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THE STEREOSCOPIC NEGATIVES BY J. LAURENT. PORTUGAL VIEWS IN THE YEAR OF 1869

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Abstract:

Jean (or Juan) Laurent lived in Madrid and started to work as a photographer in 1856, by opening a portrait gallery. In 1857 he was already taking stereoscopic views. Between 1861 and 1868 he was announced as the photographer for Queen Elizabeth II of Spain. In 1869 he traveled to Portugal to obtain city views and portrait the Portuguese royal family. Laurent sold these photographs at his headquarters in Madrid and through an extensive network of depositaries in different Spanish and European cities, including Lisbon and Porto.

All his negatives from Portugal were made with the technique of wet collodion glass plates, using a handcart as a photographic darkroom. Most of the copies were printed on albumen paper, while some others on Leptographic paper. The Laurent archive is preserved in Madrid, in the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute. In total there are about 12,000 negatives of the nineteenth century, made by Laurent and his hired photographers. Among the stereoscopic negatives (13 x 18 cm format) there are 78 views of Portugal, mainly from Lisbon, Batalha, Tomar, Coimbra, Porto, Setúbal and Évora.

Other interesting negatives of Portugal are twelve glass plates in the gigantic panoramic format of 27 x 60 centimeters. However, most of the conserved negatives in Portugal are of the standard 27 x 36 cm format. All positive copies were obtained by contact, at the same size by trimming the edges. Albumen paper copies were mounted on separate cards or in albums. As of 1875, Laurent's company was named J. Laurent y Compañía.

Keywords: history of photography, stereoscopic negatives, Spain, Portugal, J. Laurent, wet collodion plates

Among the main series of stereoscopic photographs taken in Portugal in the nineteenth century,¹ we need to recall the views obtained by professional photographer J. Laurent. But who was this Laurent? He was a French national, his full name "Jean Laurent", born in Garchizy in 1816. At the age of 27 he started living in Madrid (Spain) permanently, working in the production of special papers. Already in 1855 he began to experiment with coloring photographs and in the following year he opened a photography gallery, at number 39 of the Madrid street named Carrera de San Jerónimo. He soon achieved great success photographing celebrities and, starting in 1857, taking stereoscopic views of the Spanish capital.

He signed his photographs "J. Laurent", never "Jean Laurent". In Spain he was known by his contemporaries as "Juan Laurent". In the registrations of the Municipality of Madrid and in all the official documents, as well as in all the newspapers, he featured with the name "Juan". After passing away in Madrid, in November 1886, he was buried in the new Almudena Cemetery as Juan Laurent.² He lived in Madrid for more than 40 years.

By the catalogues published by "J. Laurent" and "J. Laurent y Compañía", it is possible to become acquainted with most of his photographic activity. He toured the Iberian Peninsula, travelling mainly by train. Photography and the railway were two of the most important inventions of the nineteenth century.

Between the years 1861 and 1868 he was proclaimed photographer to Queen Elizabeth II of Spain. Over the doorway to his establishment the following could be read in large letters: "J. Laurent. Fotógrafo de S. M." [J. Laurent. Her Majesty's Photographer]. In his catalogues, too, he featured as "Fotógrafo de S. M. la Reina" [Photographer to H.M. the Queen], for example, in the catalogue of the photographs he had for sale in 1863. (Figure 1)³ In this specific year he sold stereoscopic views of Spanish cities as well as portraits of renowned people.



Fig. 1 Cover of Jean Laurent's Catalogue 1863. Biblioteca Nacional de España

1) Araújo, N. B. (2018). Lisbon and its Region: Stereoscopic Photography, C. 1853-1890. International Journal on Stereo & Immersive Media, 1(2), 4-31. Retrieved from <https://revistas.ulusofona.pt/index.php/stereo/article/view/6291>

2) Teixidor, C. (2008), 26.

3) Laurent, J. (1863).

