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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# 'Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography': William J. Stillman and the Acropolis in Word and Image

Dervla MacManus\* and Hugh Campbell\*

In 1870, the American William J. Stillman — diplomat, journalist, painter and photographer — published an album of autotypes entitled *The Acropolis of Athens: Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography*. For a newcomer to the medium, Stillman's images were remarkable for their poise and clarity. But where the photographs were 'clear and lively', to borrow John Szarkowski's phrase, the brief text which accompanied each was, by comparison, laborious and lifeless. Facing each other across each double-spread, text and image seemed to speak in completely different registers, in a manner which presaged many subsequent uses of similar material, most famously *Vers une architecture*. This article explores the relationship between word and image at play in Stillman's *The Acropolis* in terms of Stillman's intentions and the genre of the photo-book, and considers the implications that this book, as object and genre, has for word-image relationships within architectural history.

## Introduction

William James Stillman's *The Acropolis of Athens: Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography* was published in London in 1870. The volume, bound in red leather and measuring 530 by 340 mm, contained 25 carbon prints on paper, with simple captions opposite. Imposing in size and striking in style and execution, Stillman's book has since been recognised as among the more important photographic publications of its period. It is included in Gerry Badger and Martin Parr's seminal three-volume survey, *The Photobook*, where it appears between Julia Margaret Cameron and Peter Emerson, represented by three double-page spreads. The book is claimed as a 'precursor of the twentieth-century modernist photo-book', by virtue of the aesthetic properties of the photographs themselves, but also because of the telling effect to which image, text and blank space are combined (Parr and Badger 2004: 68). The manner of its presentation in *The Photobook* draws attention to these formal qualities: opened on successive spreads, the book is photographed as an object. We appreciate it from first principles, as a physical artifact with a palpable impact.

This article seeks to preserve the immediacy of this first encounter with Stillman's volume, dwelling upon the principles according to which it is organised, and the means by which it seeks to communicate. In particular, it analyses the content and form of the images, the manner

in which they are framed and laid out, and the balance established between the photographic image and the text — the former vivid and arresting, the latter dry and dutiful. The publication lends itself to this kind of analysis because it seems itself to have been very consciously assembled, so that each element is deliberately articulated and placed. Captions sit apart from photographs; each photograph sits discrete on a single page. A 'notice' at the outset describes the technical means of production. Even the title page (**Fig. 1**), with its interpolated photograph of a doorway, and even the title itself, with its abruptly conjoined adverbs and nouns, all feel pieced together.

The overtly 'constructed' nature of the publication draws attention to the disparities between word and image and to the different communicative registers within which each operates. Each purports to establish a relationship back to the facts of what is depicted, offering a report on, or a version of, these facts. In one reading of these relationships, words tend to win out over images for the degree to which they can be exact in their denomination of people, places and events. Images seem to offer no such reliable exactitude. But, by another reading, the photographic images offer a degree of verisimilitude unattainable by any combination of words. Whereas words are put together in a process completely separate from, although relating back to, the reality being described, the photograph is made on the spot and seems in many ways a direct and complete register of a given piece of the world. This particular quality of photography is often referred to as 'indexical', following C.S. Peirce's famous trichotomy of sign relations (index, icon, symbol) (see Peirce 1955).

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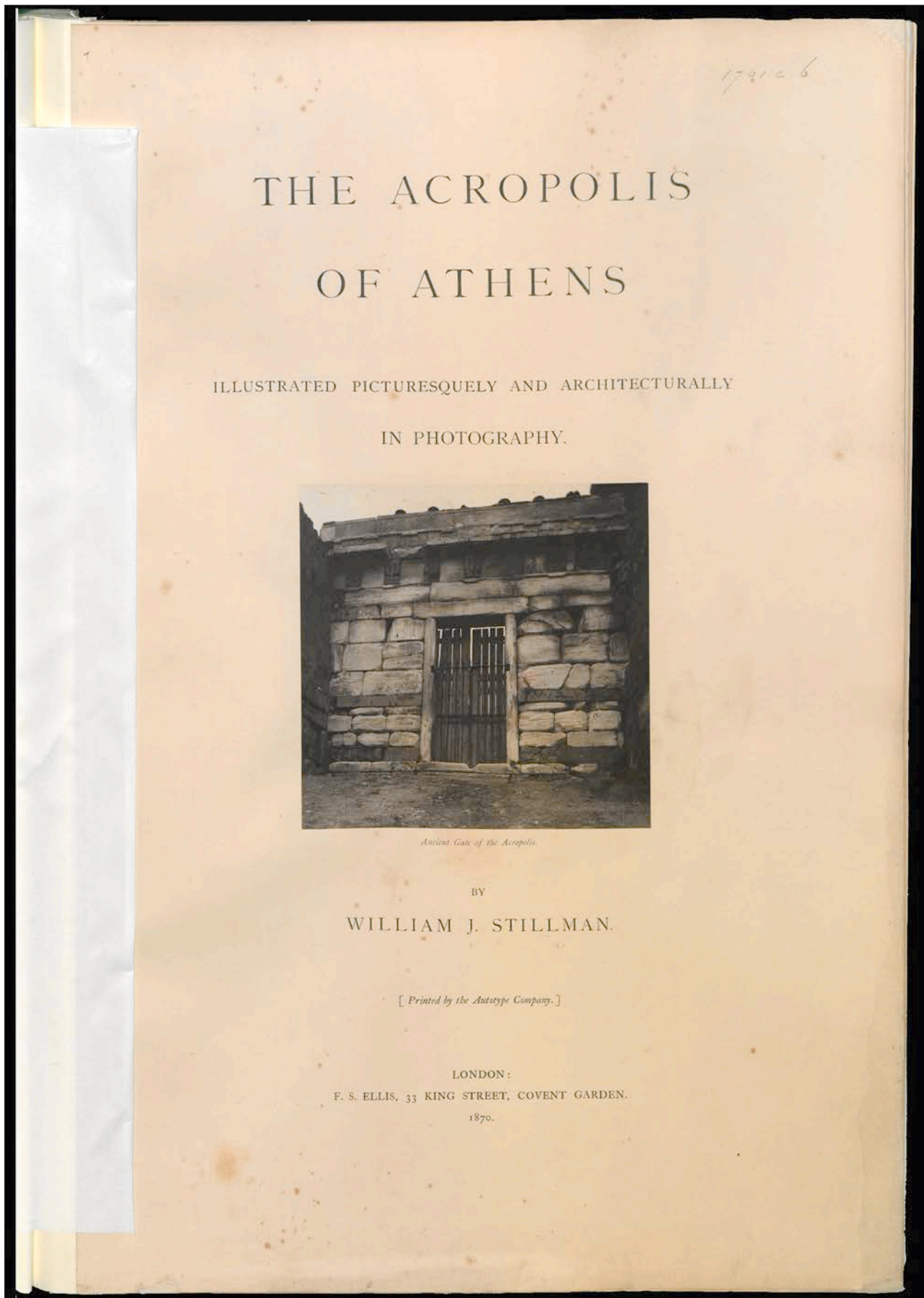


Figure 1: Title page, *The Acropolis of Athens* (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

However, this categorization is as often disputed as it is imputed.<sup>1</sup> In a recent paper, Peter Sealy explained how François Brunet has identified the 'double nature of the Peircean Index':

it is both the act of pointing, and the physical trace. These are not the same thing: the directional arrow is distinct from the footprint, and both suggest pathways for understanding the persistence of indexicality in our present time. (Sealy 2015)

In Stillman's publication, the shifting, ambivalent qualities of the photographic images become all the more pointed given the very deliberate consideration of the relationship of image and text. Through its careful construction Stillman established a particular discursive space (to adopt Rosalind Krauss's phrase) within which to place *The Acropolis* and the images it contained (Krauss 1982). So viewed, the text surrounding the images provides clues as to the formulation of this space: the purpose of the images, their intended audience, the contemporary cultural and aesthetic concerns embedded in their making, their status as photographs, as records of fact or artistic creations. Approached in this way, the title page can then be examined as a cryptogram, a compound of word and image which, when decoded, unlocks the discursive space of the main body of the book. An analysis of the title page must therefore come before proceeding to discuss the body of the book, and the particular word-image relations found therein. Once the discursive space of *The Acropolis* is established, subsequent iterations of the same images are examined, displaced from their original discursive space, word-image relations previously established are shifted and new ones emerge.

### Title Page

Simply observed, the title page presents the following information: the title of the book, an image relating to the subject of the book and its accompanying caption, the name of the author, the name of the printer, the place of publication, the name and address of the publisher and finally the date of publication. Each of these elements will be dealt with below, not in the order they appear on the page, but in a rough approximation of the order in which they reveal most about the discursive space of the book. As with any cultural product, an examination of its creator reveals most about the motivation for and circumstances of its creation. Who was William James Stillman and what brought him to make this book?

#### 'By William J. Stillman'

Stillman was a compelling and often controversial character, whose career went through numerous abrupt shifts in direction. Born in 1828 to a strict Seventh-Day Baptist family, he was brought up in Schenectady, New York, attended Union College and then studied landscape painting with Frederick Edwin Church. He formed The Adirondack Club with such towering figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson, the poet James Russell Lowell and the natural scientist Louis Agassiz. Through meeting one of the leaders of the 1848

Hungarian revolution, Stillman became embroiled in its aftermath and in 1851 went to Hungary as a spy to recover the Hungarian crown jewels. Then, in 1855, with John Durand, he founded one of the first American art magazines, *The Crayon*, but resigned as editor eighteen months later. He travelled around Switzerland with John Ruskin. He became the American consul in Rome and later the American consul in Crete. He wrote extensively about art and criticism, producing a body of essays in a highly didactic, impassioned style. At the same time he worked as a journalist for *The Times*, *The Century*, *The Nation* and *The Atlantic Monthly* as well as photographic journals. Indeed, his memoir, *The Autobiography of a Journalist*, suggests that this was the role with which ultimately he identified most strongly.

