

Al-Jabarti's CHRONICLE OF THE FRENCH OCCUPATION



1 7 9 8
NAPOLEON IN
EGYPT



On May 19, 1798, a massive French fleet set sail from Toulon harbor, bound for Egypt. Joined by smaller contingents from three other ports along the way, the fleet numbered 400 ships and transported 36,000 men. Under the command of France's rising new military officer, Napoleon Bonaparte, only 28 years old but already the most important military leader of the French revolution, the armada appeared off the coast of Alexandria on June 28th. An eyewitness, Nicholas the Turk, claimed that when the people looked at the water they could see only sky and ships and "were seized by unimaginable terror."

The French invasion of Egypt lasted for a brief three years (1798-1801) but constituted a watershed encounter between two civilizations. Though not as dramatic as Columbus's arrival in the New World or Cortés's conquest of Mexico, where a completely isolated segment of the world was brought into contact with Europe, the collision of cultural and political forces was nonetheless impressive. To be sure, Europe and the Muslim East had been in contact since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. Even at the time of the invasion fifty or sixty French merchants resided in Egypt, and France had posted consular representatives to that country for the purpose of fostering trade. Yet the Egyptian population, in contrast to their Ottoman Turkish suzerains, had only the most rudimentary knowledge of European affairs. The intelligentsia and the ruling elite were largely unaware of the revolutionary events which had determined the French to invade Egypt. For them, then, the encounter with Bonaparte produced startling revelations, not the least of which was that Europe possessed superior military power, sufficient to defeat the vaunted Mamluk military machine, and that an expansionist, imperial, and cultural zeal drove France to possess the valley of the Nile.

The French invaders left the world the most copious records of their conquest of Ottoman Egypt—records which scholars have mined for the histories of the two countries in this period. The most impressive historical

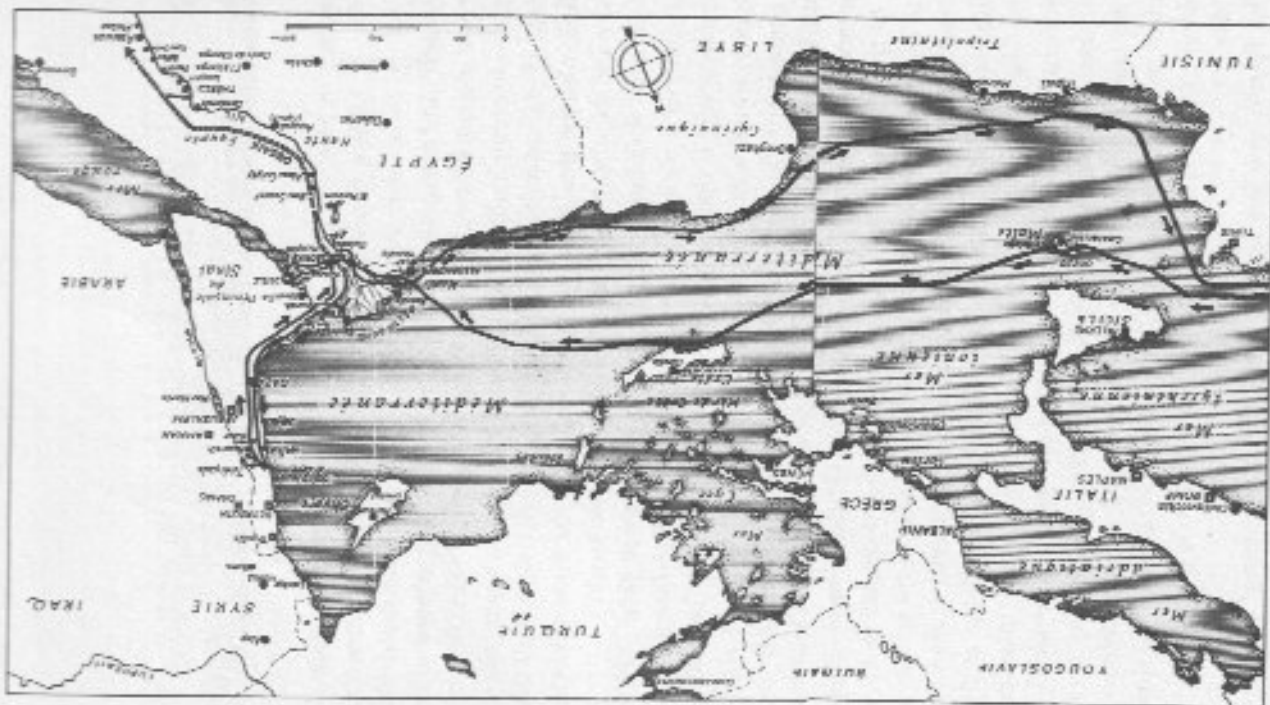
document to come out of the French occupation was the multi-volume *Description de l'Égypte*, which was the handiwork of the large contingent of scholars whom Napoleon had recruited for his conquest and colonization of Egypt.