In March 1869 he travelled to Portugal.⁴ At the time Spain found itself without a king, ruled by a provisional government. In the wake of a revolution, the queen had left for exile at the end of September 1868. The new Spanish authorities were trying to get a member of the Portuguese royal family to accept the throne of Spain. In this context, Laurent arrived in Lisbon and took a picture of king Louis I of Portugal, who would eventually reject the Spanish crown.

Laurent's stay in Portugal lasted several months. He obtained photographic views of cities and monuments, as well as works of art, such as paintings and sculptures. He systematically photographed the most prized and representative historic landmarks. Now we can verify that most of the places declared as World Heritage by UNESCO had already been photographed by Laurent in 1869.

On UNESCO's lists, and in Laurent's catalogues,⁵ we can find the following cultural features: Convent of Cristo, in Tomar, with its Manueline window; the Monastery of Batalha; the Hieronymites Monastery and the Belem Tower, in Lisboa; the historic centre of Évora; the Alcobaça Monastery; Sintra's cultural landscape, including the Pena Palace; the historic center of Porto; the historic center of Guimarães; the University of Coimbra; the Palace of Mafra, and the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte, in Braga.

In all these places, and surrounding areas, Laurent obtained stereoscopic negatives in the format of 13 x 18 centimeters. The same was true of Setubal. The photographic campaign ended in the city of Évora, whereupon Laurent returned to Spain. At present there remain 78 original stereoscopic

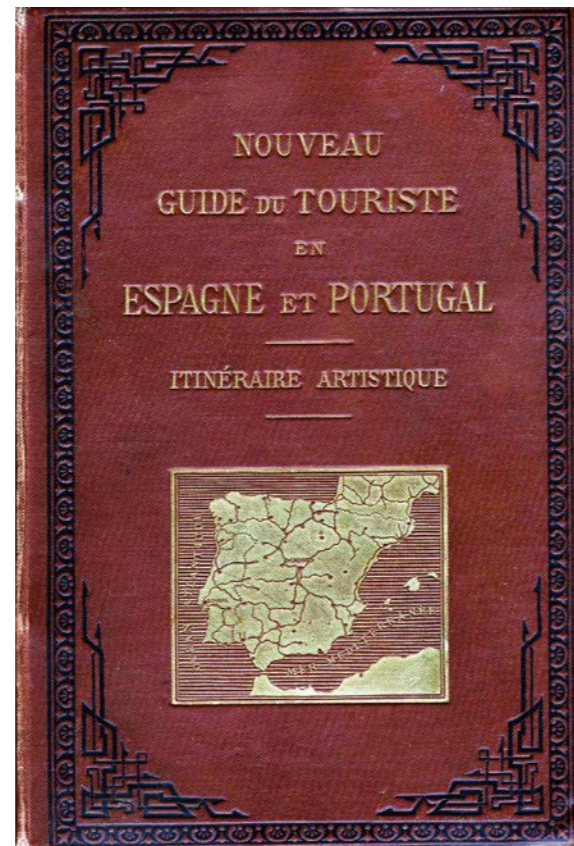


Fig. 2 Cover of J. Laurent y Cia Catalogue October 1879

4) Araújo, N. B. (2010).

5) Laurent, J. (1872).

negatives, from a total of 85 different titles that we find in the 1879 catalogue (Figures 2 and 3).⁶ Most have been preserved, as have the non-stereoscopic negatives in the extra-large formats of 27 x 36, y 27 x 60 centimeters. They can all be found in the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute (IPCE), in Madrid.⁷

Laurent's laboratory

In 1869, it was indispensable to have a field photography laboratory to produce the negatives. All the negatives from Portugal were made using the technique of wet collodion glass plate. To prepare these plates and their subsequent



Fig. 3 Map published in the 1879 Catalogue by J. Laurent y Cia

6) J. Laurent et Cie. (1879).

7) The scanned images can be seen as positives on the Internet, on the webpage of the catalogue of the Photographic Library of IPCE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute, Ministry of Culture and Sports.) These are digital positives in "jpg" format, of limited quality, which can be downloaded and used provided their source is referenced. Scanned images in high resolution, in TIF format, can be requested for publications or exhibitions.

development, it was necessary to use a "dark room" with safety lighting through red or orange glass.