*The Acropolis of Athens* was born out of a period of upheaval for Stillman, when he was, in his own words, 'physically and financially a wreck' (Stillman 1901: 457). He had been forced to flee Crete in the midst of the Cretan uprising, to ensure his own safety and that of his family (his wife, Laura, had recently taken her own life and his eldest son, Russie, was very ill). The escape from Crete left Stillman in debt. Photography offered a way to make money and, in truth, it was all he felt able for: 'I was myself nearly prostrated mentally and physically', he writes in his autobiography, 'and unfit for anything but my photography' (Stillman 1901: 457). In this frame of mind, Stillman embarked upon the project of photographing the Acropolis.

#### 'Illustrated'

'The Acropolis of Athens *Illustrated*'; this initial phrasing of the full title; a place *illustrated*, what is more, a *foreign* place *illustrated*,<sup>2</sup> immediately places Stillman's book in the realm of travel accounts, a genre of publication established in the preceding century.<sup>3</sup> Illustrated accounts such as James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens*, first published in 1762, promised to '*illustrate* the history of Architecture by delineations from the antiquities of Athens' [emphasis added] (see the dedication in Stuart and Revett (1762)). Accordingly, as Andrew Szegedy-Maszak has observed, the careful sequence of images presented in Stillman's *Acropolis* 'replicates the experience of the typical visitor' (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 164). In so doing, Stillman's account follows in the tradition of earlier travel accounts in which a typical itinerary was followed and replicated. As Edward Kaufman explains, 'the itinerary stood for shared experience', and 'architectural scholars [...] took unto themselves the travel writer's basic ambition to supplant the authority of earlier itineraries as models for travellers' (Kaufman 1989: 67).

We also know that Stillman was familiar with Stuart and Revett's account. In a scathing review of the United States Treasury Building published in *The Crayon* in June 1856, the unnamed author (whom we can reasonably assume was Stillman)<sup>4</sup> bemoans the fact that 'James Stuart and Nicholas Revett would never have gone to Athens in 1751 to obtain for publication the accurate measurements and details of the Temples of Grecian capital could they have foreseen the disastrous influence of their labors upon

architectural art' (*The Crayon* 1856: 178). Of course, Stuart and Revett's account was illustrated by drawings, not photographs.

Stillman, writing later in *The Amateur's Photographic Guide Book* of 1874, encouraged the use of photography as a means of illustrating travels available to all:

An expenditure of a few pounds will enable any traveller to illustrate his own travels, and the tourist who does not indulge the *cacoeihes scribendi* [insatiable desire to write],<sup>5</sup> to preserve in his album the transcripts of every scene worth his transcribing. (Stillman 1874: 6–7)

Significantly, given the short captions in *The Acropolis*, Stillman posits the idea of the photographic images as a literal substitute for descriptive text: 'to preserve in his album the transcripts of every scene worth his transcribing' [emphasis added]. As a metaphor, this 'transcript' frames visual experience as something which could be written, and suggests that, in the absence of writing, photography could *write* the scene – the image and text are interchangeable and of equal value. Furthermore, as 'to transcribe' means 'to make a copy of (something) in writing' [emphasis added] (OED Online), Stillman's use of the term is perhaps explained by his belief – held by many at the time – in the verisimilitude of photography.<sup>6</sup> 'A photograph', he wrote, 'is nothing but a communication of fact' (Stillman 1889: 219). The photograph is a copy of the scene, transcribed through the mechanical process of the camera. (Stillman's attitudes towards photography are further discussed in the section 'In Photography'.)

Returning briefly to the word *illustrate* itself, as the root of the verb comes from the Latin *illustrāre* meaning 'to light up, illuminate, clear up, elucidate' (OED Online), we might consider whether it is the images which shed light upon the text or vice versa. Given Stillman's inclination to view text and image as interchangeable, perhaps it would be more correct to consider the text and images as illustrating each other. The captions, or 'descriptive letterpress' (as the British Library catalogue refers to the text), shed light upon the image; they identify the subject of the image, provide geographical information and orientation. At the same time, the images shed light upon the text; they visually elucidate the written content. Together, word and image illustrate a (foreign) place: Stillman's journey and, to a certain degree, the journeys of other travellers before him.

### 'Picturesquely'

Stillman's Acropolis photographs have been interpreted by other scholars as examples of the Ruskinian picturesque.<sup>7</sup> In his early career he was an avid follower of Ruskin; writing about his time as editor of *The Crayon*, he described himself as an 'apostolate' and Ruskin his 'prophet' (Stillman 1901: 223). And while it is possible to see in these images elements of the Ruskinian picturesque – as, for example, in Szegedy-Maszak's interpretation of plate No. 10 (**Fig. 2**), in which, he argues, the 'deep perspective' and 'vigorous oppositions of light and shadow' 'together comprise

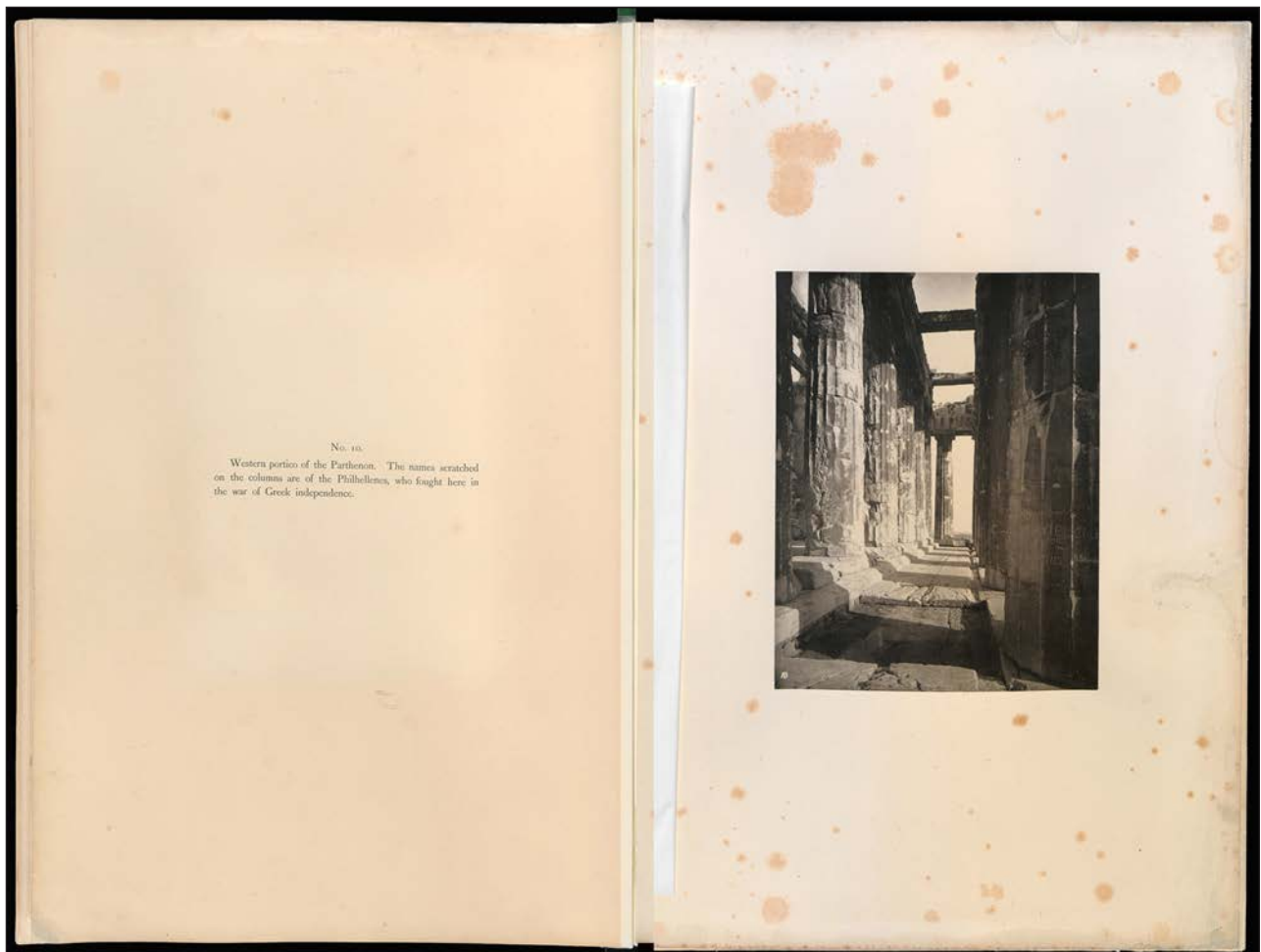
one of the hallmarks of Ruskinian picturesque' (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 175) – Stillman's own formulation of the picturesque suggests a different reading. In her recent study, Karen Georgi refutes the perception of Stillman as simply Ruskin's disciple and points out that by 1868 Stillman had published the first of a series of articles in which he rejects Ruskin's art theory while still admiring the man's moral character (Georgi 2013: 87–91). As Stillman made *The Acropolis* photographs in 1869, it may reasonably be surmised that he was no longer under the spell of Ruskin's influence, and was certainly no longer the fervent disciple of earlier years. Notably, Stillman wrote the article while in Athens, as evidenced by his sign off: 'W. J. Stillman, Athens, Greece, October 28, 1868' (Stillman 1868: 437). What then would Stillman's formulation of the picturesque be? An analysis of Stillman's use of the term in his own writings, particularly his autobiography and collection of critical essays, *The Old Rome and the New*, yields some telling examples. The term 'picturesque' is most often used in relationship to 'hunting views' in the landscape suitable for painting.<sup>8</sup> A passage from the autobiography, in which he laments what is 'unpicturesque' about his native American landscape, is particularly revealing:

In American landscape the element of the picturesque is in a serious deficiency. What is old is the wild and savage, the backwoods and the wild mountain, with no trace of human presence or association to give it sentiment; what is new is still in the crude and angular state in which the utilities are served, and the comfort of the man and his belongings most considered. Nothing is less paintable than a New England village. (Stillman 1901: 175)