Often the voices of the invaded are silent. We look in vain for their reactions to the trauma of invasion and occupation. African perceptions of the conquest of the African continent at the end of the nineteenth century would have gone unnoted save for the diligence of later researchers in recording African oral testimony. The Spanish conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century left only sparse Indian records, in large measure because of the catastrophic loss of Indian life and the systematic destruction of American culture by Spanish overlords. Fortunately, the French occupation of Egypt produced no such effacement of indigenous accounts. The most important of the Egyptian observations were those set down by Egypt's unrivalled chronicler of the eighteenth century, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti.

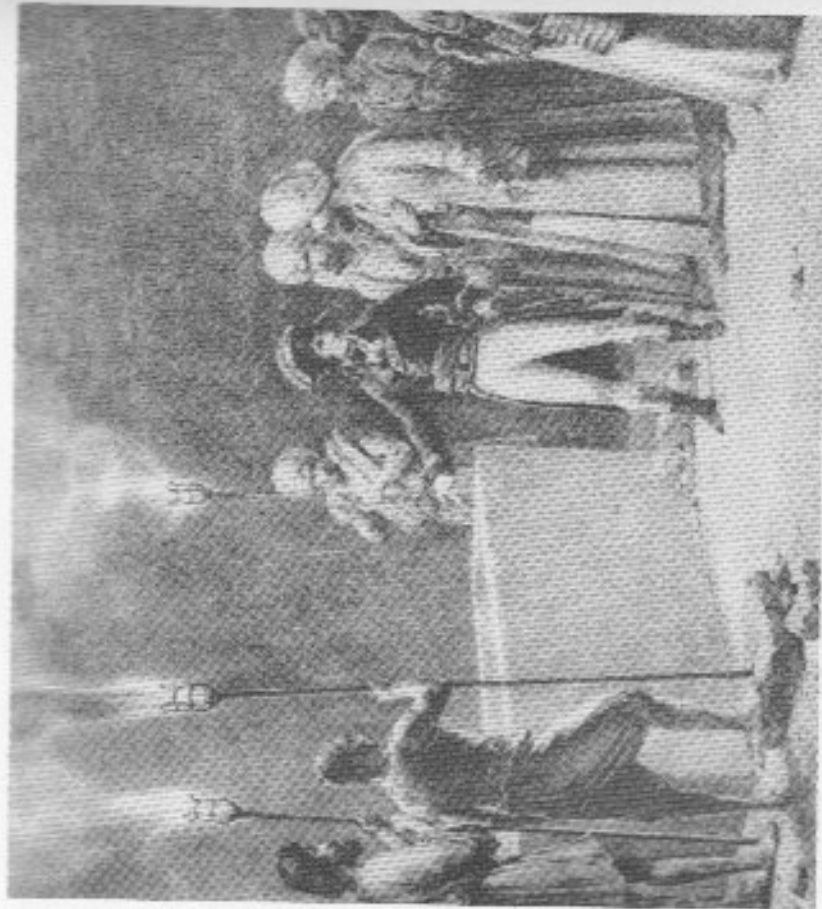
In all, Jabarti wrote three versions of these cataclysmic years. His first work, entitled *Tārīkh muddat al-Faransīsi bi Misr* and available in translation here, covers only a little more than six months of the French invasion. It offers Jabarti's immediate, often highly emotional responses, to the early days of French rule. It expresses the author's cynicism toward Napoleon's efforts to curry favor with the local population by claiming to be sympathetic to Islam while at the same time it reveals much admiration for French learning. Jabarti's second account, *Maḡhar al-taqdis bi-zawā'ī dawlat al-Faransīsi*, would appear to have been written to put the author in the good graces of the Muslim rulers contending for power in the wake of the French withdrawal. It rejected the French occupation in all of its manifestations. The final study, the famous *Ajā'ib al-āṣḥar fil-tarājim wa-l-Akḥbar*, chronicled the history of Egypt from 1688 until 1821. A portion of this work presented, in a dispassionate tone, the events of the French occupation.