Laurent took to Portugal and used there his characteristic handcart or laboratory cart, identified with his name and the address of his headquarters in Madrid and the branch in Paris (from which he only sold paper copies). The sign or inscription read: "J. LAURENT / IN MADRID CARRERA S. GERONIMO 39 / IN PARIS RUE RICHELIEU 27".

A few months before, the inscription included a royal crown and the title of photographer to H.M., elements which were now hidden under a coat of paint. Laurent was skilful and adapted to the political changes. In December 1868 he portrayed the members of the Provisional Government. The trip to Lisbon was very timely.

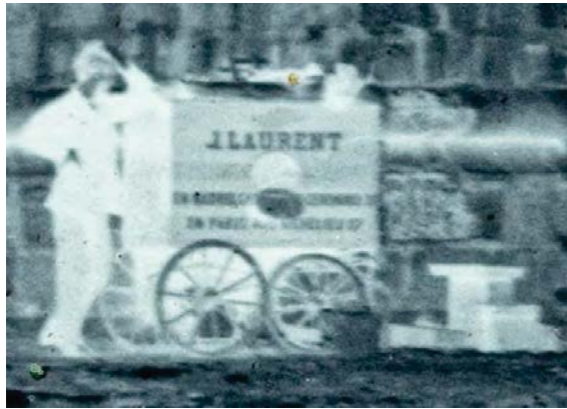


Fig.4 Laurent's laboratory, next to the Belém Tower. Detail of negative 806.



Fig. 5 Laurent's laboratory. Digital positive.

Laurent's small laboratory cart can be found photographed in several negatives of Lisbon and Batalha. It can be best seen in the stereoscopic view 806, of the Belém Tower, Lisbon.⁸ By considerably enlarging a faraway detail, we are able to discern the laboratory and someone standing, who may be one of the photographer's assistants. (Figures 4-5-6)

Albumen paper prints were developed from the collodion negatives, with warm hues. This type of paper yielded very good results and was primarily used in the years 1856 and 1890. It was the most representative of nineteenth-century photography.

Laurent also made prints in Leptographic paper. This was an invention created in 1866 by photographer José Martínez Sánchez with Laurent himself. Using this paper, he developed some portraits of the Portuguese royal family. This paper had a baryta layer, which produced a very white and smooth background.

Laurent's Portuguese views were sold in many outlets apart from the Madrid headquarters and the Paris branch: in 1879, in Lisbon, Porto, London, Stuttgart, Vienna, Brussels and Rome, by depositaries, the year which marked the heyday of the firm "J. Laurent y Compañía".⁹ It was also possible to purchase the views by mail with payment on delivery. However, in the following decade business declined and international distribution came to an end.

