* which was sponsored by Louisa Tenison in 1875.
- ⁵³ Nicholas Tromans (ed.) *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist painting* (London, 2008)
- ⁵⁴ John Frederick Lewis, *Door to the Church, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt* (1843), water-colour, Searight Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, No: SD.583; image ref: 2008BT7956.
- ⁵⁵ Zeynep Çelik, 'Commemorating the Empire: from Algiers to Damascus', in Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones (ed.), *Edges of Empire: Orientalism and visual culture* (Oxford, 2005) 27.
- ⁵⁶ For biographical information on O'Connor, see John Evans, 'One of the first recipients of V.C.', and Des Smith, 'Sir Luke O'Connor', in *Journal of the Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society*, 3, 1990, 11-13 and 37-39.
- ⁵⁷ Lori Pauli, *Acting the Part: photography as theatre* (London, 2006) 18.
- ⁵⁸ The Tenison's villa in Algiers, Campagna Kingston, is mentioned in Allen, 'The boy from Castlebar', 137.
- ⁵⁹ Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: feminism and visual culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London, 2000) 68.
- ⁶⁰ Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, 'The sands of rhyme: Thackery and Abd al Qadir', *Research in African Literatures*, 30, no. 3, 1999, 194-206.
- ⁶¹ Valerie Pakenham, *The Big House in Ireland* (London, 2005) 85.
- ⁶² E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Real Charlotte* (Dublin (1894), 1999) 126.
- ⁶³ The son of the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn commented upon Louisa's freedom of speech and outspoken nature in his autobiography; Lord Frederick Hamilton, *The Days before Yesterday* (London, 1920) 48.