We know little of the life of Ottoman Egypt's most illustrious historian, save that he was born into a family of *ulama* (religious scholars) in 1753 and died in 1825 or 1826. His most important work, *Ajā'ib*, was long forbidden publication because of its many criticisms of Muhammad Ali, Viceroy of Egypt from 1805 until 1849 and founder of Egypt's ruling dynasty. Only at the end of 1870 was the ban on its publication lifted, and only in 1879–80 was the entire work published.

The *Muddat* commences in the middle of June, 1798, with news of the arrival of a British fleet under the command of Horatio Nelson off the coast of Alexandria. Nelson had come in search of the French fleet under Napo-



Bonaparte's route to and from Egypt



Visit to the Pyramids of Gizeh

leon, and the two fleets had passed in the night without encountering each other. The account leaves off in December, 1798, with Napoleon still trying to secure his hold over a recalcitrant Egyptian population. Although it deals with only a brief period in the French occupation, it treats all of the most important themes of French rule, including the military clash with the Mamluks, the French efforts to organize a settled and collaborative government in Egypt, and the first and most aggressive uprising of the Cairene population against the French. It also presents, admittedly from the perspective of the author, the attitude of local inhabitants toward the French colonizers.

The decision to occupy Egypt did not spring fall-blown from the fertile brain of Napoleon Bonaparte. France's economic interests in Egypt were rising in the eighteenth-century, by the end of which Egypt was France's leading trading partner, outside of the sugar islands of the Caribbean. French

diplomats had proposed several schemes for conquering and colonizing Egypt well before the French revolution. It fell to Napoleon, however, to put these ideas into practice. This he did with the flair and comprehensiveness for which he was already well known. Following his expulsion of the British from Toulon, his suppression of a Parisian royalist uprising against the Convention, and his military triumphs in North Italy in 1796, the French Directory named him to command the Army of England. Although this army was ostensibly intended to conquer England, Napoleon realized the folly of such an effort, given the British command of the seas. He proposed, instead, to strike at British interests in India and throughout Asia by invading Egypt. Having secured the assent of the Directory, he assembled an armada and a powerful army of occupation. Nor did he neglect the cultural aspects of the undertaking. The French revolution had propelled an arsenal of new political, cultural, and social ideals into world history. In selecting a group of scientists to aid the colonization effort, Napoleon chose leading men of science who in addition to their technical skills were suffused with the ideals of the French revolution.

In 1798 Egypt was still formally part of the Ottoman empire. In reality, Mamluk military households ruled the country. Ottoman forces had conquered Egypt in 1517 and incorporated it as a prized possession. The Ottomans continued to exercise suzerainty over the country in the eighteenth century. They appointed a political representative to the country and received annual tribute payments. But Ottoman political and military influence was waning. The seven Ottoman military corps, including the feared Janissaries, or military slaves recruited from Christian families in the Balkans, had yielded military supremacy to the Mamluks.

Exactly when the Mamluks established political supremacy in Ottoman Egypt is not clear. These military households increased their numbers by taking young boys away from their parents, introducing them into Mamluk households as slave recruits, and preparing them for political and military service. These slave levies were drawn at first overwhelmingly from the Caucasus but later from the Sudan and other parts of Africa as well. As Jabarti's account indicates, the Mamluks were not the only influential group. Through ties of wealth they had aligned themselves with merchant and alama groups. Egypt's ruling elite constituted a tiny fraction of the total population. The vast majority were peasants and artisans who had little say in governance and were viewed by their rulers mainly as taxpayers.