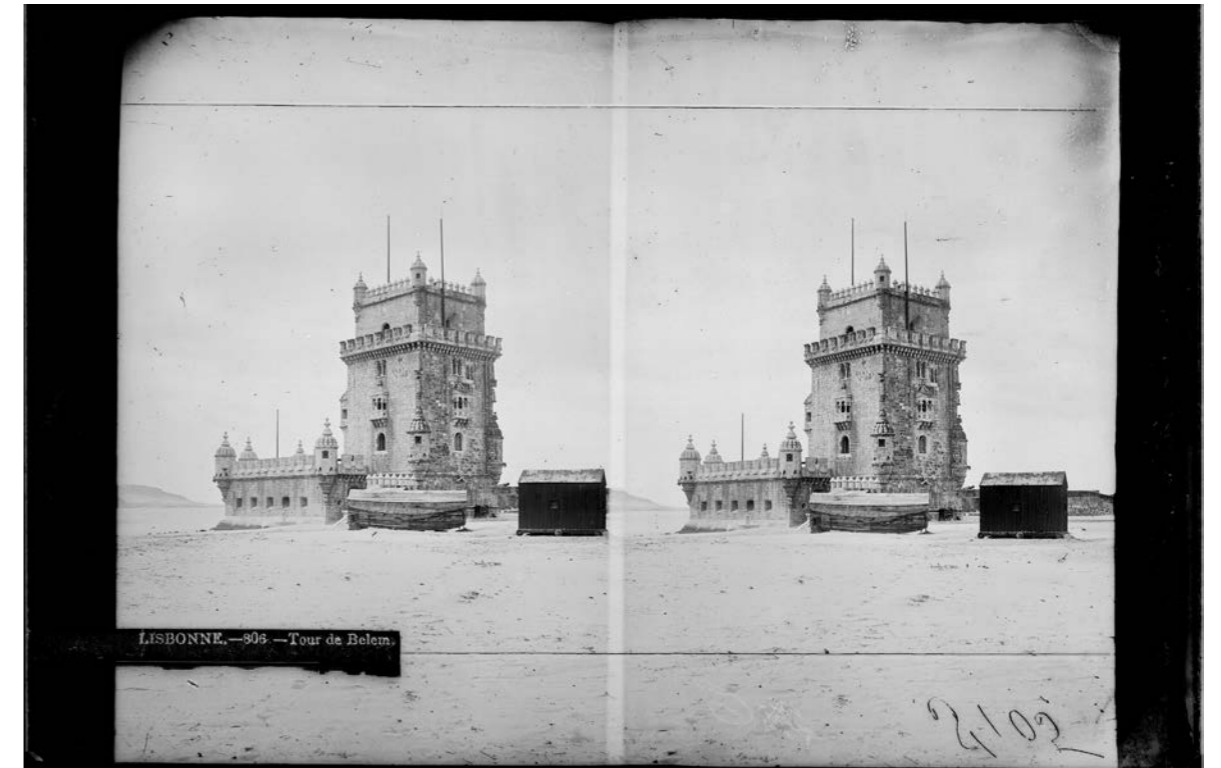


Fig. 6 Belém Tower. Stereoscopic photograph by Jean Laurent, number 806. Digital positive.

The stereoscopic views from Portugal, with their pair of positive images, come in two types of card mounts. The older ones, around 1869-1871, present an embossing stamp mark with the handwritten signature of J. Laurent. Later, the views will have a bluish background and the name typographically printed: "J. Laurent" or "J. Laurent & Cie." (from 1875).

Seeing the images in three dimensions, in relief, requires the use of a stereoscopic viewer. In Laurent's time, wooden stereoscopes were common, with their corresponding pair of

lenses. The left eye must look solely at the left image, while the right eye looks at the right image of the pair. The illusion of depth is created by the brain.

Still, getting back to the collodion negatives, it is important to highlight that they usually present great sharpness. The magnified images enable us to obtain specific details that cannot be admired in the albumen prints. We saw the case of Laurent's laboratory cart by the Belem Tower. We are now going to magnify a detail in the negative "808 bis", of the Rua

8) Teixidor, C. (2007), 41-43.

9) Roswag, A. (1879).



Fig. 7 Lisbon. Rua Augusta Arch. Detail of negative 808 bis.

