

“The Daguerrotype, or Solar Engraving,” 27 July 1839

(keywords: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Francis Bauer, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

THE DAGUERRETYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA

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[From the New York Journal of Commerce]

THE DAGUERROTYPE, OR SOLAR ENGRAVING.

Much curiosity has been excited among our artists and connoisseurs, to ascertain the secret of Daguerre’s discovery. It is very common in certain circles, we are told, to notice fingers blackened by the nitrate of silver. We believe as yet, none of our experimenters have been able to *retain the color* imparted to the nitrated paper by the sun’s rays. They also find their images inverted. We have heard it intimated that the French government are about to make arrangements with Mr. Daguerre, by which, in the course of two or three years, the benefit of his discovery will be imparted fully to the public. Within this period it is expected that the whole matter will be found out in this country!

As usual in such cases, the credit of Mr. Daguerre’s discovery is claimed by a host of competitors. And in truth there is evidence that others have anticipated him in some of the principal features of the art. The London Athenaeum says,—

The most curious fact in relation to this discovery yet remains to be told. It would appear, considering the character of the pictures, all but impossible that impressions from them could be multiplied after the manner of an engraving; M. Daguerre, indeed, stated to us that it was impossible, and it is but reasonable to believe that he is as fully informed of the nature and extent of the discoveries as M. Niepce himself. Yet, in 1837, M. Niepce not only declared that it was possible, but produced specimens of such multiplied copies; and Mr. Bauer has now in his possession, not only copies of engravings fixed permanently by the action of light, not only scenes from nature, but metallic plates engraved, and engraving copied from them; and he understood and believed and believes that no engraving tool was used, but that the drawings were fixed by the action of light, and the plates subsequently engraved by a chemical process, discovered by M. Niepce. If so, the greatest secret of all remains yet to be made public, and is, we believe, as unknown to M. Daguerre as to others.

[End of text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

The paragraph cited from the *Athenaeum* comes from a column of text appearing under the header, “Our Weekly Gossip,” *Athenaeum: A Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* (London) no. 593 (9 March 1839): 187.

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