It is clear from this passage that, for Stillman, natural landscape untamed by human hand is not picturesque; some evidence of human occupation is required to elicit emotion. Furthermore, the 'new' and the 'comfortable' are not picturesque; some element of harshness and ruin is needed to offer a feeling of the sublime (in this regard Stillman's formulation of the picturesque follows Ruskin's and Edmund Burke's before him). He continues:

The valley of the Mohawk is one of the earliest settled and least unpicturesque sections of the Eastern States, with its old Dutch farmhouses and the winding of the beautiful river [...] but I had explored it on foot and in every direction for miles around my birthplace, and found nothing that seemed to 'make up' save trees and water [...] after my experience in rural England, it was very discouraging to ransack that still unhumanised landscape for pictures. (Stillman 1901: 175–76)

Here the notion of the picturesque is linked to seeking out views which can serve as the subject of a painting; 'to ransack' 'the landscape for pictures'. Indeed the 'hunting for views' metaphor is a trope frequently repeated in Stillman's writing.<sup>9</sup> Ruin or dilapidation must also be



**Figure 2:** Stillman's plate No. 10 showing the western portico of the Parthenon (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

present for the picturesque, as Stillman further relates in this passage:

Everything was too neat and trim, and I remember that one day, when I was on my search for a 'bit', I found a dilapidated barn which tempted me to sit down before it, when the farmwife, guessing my intentions, ran out to beg me 'not to take the barn yet they were going to do it up the next week as good as new, and wouldn't I wait?' (Stillman 1901: 175–76)

A common theme in Stillman's use of the picturesque is that it must be present in the view as found: it is not something that can be generated in the painting of the view if it does not exist there already. On first appearance this formulation of the picturesque would seem to be at odds with its use in *The Acropolis of Athens* as the phrase 'Illustrated Picturesquely' would imply that the illustration itself is picturesque. However, an analysis of the subsequent descriptive term, 'Architecturally' may help to resolve that apparent anomaly.

#### 'Architecturally'

Stillman wrote to William Rossetti in January 1869, 'I am, in fine weather, amusing myself by taking a series of photos of the Acropolis; not only picturesque, but to show

the technical characteristics of Greek architecture. It will comprise about twenty small views' (quoted in (Szegegy-Maszak 2005a: 160). And while the resulting images and their captions would home in on the tectonic precision and material quality of the Acropolis, for Stillman architecture was also bound up with questions of beauty and of the spirit of the age. In the same architectural review, published in *The Crayon* in 1856, Stillman pleads for an architecture 'whose lasting beauty shall attest a rich intelligence and art really worthy of our day!' Conscious of the nineteenth-century search for a style of the age, Stillman felt that Greek revival architecture was merely imitation, devoid of the true spirit of Greek architecture:

Copyism reigned supreme [...] To the perpetrators of all this mischief, however, it had never occurred that they had scarcely learned the alphabet of that language so eloquent under the reign of Pericles [...] They did not know even that what they had so eagerly snatched from the ruins of the Acropolis was but the skeleton of a once symmetrical and vital art. (*The Crayon* 1856: 178)

Stillman's wish for architects to shun mere copying might allow the seemingly contradictory goals of being both architecturally and picturesquely illustrated to be

reconciled.<sup>10</sup> The Acropolis contained all the elements of Stillman's own formulation of the picturesque: a natural landscape, with views of topographical features, framed by ruins of ancient buildings ('to give it sentiment'), with fragments of beautiful sculptures strewn about. It was perhaps the ultimate picturesque site. By capturing the picturesque nature of the Acropolis as well as its technical details, Stillman's photographs might manage to make manifest and comprehensible some of the elusive vitality of Greek architecture. This idiosyncratic combination of the picturesque and the architectural may be what Stillman meant by 'intelligently' when he wrote in his autobiography: 'I set about photographing the ruins of Athens, which I found had never been treated intelligently by the local photographers' (Stillman 1901: 454).

Notwithstanding Stillman's 'intelligent' approach, a further reading of 'architecturally' also presents itself; as adverbs, 'picturesquely' and 'architecturally' indicate modes of operation and particular attitudes applied to the process of photography. In this reading, 'architecturally' signifies, in addition to the above meanings, that the photographs are taken *in the mode of architecture*. One of architecture's modes of operation, which it shares with photography, is as an ordering device, an apparatus for selecting and framing views. A number of Stillman's

captions consider the Acropolis in this mode, for example, plate No. 8 (**Fig. 3**): 'The eastern façade of the Propylæa. The island and bay of Salamis are seen through the intercolumniations, and through those at the left the port of Peiræus'. Stillman not only describes the architecture, but also the view framed by the architecture. As devices, the Parthenon and the camera were well matched in terms of their capacity to frame and capture the views Stillman hunted out.

#### 'In Photography'

That Stillman was fully invested in the technical aspects of making and printing photographs is evident from his extensive writing on the subject. Along with numerous journal articles, in 1874 he published *The Amateur's Photographic Guide Book*, in which he explains in detail the process of setting up the large-format camera, composing and taking pictures and then the extremely cumbersome and painstaking technique of wet-collodion printing, which he had used for the Acropolis pictures. He also describes his adaptations of the camera back to allow the lens a greater range. He described photography as 'the purely mechanical impression by chemical means, of a phenomenon which is placed before the camera' (Stillman 1889: 130). For Stillman, the camera is a technical instrument



**Figure 3:** Stillman's plate No. 8 showing the eastern façade of the Propylæa. (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

*par excellence*, albeit one capable of producing images of artistic merit. He was adamant, however, that photography was not art, a view he elaborated in a series of articles published in *Photographic Times* in 1886 entitled 'The Art in It', and a further series in 1889 entitled 'The Art Side of Photography':

[T]he claim of photography to be considered one of the fine arts must be in any and every case rejected [...] nor is there in any pure photograph any element of personality or imagination or any distinguishing element analogical to those which in all branches of fine art give distinction to the artist. (Stillman 1886a: 157)

While Stillman allowed that photography could be artistic, in the sense of the technical skill and taste demonstrated, for him there was a more fundamental distinction to be made between subjective truth and objective fact, which meant photography was merely a copy of the facts and devoid of artistic truth. In his more philosophical writings, Stillman sought to establish a framework of knowledge which would allow him distinguish between truth and fact, between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', as he conceived them. In his extraordinary essay, 'The Subjective of It' (1898), Stillman sets out this dialectic: he describes an encounter with a 'daemon', a disembodied voice which haunts him over a period of days while he is camping in the Adirondacks with his literary friends. The 'daemon' taunts Stillman, repeatedly asking 'Subjective or objective?' Stillman responds with a mantra he had often repeated to himself: 'The universe is subjective to Deity, objective to me; but if I am in His image, what is in me which corresponds to the Creator in Him?' (Stillman 1898b: 235). Artistic truth for Stillman was intertwined with 'emotions and impressions', beauty was a reflection of moral goodness, whereas fact belonged to the realm of science and objectivity.

The question of what constituted artistic truth was the subject of intense dialogue between Stillman and John Ruskin. He recalled that Ruskin 'used to express the strongest abhorrence of the terms "subjective" and "objective" as German nonsense' (Stillman 1897: 110). In 1859 Stillman accompanied Ruskin on a trip to Switzerland, where they sought to reconstruct views from Turner's paintings and sketches. Stillman wrote:

We went to Bonneville to hunt out the point of view of a Turner drawing which Ruskin liked, but needless to say, though we ransacked the neighbourhood for views, we never found Turner's. (Stillman 1901: 310)

Stillman recognised that Turner's sketches were not drawn with the absolute 'fidelity to nature' Ruskin insisted upon, but were instead a 'subjective transformation of natural truth' (Stillman 1898a: 110). Stillman was not free to construct his views, however; through photography he was forced to deal with the facts before him.

Even as Stillman increasingly favoured photography as a medium, he always stressed its limitations:

Photography is as far superior to painting, or art in general, as a medium *for the expression of the facts of nature, or the results of science*, as art is superior to photography *as the means of expression emotion or imaginative conceptions.*' (Stillman 1886b: 479; emphasis in original)

He similarly differentiated between the artist and the artisan, aligning photography with the latter and the artisan's highest accolade was to be a 'perfect transcriber of nature' as such; the artisan was a 'scientific draughtsman' (Stillman 1856: 1). Here the concept of transcription is associated with drawing. Returning to the previous comparison with Stuart and Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens*, which was illustrated by means of 'delineations' or drawings, in Stillman's *The Acropolis of Athens*, Stuart and Revett's scientific drawings are replaced by scientific photographs—both transcriptions, in Stillman's terms. The idea of the photograph as a scientific drawing further resonates with Stillman's notion of operating 'architecturally'—an illustration as he claimed; 'to show the technical characteristics of Greek architecture' (quoted in Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 160).

And of course, scientific objectivity was often the preferable option. 'A poor picture is a waste of time and colours', he wrote, 'while a photograph that contains a fact always has a value' (Stillman, 1886b: 479). In a manner which predicts the so-called 'documentary style' of later photographers such as Walker Evans, Stillman allows an accurate record to reveal a larger truth.

#### 'F.S. Ellis'

Described as a 'scholar-bookseller' (McKitterick 2009: 662), Frederick Startridge Ellis published works by William Morris and the Rossetti brothers. Ellis advised Morris on his collection of early printed books and edited the Kelmscott Chaucer (McKitterick 2009: 641). It was through Morris and William Rossetti that Stillman became acquainted with Ellis. Indeed, Morris first introduced the idea to Ellis of publishing Stillman's photographs.<sup>11</sup> Having received a copy of Stillman's book from Ellis, Dante Gabriel Rossetti himself was drawn to consider publishing 'photos of some drawings' (Rossetti 1928: 99). Thus 'F.S. Ellis, 33 King Street [...]' on the title page identifies *The Acropolis* as both a scholarly publication, in terms of its content, and as a consciously crafted object in its own right.