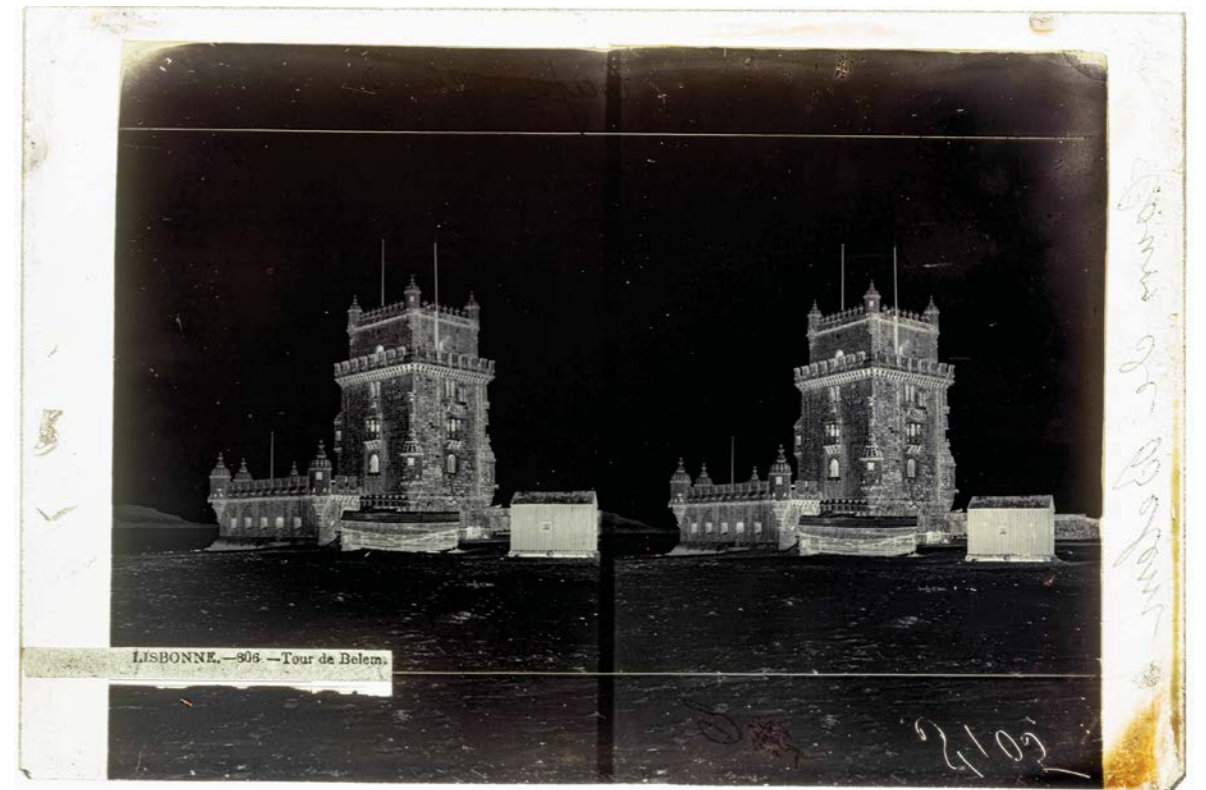
Augusta Arch, when its construction was coming to an end, but it still lacked its sculptures. (Figures 7-8)



Fig. 8 Rua Augusta Arch. Digital positive.

Besides their aesthetic value, Laurent's photographs possess great documental and historic value. Currently they can be used to support restoration work on monuments and works of art. High-resolution scans from the negatives can prove very useful.

LISBONNE.- 806. – Tour de Belem. Lisbon, Belém Tower. Original negative. (Fig. 9)



Seven stereoscopic negatives are reproduced and commented in the next pages. They are shown didactically as they are, as negatives:

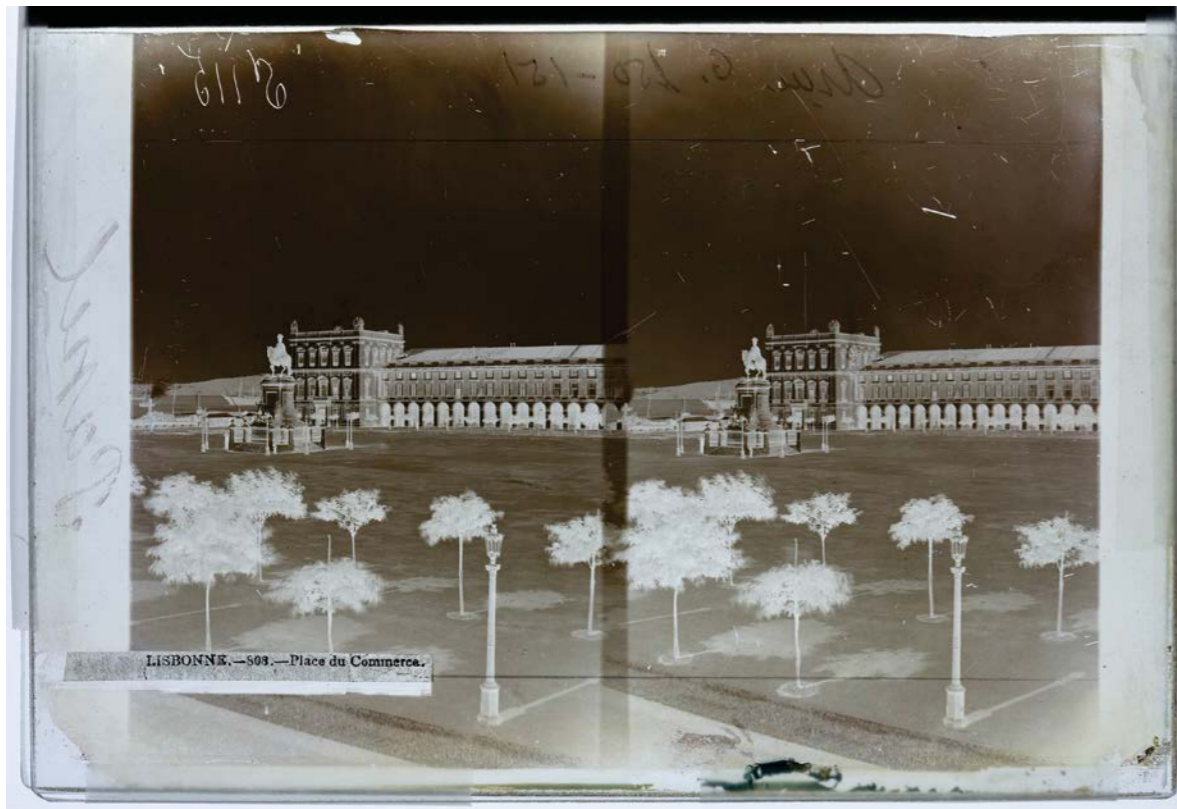
This is the stereoscopic negative bearing the modern inventory number VN-17829, of the Photographic Library of IPCE. It is a collodion glass plate dated 1869.

To capture this view, Laurent had to take his photographic laboratory cart, which can be perceived in the distance, by the base of the tower. His field laboratory can also be seen, as well as a large-format camera used to obtain non-stereoscopic negatives.

Seeing the image in three dimensions, as positive, the tower is shown with relief. However, a small house on wheels and a beached barge stand in the way, emerging as obstacles.

**LISBONNE. – 808. – Place du Commerce.
Lisbon, Commerce Square. Original negative.
(Fig. 10)**

In this case, the preserved negative has the catalogue number VN-40998. This was one of the last stereoscopic negatives traced during the process of compiling the inventory of Laurent's old archive.



Just like all the other stereoscopic negatives, this was obtained by using the wet collodion glass process, in the 13 x 18 centimeter format. Laurent took several photographs in this large square in Lisbon, known as Praça do Comércio [Commerce Square], or Terreiro do Paço [Palace Ground].

The positive image (in albumen paper print) displays stunning aesthetic beauty and has a great three-dimensional effect.

The composition with rows of trees and the central monument enhance the depth effect.