Napoleon's military defeat of the Mamluk forces, just outside Cairo, at the so-called battle of the pyramids, sent shock waves throughout the Muslim

East. The French force had the advantage of numbers—25,000 against a probable 15,000. But the Mamluk profession was warfare. As they marched out to meet the French, one of their princes boasted: "Let the Franks come; we shall crush them beneath our horses' hooves." The Mamluk warriors were, if nothing else, a spectacle to behold. Their elaborate and resplendent military regalia was intended to evoke fear in their adversaries. Literally armed to the teeth, they carried javelins, sabers, battle axes, bows, and muskets and were surrounded by a retinue of followers whose function was to assist rather than to fight. Nonetheless, they proved no match for the superior weaponry, advanced military tactics, and determination of the French forces. By the time the battle ended, the Mamluk forces were in disarray. Egypt's two rulers, Ibrahim Bey and Murad Bey, had fled. Ibrahim had retreated to Syria and Murad to Upper Egypt. Shortly after the conflict, the French entered Cairo, and Napoleon installed himself in the house of a local notable, Muhammad Bey al-Alfi.

From the outset Napoleon intended to colonize Egypt. To do so he sought the support of the local population. As a first step he issued a proclamation, contained in Jabarti's account. Asserting that the French had entered the country not to destroy Islam but to liberate its inhabitants from Mamluk tyranny, Napoleon hoped to align himself with Egypt's merchants, ulama, and lesser notables. The proclamation also made clear, as did subsequent French actions, that resistance to French authority would be met with stern reprisals. Napoleon followed his proclamation by creating local governing councils, *diwan*s, which, while advisory and subordinate to French military commanders, had local Egyptian representation. The first *diwan* was established in Cairo. Additional councils were set up in each of the sixteen administrative districts into which the French divided Egypt. Later, Napoleon created a grand *diwan*, which drew representatives from all of Egypt's districts as well as Cairo and which selected Shaykh al-Sharqawi as its President.

The invasion and the efforts of the French to create a settled administration in Egypt provoked determined opposition among the local population. The French task was rendered even more difficult when the Ottoman Sultan proclaimed a holy war and called upon the local inhabitants to rise against the occupiers. Jabarti's account suggests that a number of oppressive French policies alienated the Egyptian population and deepened the antagonism against the occupying force. French military and administrative plans were costly. The new rulers were compelled to place heavy tax demands on the people. They also forced merchants to advance them funds, and they confis-

ated the property of the Mamluks as well as properties for which Egyptian claimants failed to produce adequate records.

Jabarti's account of the October 21-22 Cairo uprising offers a valuable Egyptian perspective on these events. The *Muaddat* leaves no doubt that *ulam*-like Jabarti himself, distrusted Napoleon's proclamations and rallied the people against the French. Using mosques as meeting places, the rebel leaders attacked the French for their fiscal policies but also pointed out the widespread French infringements of traditional rights and Islamic customs. Yet the rebellion failed. It was unable to win the support of all of Cairo but was confined to a few severely disaffected quarters where hot-headed recalcrants filled the population with rumor and inaccurate information. The French response was quick and severe. Stationing their cannons on high ground and raining down fire on the most rebellious locations, including even the venerated al-Azhar mosque, the French brought the resistance to an end within 36 hours. Even after suppressing overt opposition, the French carried out further acts of punishment, including executions, against those individuals deemed responsible for inciting the rebellion or joining it.

The short-lived October 21-22 uprising proved a harbinger for future Franco-Egyptian relations. Although Jabarti recounts no further acts of opposition in the *Muaddat*, in fact French forces were harassed during the remainder of their stay in Egypt.