#### '[Printed by the Autotype Company]'

As evidenced by its large size and fine binding, the publication was treated as a fine-art portfolio, funded through subscription, and the Autotype Company represented the latest and greatest in photographic printing technology at this time. The newly founded company—established in 1868—proclaimed their express purpose as the 'producing and printing of Autotype copies of Works of Art' (Boyes 1868: 13). The autotype process was a form of carbon printing which surpassed the ubiquitous albumen

print by producing a more stable image. It also allowed for a very broad tonal range and fine detail. Furthermore, printing techniques dictated the format of the book. Until the development of the halftone process in the 1880s, images and typeset text could not easily be combined on a single sheet (other than through the use of tipped-in images); hence the separation onto facing sheets. This layout, common to the period, establishes a binary relationship of image and text, each independently produced, each formally discrete, framed by generous borders, but evidently thematically linked across the divide of the binding. And given that the layout is necessitated by the use of photographs, the image might seem the dominant partner in this arrangement, dictating the sheet size (and leaving its ghostly presence around the type), dictating also the placement of the text, which remains subservient. However, a more sustained analysis of the publication reveals greater subtleties and complexities in this relationship of text and image.

### **'Ancient Gate of the Acropolis'**

Finally, with regard to decoding the title page, some observations might be made on the way in which a single image is incorporated. A photograph of the Beulé Gate lies in the centre of the page, interposed between the title and its author; a different word-image relation is at play here than in the rest of the book. As distinct from the binary relationship of image and text established in the following pages, this image is embedded in the page and surrounded by text. A small caption beneath the image reads 'Ancient Gate of the Acropolis'. The short caption is in keeping with the use of captions throughout the book; however, the image here is allegorical (as well as factual – it is indeed the ancient gate of the Acropolis). The image of the gateway symbolises a threshold of knowledge and experience; to open this book is to enter the Acropolis, to understand its architecture and its beauty.

### **'Notice'**

Establishing further the discursive space envisaged by Stillman, the title page is followed by a dedication page, and then by the following 'Notice' (Fig. 4):

The negatives from which the following Auto-types are printed have been, with one exception, left untouched, that nothing should injure the outlines, or diminish the architectural accuracy, of the Views. The negatives are all produced with Dallmeyer's rectilinear lenses, and the façades as far as practicable, photographed from points exactly equidistant from the extremities.

Here Stillman presents the Acropolis volume, as a whole, as a scrupulous document of fact. That 'the negatives [...] have been left untouched that nothing should injure the outlines' asserts the trustworthiness of the images. The 'one exception'<sup>12</sup> refers to the nineteenth-century practice of supplanting a dull sky in one negative with a more visually interesting or dramatic sky from another negative; the resulting composite was called a combination print.<sup>13</sup> As

Szegedy-Maszak observes, plate No. 18 is one such combination print with a particularly striking and dramatic sky (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 184).

'Dallmeyer's rectilinear lenses' were the most modern in lens technology. They corrected the 'barrel-shaped distortion' at the edges of the image and were produced by John Henry Dallmeyer, who especially recommended the 'rapid rectilinear lens' for architectural purposes (Dallmeyer 1874: 19). Stillman, in his *Amateur Guide* of 1874, recommended the use of a 'swing-back' camera of his own design, which he had produced during his time as Cretan consul (before his flight to Greece). The 'swing-back' design ensured that the photographic plate was always 'parallel to the plane of the building', thereby avoiding the converging of lines towards the top of the image. Stillman records in his autobiography that in setting out to photograph the 'ruins of Athens' he 'was provided with everything necessary to *correct* architectural work' (Stillman 1901: 454; emphasis added).

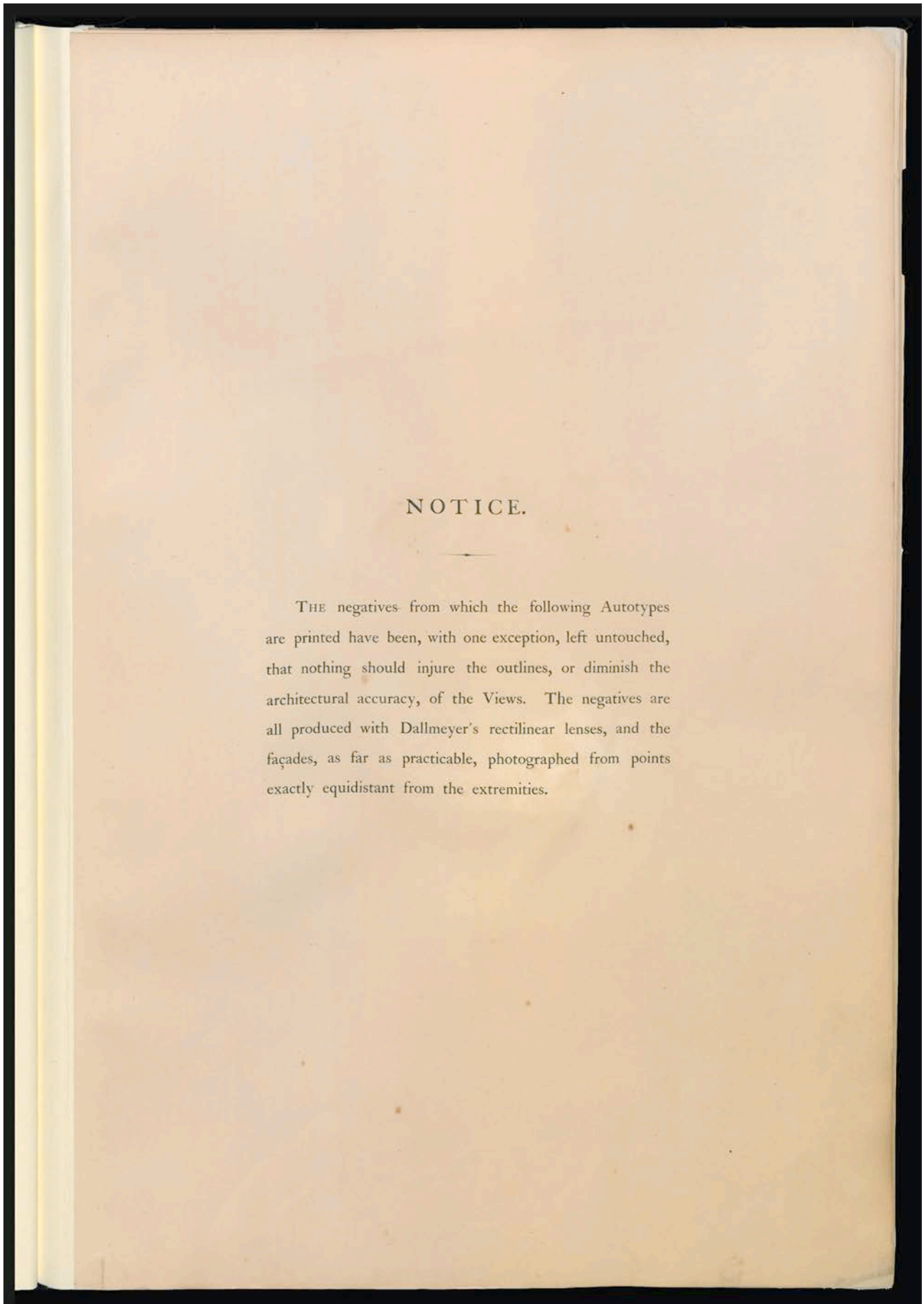
Having itemised his equipment, Stillman then outlines his method: 'and the façades as far as practicable, photographed from points exactly equidistant from the extremities'. In other words, the camera was placed on a centre line with the façade. By explaining his methodology, Stillman again asserts the veracity of the images, and in so doing reinforces their pedagogical value. The set-up also accounts for the frontal and strongly perspectival composition of some of the images, for example plates No. 16 and No. 20 (Fig. 5), a mode which, as Claire Zimmerman has recently explored, would become the norm in architectural photography in the early twentieth century (Zimmerman 2014).

A last point to note is the capitalisation of the word 'views'. This reinforces the deterministic concept of view which recurs elsewhere in Stillman's writing – as the picturesque must reside in the view as it exists, it is not something which can be created in the capturing of it. The practice of 'hunting for views' essentially treats the view as an object in itself, and by capitalising it here, Stillman expresses its objecthood.