**LISBONNE. – 808 bis. – Place du Commerce.
Lisbon, Commerce Square. Original negative.
(Fig. 11)**

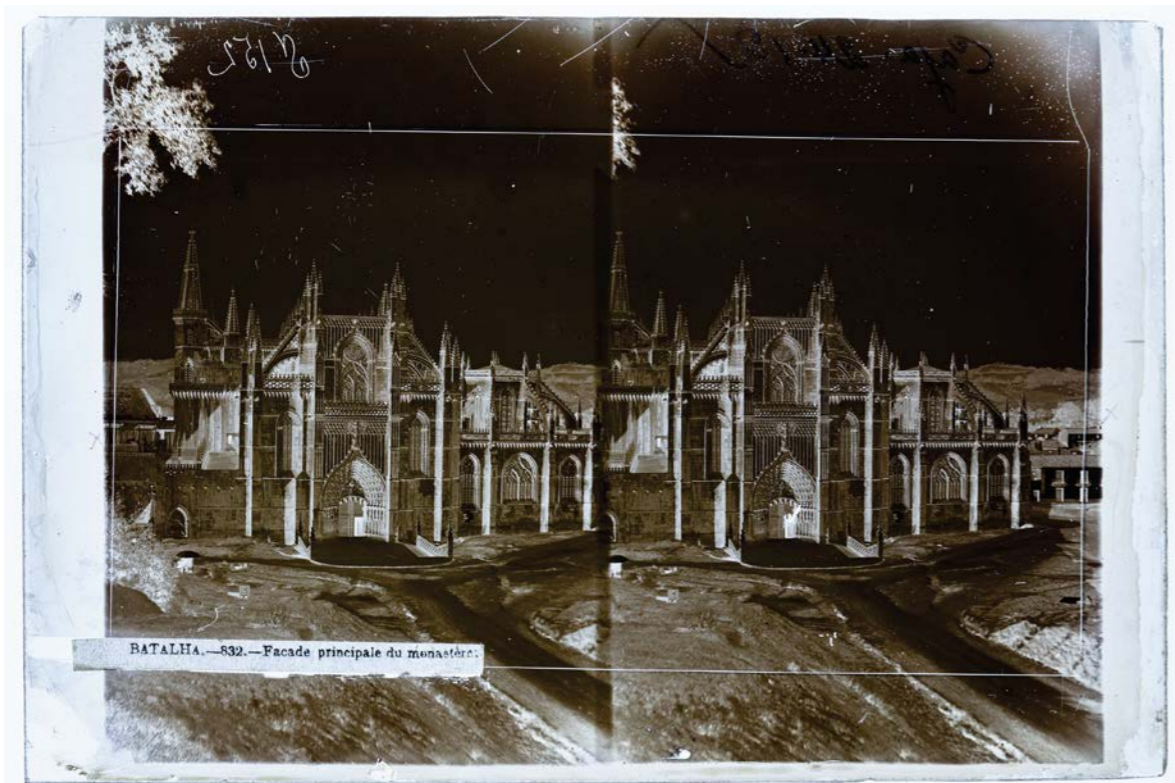


This original negative bears the modern inventory number VN-17380. The setting is another view of the same square.

In the image we see the Triumphal Arch of Rua Augusta, without the sculptures. At the top it is possible to discern mobile scaffolding, installed to finish the construction. Meanwhile, at the center of the square stands the equestrian sculpture of King Joseph I, in whose reign Lisbon's 1755 earthquake took place, which would destroy the royal palace and the whole city.

BATALHA.- 832.- Facade principale du monastère. Oporto, main facade of the monastery. Original negative. (Fig. 12)

This is negative VN-17683. In the Batalha Monastery, Laurent took several photographs on plates of three different sizes: 13 x 18 (stereoscopic), 27 x 36 (standard format), and 27 x 60 centimeters (extra-large panoramic).



Laurent placed his field photo lab near the main façade of the Monastery, protected from the sun by a broad umbrella. The cart and a large photo camera can be seen on the left. These details can be clearly seen in enlargements, or else observing the original negative with a thread counting magnifier.

COIMBRA.- 858.- L'Université. Coimbra, the university. Original negative. (Fig. 13)

Negative catalogued number VN-17016. The tower of the University of Coimbra was built to manage academic life, with its clock and bells. In this stereoscopic photograph, thanks to the clock, we can ascertain that the left image was taken at 12.15 and the image on the right two or three minutes later.

Using a stereoscopic viewer, we note that this photograph has a very good relief effect. The rows of trees help increase the three-dimensional sensation.



PORTO.- 865.- Eglise et tour des Clérigos. Oporto, Church and the Clérigos tower. Original negative. (Fig. 14)

Negative VN-18008. Both the Clérigos church and the tower (Igreja e Torre dos Clérigos, in Portuguese) are in eighteenth-century baroque style. This is one of the most iconic, representative sites of the city of Porto.