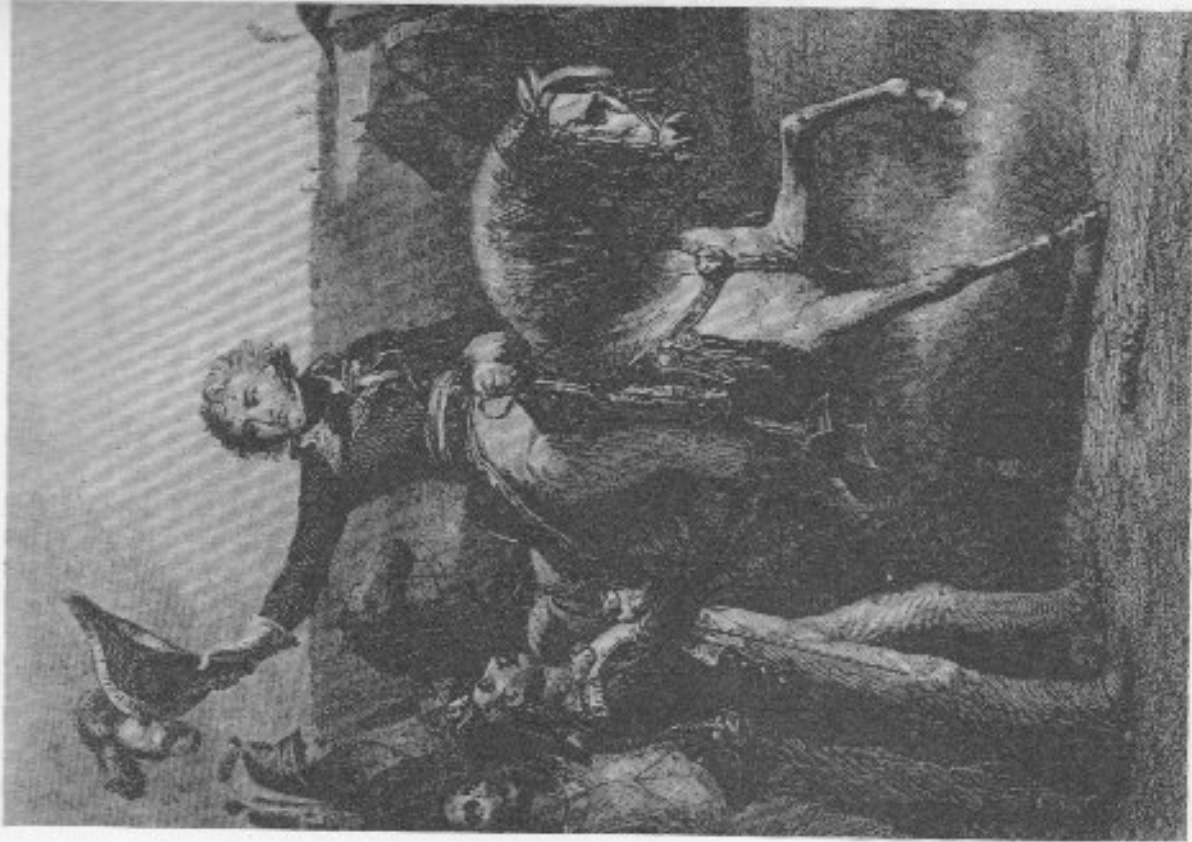
At this point the narrative breaks off. The French were still attempting to complete their control of the country and had even embarked upon a campaign to conquer the holy places and Syria. There, in Syria, Napoleon suffered his first military reversal. At the city of Acre the French forces ~~ground to a halt~~: Ottoman troops, the British fleet, and the ravages of disease wreaked havoc among the French forces and persuaded Napoleon to lead his army back to Egypt. By the time he reached the valley of the Nile he had lost 2,000 of the 13,000 who had embarked upon the campaign. Another 3,000 had suffered casualties.

No doubt Napoleon intended to fulfill his mission in Egypt and establish a full-fledged French presence there. But he kept an eye on events in France. By the middle of 1799 he realized that his army was by now trapped in Egypt. The British had destroyed the French fleet off Abukir on August 1, 1798, and the Ottomans had landed troops in Egypt to oppose the French. At home France had lost much territory to its adversaries. Determined to play a large role on France's political and military stage he left Egypt. Keeping his plans secret from all but a few trusted individuals, Napoleon stole away from Cairo on August 18, 1799, embarked from Alexandria on August 22,

and after 47 days at sea arrived back in France. Within three months of his departure from Egypt he had seized power in France. He established himself as the First Consul of the newly established Consulate government which had replaced the Directory. While thousands of his soldiers remained trapped in Egypt amid an increasingly hostile population and suffered greatly from disease, the young French general had set his course toward the mastery of Europe.