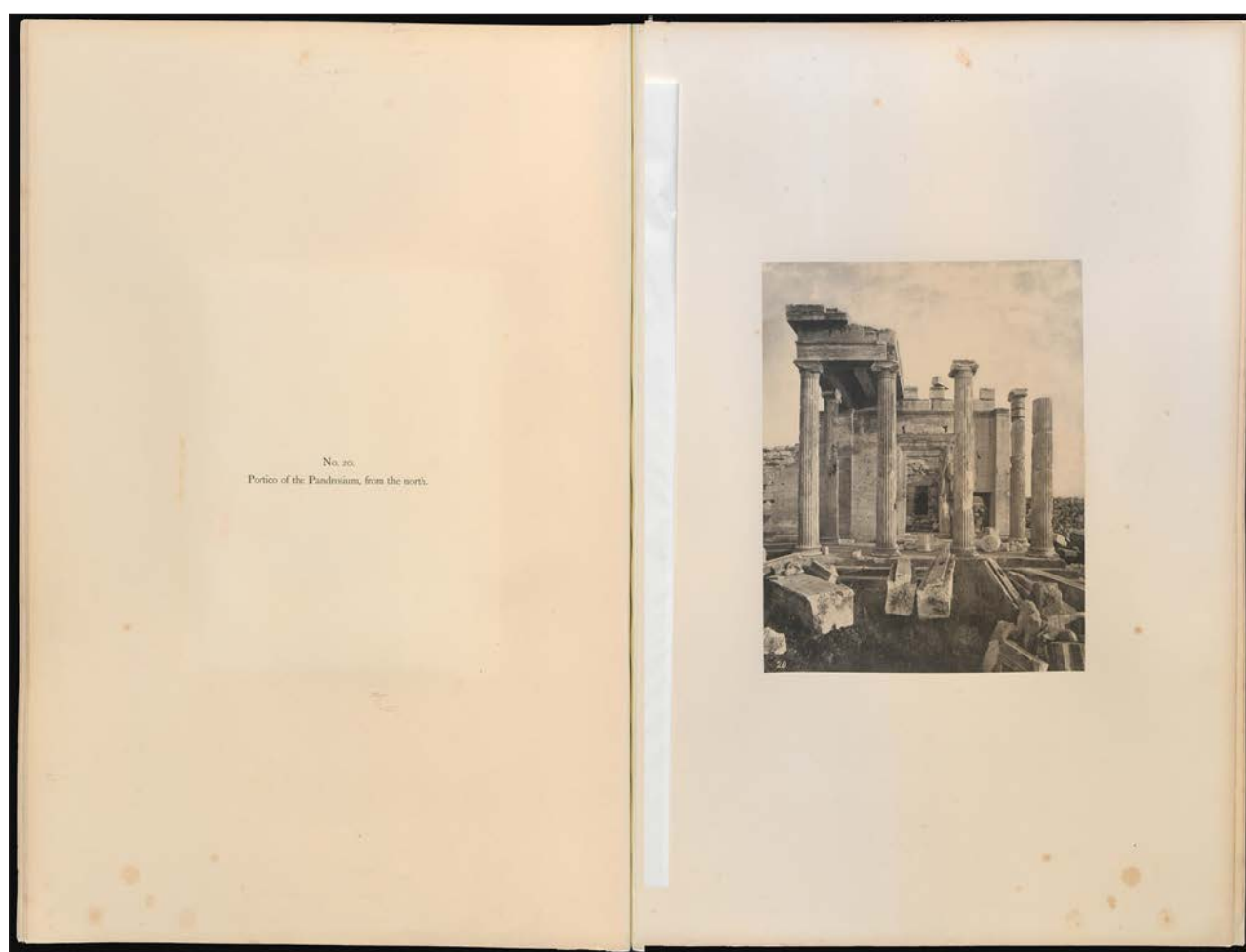
Taken as a whole, the 'notice' presents *The Acropolis of Athens* as a record of fact, 'architectural accuracy' as its first and foremost concern. It has the character of scientific method statement, describing the equipment used and the precise methodology employed, as well as flagging anomalies in the process. Inherent in this quasi-scientific method statement is the expectation of reproducibility – that another 'scientist' could attain the same results following the same method. In 1882 Stillman himself returned to reproduce the experiment, taking virtually the same views he took in 1869.

### **Stillman's 'Twenty Five Plates with Descriptive Letterpress'<sup>14</sup>**

Beyond the introductory pages, the heart of the book consists of twenty-five photographic images and their captions. The scale and nature of the content renders the volume too unwieldy and precious to accompany a traveler in the manner of a popular guidebook. This was a publication to be savoured in repose rather than consulted in



**Figure 4:** Stillman's 'Notice' (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).



**Figure 5:** Stillman's plate No. 20 showing the portico of the Pandrosium (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

the field. Stillman's intended audience was more likely to have encountered photographs of the Acropolis as individual prints or as part of larger collections covering the Mediterranean and Greece: his album was unusual in that it dwelt on a particular site, the Acropolis, at length.

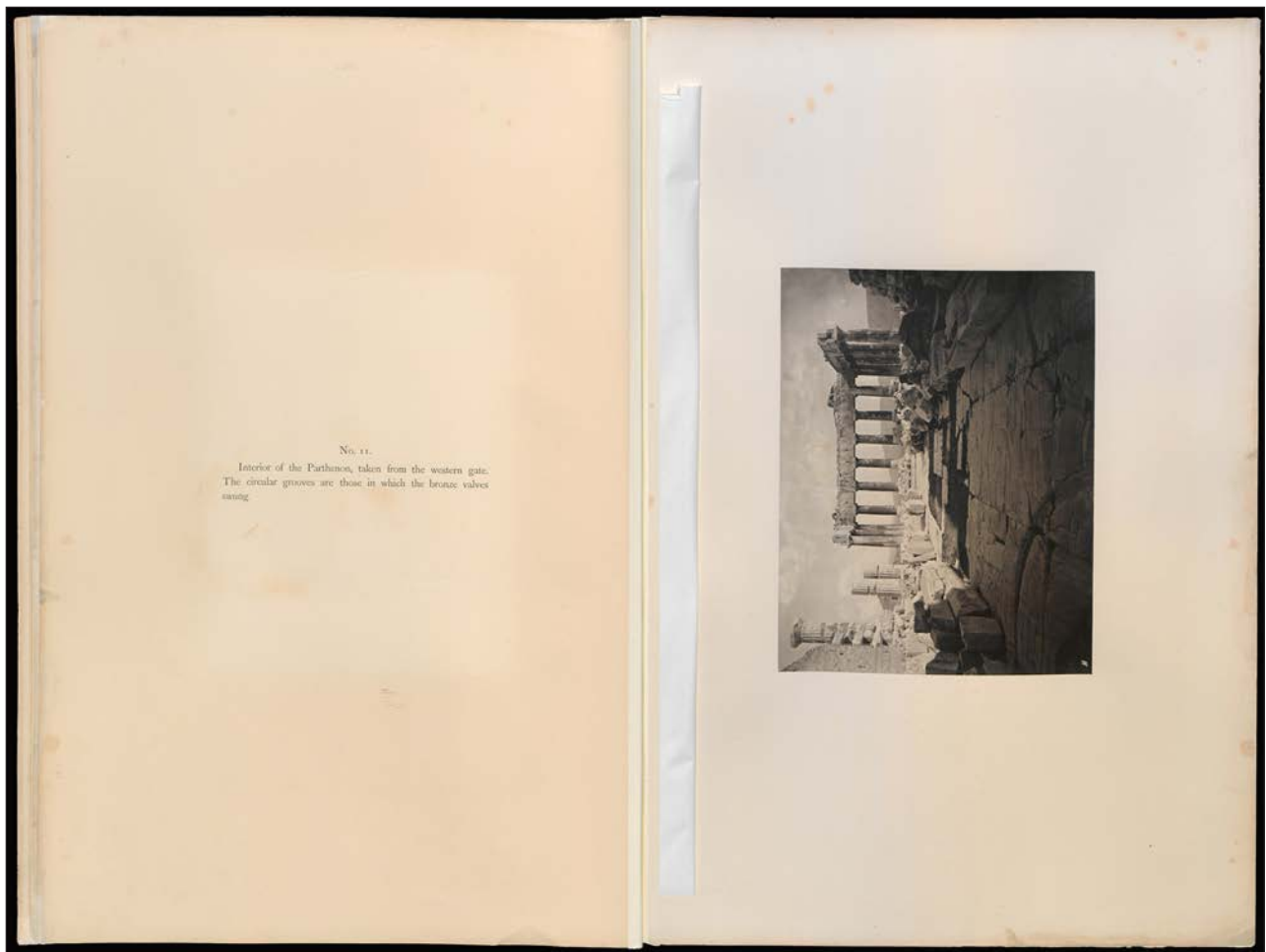
As Szegedy-Maszak has noted Stillman's narrative of the site 'replicates the experience of the typical visitor' (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 164). The sequence of images follows to a great extent the prescribed route set out in the guidebooks of the time, such as John Murray's and later Baedeker's. Murray's 1872 edition of the *Handbook for Travellers in Greece* begins its description with an account of 'the topography of the Acropolis', followed by detailed descriptions of the Propylæa, the Parthenon and the Erechtheum. Stillman too begins by encircling the Acropolis, providing wide landscape views, and then 'zooms in' to the western façade of the Propylæa, followed by the Temple of Victory, and then the western façade of the Parthenon. The Parthenon provides Stillman's main focus, accounting for ten of the twenty-five plates. Of these ten, four are taken from inside looking out: plates No. 10 (**Fig. 2**), 11 (**Fig. 6**), 14 and 15 (**Fig. 7**). Interior views were unusual in the canon of commercial photography at the time (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 178). In the context of Stillman's methodology, his attention to the interior might be explained as an example of his scientific

rigour: to give a full and objective account. More speculatively, these images fulfil another more phenomenological function, in that they allow the viewer to dwell in the Parthenon, to inhabit its porticoes and its interior proper (**Fig. 6**).

Two of these four images include people; plate No. 11 (**Fig. 6**) features a man sitting in Greek costume, and plate No. 15 (**Fig. 7**) includes the figure of a man in western dress and a top hat, thought to be Stillman himself.<sup>15</sup> While many nineteenth-century photographers included people in their photographs to 'give scale and add interest' (Ehrenkranz 1988a: 120), the inclusion of figures, particularly of the photographer's own, suggests a ruin inhabited and experienced, in addition to a ruin recorded. The caption to plate No. 11 (**Fig. 6**) supports this interpretation, pointing to the traces of former inhabitation:

Interior of the Parthenon, taken from the western gate.  
The circular grooves are those in which the bronze valves swung.

The focus of the plates shifts from the Parthenon to the Erechtheum and the Pandrosium, finishing with detailed views of a 'Figure of Victory'<sup>16</sup> and a fragment of the frieze from the Parthenon.



**Figure 6:** Stillman's plate No. 11 showing the interior of the Parthenon (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

There is a stark contrast between the text-laden, fact-heavy pages of Murray's guidebook and the deliberate sparseness of Stillman's layout, with its single-framed images and minimal text. It is as though the images have replaced the need for text, replicating the experience of the traveller as surely and completely as the descriptions of the guidebook. As he advised in *The Amateur's Photographic Guide Book*, the images have transcribed 'every scene worth transcribing'.