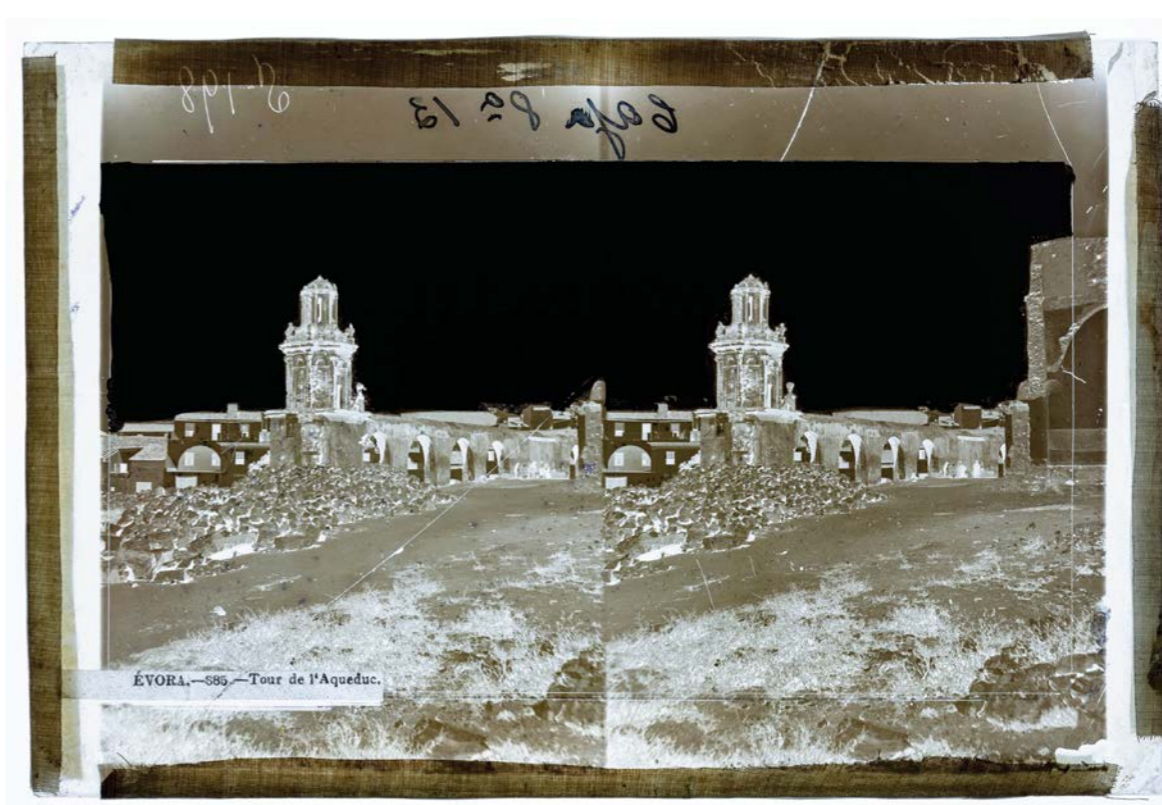
This stereoscopic view was taken in two consecutive moments. Between the left-eye image and the right-eye image see that two people have moved. When we see the photo with a viewer, in three dimensions, that movement of the people produces a negative effect, disturbing the view of the street.



ÉVORA.- 885.- Tour de l'Aqueduc. Évora, Aqueduct tower. Original negative. (Fig. 15)

This is negative VN-17825. This tower of the aqueduct has been pulled down, but the so-called "Aqueduto da Água de Prata" [Silver Water Aqueduct] still supplies water to the city of Évora. It is a great structure from the Renaissance period, inaugurated in 1537.

The original glass negative is broken in two pieces, but the fragments remain attached. The break line can be seen diagonally, crossing the left-eye image. This ancient flaw has little effect on the view of the aqueduct. The area of the sky is masked in the negative, producing very clear skies in the digital positives.



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