### Captions

Supporting the idea of the images replicating the experience of the traveller, the captions, although short and dry, allow the viewer to reconstruct, to some degree, Stillman's experience of the Acropolis. As previously noted, they orientate the viewer, providing geographical clues, and identify the subject of each photograph, as for example plate No. 4:

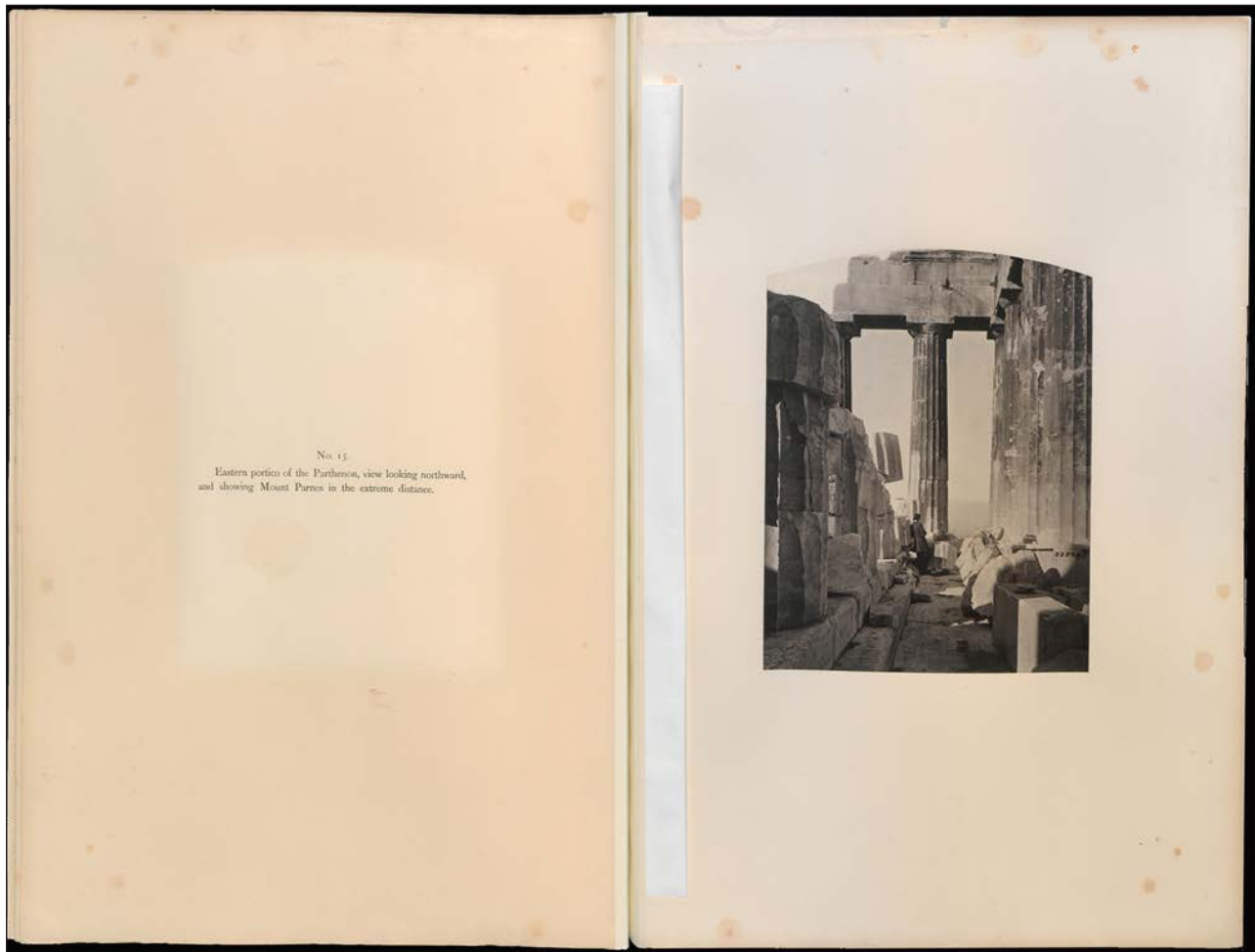
The Acropolis, from the hill above the Illissus, looking north-west. At the right are the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter, and at the extreme left the Musæum Hill, with the monument of Philopappus.

As Kaufman has noted, the inclusion of locational detail in travel accounts was a 'habit' which lasted well into

the nineteenth century, and such detail 'forms not only a record of a voyage but also directions for replicating it' (Kaufman 1989: 67). The captions in *The Acropolis* conform to this interpretation. They identify topographical features, the location from which the 'view' was taken as well as the direction of the 'view':

View of the Acropolis, from Musæum Hill. A portion of modern Athens, is visible at the left; at the right is seen the course of the Illissus, and the remaining columns of the Temple of Jupiter, beyond which rises Mount Hymettus. The view is eastward.

Here the term 'view' is used to mean two different things. In the first instance it refers to the image itself, the photograph on the page: 'View of the Acropolis'. Secondly it refers to what the photograph is an image of: 'The view is eastward'. The former places the viewer outside the image, looking at the product of the camera. The latter places the viewer within the landscape of the image, looking through the camera, which in turn is Stillman the photographer's view, although by using 'the', Stillman's ascribes it to the camera, the machine. The easy slippage between the two meanings reveals something of the double nature of photography



**Figure 7:** Stillman's plate No. 15 showing the eastern portico of the Parthenon (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

observed by Burnett: 'it is both the act of pointing, and the physical trace' (Sealy 2015).

For a writer, critic and journalist, Stillman's use of language in *The Acropolis* is surprisingly free of embellishment. The captions are simply retelling the facts contained in the image. He does not use figurative language; there are no metaphors or similes. It is as though he is consciously holding back from passing judgement on the 'views', as befits the status of the image, and the book, as an objective record of fact. The caption for plate No. 17 is the one exception in which he allows a superlative to slip by:

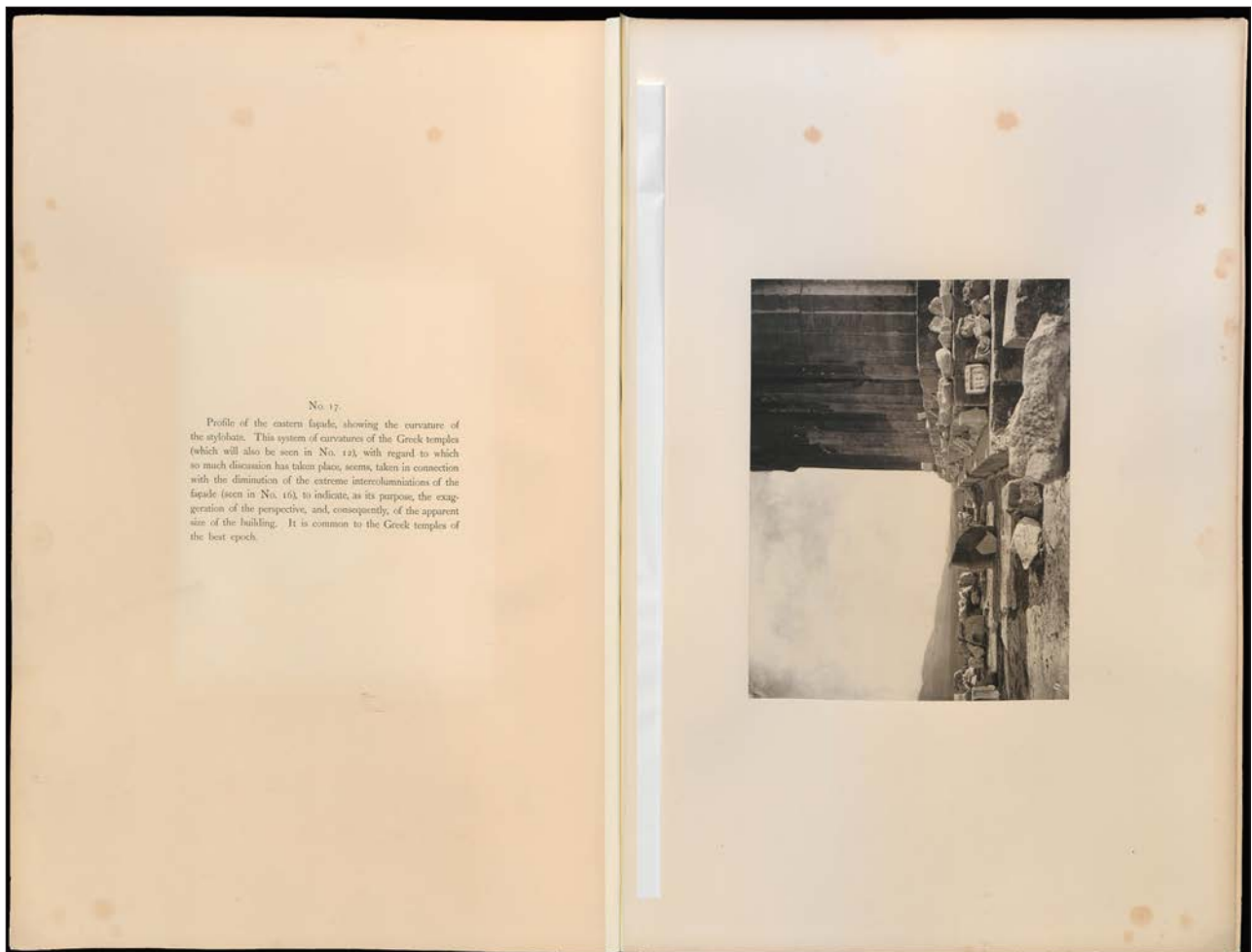
Profile of the eastern façade, showing the curvature of the stylobate. This system of curvatures of the Greek temples (which will also be seen in No. 12), with regard to which so much discussion has taken place, seems, taken in connection with the diminution of the extreme intercolumniations of the of the façade (seen in No. 16), to indicate, as its purpose, the exaggeration of the perspective, and consequently, of the apparent size of the building. It is common to the Greek temples of the *best* epoch. (emphasis added)

This is also the longest caption in the book and bears some further examination. Stillman's use of technical language

here has been commented upon by Szegedy-Maszak, who asserts that it is meant to establish Stillman's 'erudition and, by implication, that of his audience' (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 181). The curvature referred to had been confirmed in 1851 by Francis Penrose in *The Principles of Athenian Architecture*. Here, Stillman offers his own theory for the purpose of the curvature: 'the exaggeration of the perspective, and consequently, of the apparent size of the building'. The photograph is purposely framed and composed to affirm – by objective record – the curvature identified by Penrose (**Fig. 8**). The image is offered in evidence of a theory contained in the caption.

This caption is also unusual because it refers to other images in the book: plates No. 12 and No. 16. In so doing it begins to tie the series of single images together as a whole document, a full and complete record, reinforcing its value as a pedagogical tool.

Many of Stillman's images break with the canon of photographic representations of the Acropolis that was already becoming established.<sup>17</sup> Plates No. 12 (**Fig. 9**) and No. 13 (**Fig. 10**) are particularly unusual; these photographs deviate from the conventions of drawing which tended to dictate the stratagems of early photography (Ackerman 2002, 2003). The way in which text and image work together further complicates the dynamic. Whereas it is the artistic qualities of plates No. 12 and No. 13



**Figure 8:** Stillman's plate No. 17 showing the profile of the eastern façade, a photograph set up to record 'the curvature of the stylobate' and 'the diminution of the extreme intercolumniations' (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

which immediately impress — the deep perspective view, the dark tones which hint at the sublime — the captions frame them simply as records of fact. The caption for No. 12 reads:

Western portico of the Parthenon, from above, showing the frieze in its original position, the only portion which remains so.

And for No. 13, we are told:

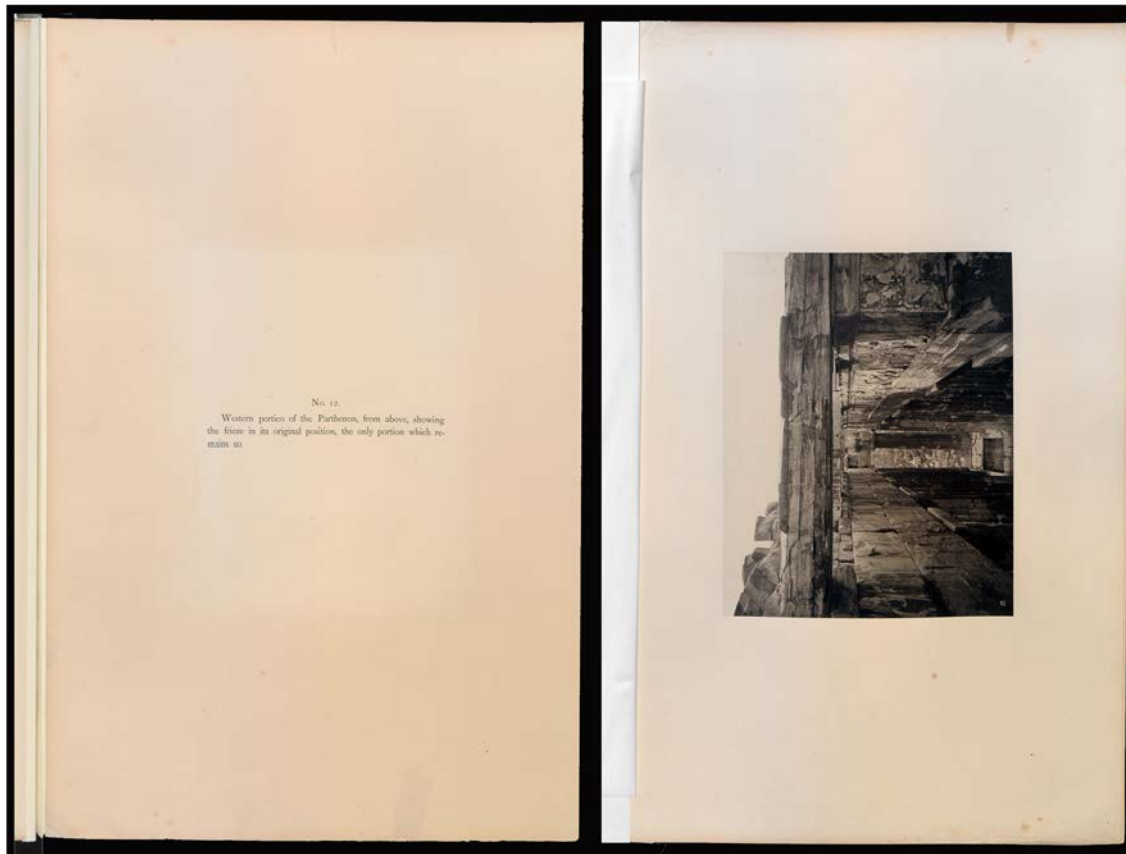
View taken from the same point as No. 12 and looking eastward over the Parthenon. Modern Athens is seen at the left, and above it, in the centre, Lycabettus; at the right Hymettus, and in the extreme distance, Pentelicus.

Rather than considering these images as evidence of an artistic concern at work, the captions frame these images as simply the result of the application of an objective scientific method (that which Stillman set out in his notice). The depth of field and flexibility of focus permitted by the Dallmeyer lens is evidenced by the sheer closeness of the architectural fabric in plate No. 12 (**Fig. 9**), a confrontation between the lens and the building that is then turned

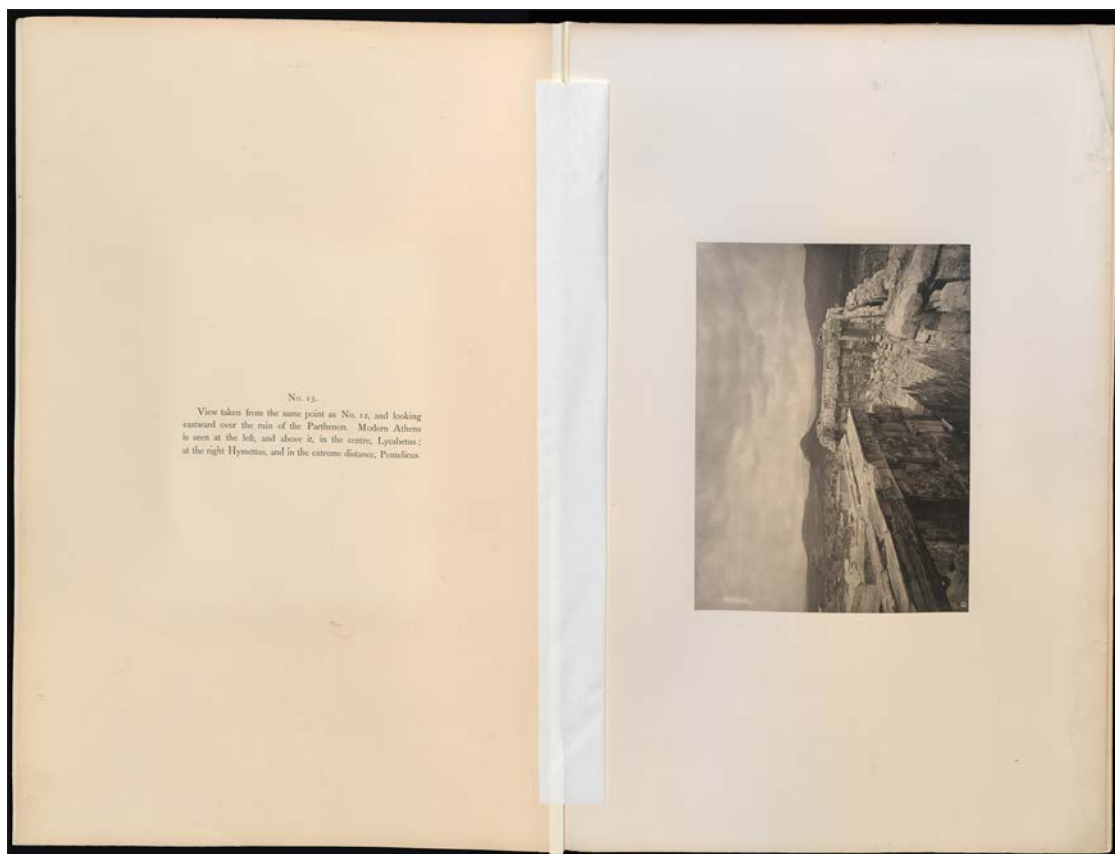
on a pivot, to a wide landscape shot re-establishing the geographical context (**Fig. 10**). This juxtaposition of powerful stone geometry and natural setting exemplifies the dialectical method at work in the book and indeed at the site itself.

### Subsequent Iterations

Stillman's photographs surface and resurface in different contexts in the decades following the publication of *The Acropolis* in 1870. In subsequent iterations he adopts varying approaches to the combination of text and image. In 1872 Marion & Co., one of the largest photographic printing companies of the period (Plunkett 2008: 892), published a new version of *The Acropolis*, entitled *Photographic Views of Athens*, containing twenty-three albumen prints taken from Stillman's 1869 negatives. A notice in *The Athenaeum*, of June 1872, advertised the album as not only available from Marion & Co. but also from 'the photographer' directly (Advertisement 1872: 674). That 'Single Views unmounted' were also offered, indicates that Stillman was not averse to his images being disseminated without their captions, nor to their use singly without the context and sequence provided by the albums. The subject of the images in both albums is the same. Some images appear to be identical, perhaps even printed from



**Figure 9:** Stillman's plate No. 12 showing the western portico of the Parthenon (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).



**Figure 10:** The result of Stillman's *volte-face* from plate No. 12 (Stillman 1870: plate No. 13). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

the same negative, while other images have a slightly different viewpoint. Plate No. 15 (**Fig. 7**) is the most notably different; the figure, Stillman, is not present in the 1872 print.

Most striking about the 1872 publication is the omission of virtually all text. There is no frontispiece, preface or introduction, no 'notice' to explain the precision of Stillman's methodology. The images, shorn of captions, float in the centre of the page. Thus presented, the meaning of the photographs, and even the identification of their subject, relies entirely on the prior knowledge of the viewer. A review in *The Athenaeum* in 1872, while admiring the artistic quality of the images, lamented the absence of a more complete geographical and historical context:

We think Mr. Stillman would have done well to print not only a plan of the site, but a brief sketch of its history, to accompany the photographs [...] Everyone has not at his fingers' ends the history of these buildings. (Athens 1872: 406)

Without their captions, short as they are, the descriptive armature of the text is missing and the images are left open to interpretation; their 'discursive space' is, in effect, boundless. That being said, considering the collections where Stillman's images are found – the Hellenic Society, for example – their primary use (discursive space) appears to have remained pedagogical. Deborah Harlan notes that Stillman's images, as individual albumen prints, were 'avidly collected' and are found in the collections of artists and scholars, including Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) and Sir John Beazley (1885–1970) (Harlan 2008: 123). This is perhaps testament to the precision of Stillman's method and his diligence in its application.

The absence of text might be explained by the change of publisher. In the hands of F.S. Ellis and the Autotype Company, *The Acropolis* was, by association, a fine art book, lauded by Ruskin in the company's prospectus as 'one of the most important Education Art-works that has yet been published in Europe' (Boyce, 1868: 7), whereas Marion & Co. were most famous for printing thousands of *cartes-de-visites* – small portraits of celebrities, family members or friends – described by Joseph Plunkett as "'touchy-feely" artefacts; not to be looked at with deferential awe or revered from a distance' (Plunkett 2008: 277). Marion & Co. were interested in the mass-production of images, not books, and as the inclusion of text would have required a different printing technique, their 1872 version reverts back to a portfolio format.

However, it is not completely true to say there is no text whatsoever. Close inspection of both the 1870 and the 1872 version reveals that six of the photographs have 'WStillman 69' inscribed into the negative and three plates also bear descriptions of the image; plate No. 7 (**Fig. 11**), for example, has 'Temple of Victory' positioned on the lower half of the image. These words may have served simply as an *aide-memoire* to Stillman; however, by scratching them into the surface of the negative itself, he circumvented the contemporary difficulties of



**Figure 11:** Close up view of Stillman's plate No. 7 of the Temple of Victory. Stillman's signature is visible at the top left of the image, and 'Temple of Victory' is just visible, written vertically, on the right edge of the boulder in foreground (Stillman 1870). © The British Library Board (1701.c.06).

printing text and image on the same paper, providing some, if scant, context to the images. Stillman's placement of these etched captions is interesting as they adhere to the composition of the photograph and follow the contours of elements, usually boulders and rocks, as in **Figure 11** – in this case, the image dictates the layout of the text.

As noted previously Stillman returned to re-photograph the views he took in 1869, sometime during or prior to 1882 (Ehrenkranz 1988b: 25). It is not known why he undertook this re-photographing exercise, but it is known that he placed his Athens negatives at the disposal of the Hellenic Society in 1886 (Harlan 2008: 124). Advertisements in *The Athenaeum* between 1886 and 1891 offer the photographs for purchase through the Autotype company, 'issued by authority of the Hellenic Society'.

The images resurface again in 1888, in an illustrated book, *On the Track of Ulysses*, part travel journalism, part archaeological treatise. In this iteration, Stillman's own sketches and photographs were transformed into wood-block engravings; they 'were put on the blocks', Stillman acknowledges, by Harry Fenn (Stillman 1888: vi). As engravings, the images could be easily printed with the text, and consequently a different word-image relationship is established. The chapter 'The So-Called Venus of Melos' contains an illustration of 'Victory raising an offering' (**Fig. 12**) which is based on the 1882 photograph 'Victory', which in turn is a re-photographed version of 'Figure of Victory' from the 1870 publication (Ehrenkranz 1988a: 122).<sup>18</sup> The relationship between image and text is reversed; rather than the text describing the image, the images now illustrate the text, serving as evidence for Stillman's archaeological theories. The layout of the page evinces a different hierarchy of word and image; the image is surrounded on three sides by the text, it is almost subsumed by the text. The immediacy of the photograph as an objective record is contaminated by transformation to engraving; the image is

*THE SO-CALLED VENUS OF MELOS.*

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even none which lend themselves to a group, if such were made up by various sculptors; *Thirdly*, that, at the epoch in which the statue was produced, any group which has been suggested would have been out of accordance with the aims of art, as practiced by the Greeks. The only evidence in favor of such a theory is that in some antique fragments or coins are indications of such a figure as the Melian in combination. But, as this statue must have been in its own time nearly as celebrated, relatively, as in ours, it must have given rise to many imitations and adaptations. It may have given rise to some which support the group theory, but to more which support an opposing theory.

Von Ravensburg goes over, in detail, all the group theories, and easily finds fatal objections to all. What most surprises me is that any one ever tried to put it into a group, so completely by itself does it stand in every sense of the word.

Millingen, in 1826, started his theory that it was a Victory holding a shield in both hands. I am quite convinced that many who have started other theories would have adopted this if they had not been anticipated in proposing it. The vanity of archæological research, and eagerness to propose something new is so dominant in most archæologists that



VICTORY RAISING AN OFFERING (TEMPLE OF NIKÉ  
APTEROS, THE ACROPOLIS, ATHENS).

further mediated by the interpretation of the engraver; unwanted details are omitted; the fragments of sculpture which surround the figure in the photograph are obliterated in the engraving. While photography fundamentally operates on the basis of framing and selection, here the expanse of the discursive space of the image is further confined through engraving, as an illustration of Stillman's theory on the Venus of Melos. Stillman's archaeological treatise required a different order of description; here he presents his archaeological *theory*, not a simple record of the facts but rather an interpretation of the facts, the primary mode for which is not image, but language.

To conclude by returning to Badger and Parr's survey, its first two sections are entitled 'Facing Facts – The Nineteenth-Century Photobook as Record', and 'Photography as Art: The Pictorial Photobook'. Given how keen Stillman was to stress photography's capacity for recording facts and its lack of artistic credentials, it would no doubt have dismayed him to learn that, over a century later, his album was included in the second section rather than the first. It may have bewildered him too to see his book being claimed as a progenitor of modernist values in photography precisely because 'self-expression is deemed as important as making a record' (Parr and Badger 2004: 68).

This proto-modernist quality might be seen as a product of the way in which the images are framed in the publication. Their placement on oversized sheets means that we never read them merely as transparent windows to experience, but always also as discrete artefacts with distinct formal properties. Despite its formal placement, the same cannot be claimed of the text, which remains unambiguously functional. Thus Janus-like, Stillman's book looks in two directions, the grounded text pointing back towards the empirical world of facts, where buildings are tied to the time and the place of their making, while the photographs point forward to a world in which formal and material properties may be decontextualised, transformed and endlessly reinvented.

### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See for instance the lengthy discussions collected in James Elkins's book, *Photography Theory* (Elkins 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> *The Acropolis* was published in London.
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the history of the illustrated travel account and its relationship to architecture, see Kaufman (1989).
- <sup>4</sup> Stillman writes in his autobiography that due to the failed promises of his contributors, 'for the first numbers, I wrote nearly the whole of the original matter, and for some time more than half of it' (Stillman 1901: 228).
- <sup>5</sup> See the poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Cacoeihes Scribendi*. Although the poem was not published until 1890, the interpretation of the phrase is made clear in the poem. Stillman and Holmes were acquainted with one another, and both were members of the Saturday Club.
- <sup>6</sup> As noted by Barry Bergdoll with regard to architectural photography in France at this time (Bergdoll 1994: 100).
- <sup>7</sup> See for example, Lindquist-Cock (1979) and Szegedy-Maszak (2005a).
- <sup>8</sup> In this regard the 'picturesque' is more closely related to what Ruskin termed 'the simple etymological sense' of the word, that which is 'fit to become the subject of a picture' (Ruskin 1903: 236).
- <sup>9</sup> See for example in *Old Rome and New* (Stillman 1898a: 250, 265), and in his autobiography (Stillman 1901: 175, 310).
- <sup>10</sup> Colin Eisler notes the inherent contradiction in the two terms, while Szegedy-Maszak contends that Stillman successfully resolved these competing requirements – the need for scientific accuracy and artistic expression (Eisler 1988: 112; Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 178).
- <sup>11</sup> In a letter to F.S. Ellis, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote, 'Stillman wishes me to say that he will call some time [sic] next week on you about his photographs in Greece which you have heard of from Morris, to whom love. I suppose he'll be here in a day or two' (Rossetti 1928: 54).
- <sup>12</sup> There were in fact four exceptions (see Szegedy-Maszak 2005a and 2005b: 216, note 46).
- <sup>13</sup> Combination prints were used to overcome a technical deficiency in the collodion wet-plate process, whereby an exposure showing the detail of the landscape, for example, meant the sky portion was over exposed; see Hirsch (2008: 960–62).
- <sup>14</sup> As described in the British Library Catalogue entry for Stillman's *The Acropolis*.
- <sup>15</sup> In total four photographs include a person in this publication of *The Acropolis*. On the figure in plate No. 15, see Szegedy-Maszak (2005a) and Tomlinson (1987).
- <sup>16</sup> Szegedy-Maszak notes that this plate depicts 'a panel from the sculpted parapet that once served as a protective balustrade around the small Temple of Athena Nike' rather than Figure of Victory from the Temple of Victory, as Stillman's description claims (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 185–189).

<sup>17</sup> Szegedy-Maszak notes that 'almost all' Stillman's photographs 'have no parallel in the repertoire of commercially available tourist views' (Szegedy-Maszak 2005a: 181).

<sup>18</sup> The photographs are here translated into engravings so that image and text can be printed on the same page, making it viable for large-scale commercial printing; see Wakeman (1973).

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