At his departure Napoleon placed Jean-Baptiste Kléber in command. He did not inform Kléber of this decision, no doubt because he knew of Kléber's growing hostility to the Egyptian venture and to his own handling of affairs there. Once in command Kléber sought but one goal—an agreement with his Ottoman and British adversaries by which he would be permitted to evacuate the Egyptian army to France. An agreement, struck on January 24, 1800, and initiated by the English naval commander, Sidney Smith, as well as the Ottomans, was repudiated in London. Unable to leave the country, Kléber turned his attention to securing dominion over Egypt. Even here he was frustrated, and on June 6 he was assassinated by a religious enthusiast from Aleppo. His successor was Jacques-Abdallah-Ménou, a man who had converted to Islam while in Egypt so that he could marry an Egyptian woman. Unable to maintain the French military position in Egypt, Ménou had to accede to British surrender terms. On July 31, 1801, the French forces began to leave Egypt; the last soldier had departed by the end of September. The brief but important French occupation was brought to a close.

Modern scholarship regards the French invasion and occupation of Egypt as opening the modern era in the Arab world. The French forces, the argument runs, exposed the military weaknesses of the region and awakened the educated classes to the learning of the West. To be sure, an occupation lasting a mere three years could not produce far-reaching and fundamental institutional and intellectual changes. Yet by defeating the Mamluk cavalry and sowing confusion among the ruling elements in Egypt the French occupation set in motion a train of events which changed the face of Egypt and the rest of the Middle East. In Egypt itself, an Albanian military adventurer, Muhammad Ali, took advantage of the power vacuum created by the defeat of the Mamluks and the withdrawal of the French. Triumphant over the Ottomans and the remnants of Mamluk military power, Muhammad Ali consolidated his authority in the Nile valley in 1805 and thereafter effected far-reaching, albeit autocratic changes in virtually every arena of Egyptian life. Not surprisingly, he drew freely upon France for technical advice. He



Portrait of Kléber (Drawing by E. Charpentier)



Bonaparte fleeing from Egypt back to France (Humorous engraving by Gillray)

encouraged French military and cultural leaders to create French-style institutions in Egypt and to assist in what proved to be the Middle East's most dramatic and successful effort at defensive modernization. The linkage between Muhammad Ali's reforms and the French invasion was clear. French successes in Egypt spurred the thinking of Muhammad Ali and his advisers who looked to France as the model European country for their development. In return French savants and military men, inspired by the almost-mythic qualities of the Napoleonic stay in Egypt, gladly made their talents available to Egypt. The Franco-Egyptian alliance was propitious. In Muhammad Ali's Egypt Western education, new industrial projects, irrigation works, and cash-crop agriculture set the country on new pathways.

In preparation for the invasion Napoleon assembled a talented group of young scientists to accompany his forces to that country. Inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment and eager to patronize learning, Napoleon took with him to Egypt more than 500 civilians, of whom 151 were members of the special Commission des Sciences et Arts. To lead the scientific contin-

gent Napoleon chose two scientific luminaries—Gaspard Monge and Claude-Louis Berthollet, then in their fifties and well known for their impressive work in the fields of geometry and chemistry. Other men enrolled in the Commission included Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier, just thirty years old and soon to be the inventor of the system of mathematical analysis which bears his name, Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, a naturalist, Déodat de Dolomieu, a mineralogist, and the artist Vivant Denon. The great majority of the scientists were young men, recent graduates of the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées. In Egypt they set up the Institute of Egypt, the workings of which Jabarti describes toward the end of his *Muddat*.

The monument to the energy of the Commission des Sciences et Arts was the *Description de l'Egypte*, published between 1809 and 1828 and containing ten albums of plates, 9 volumes of text, and three volumes of atlases and maps. The first five albums were devoted to the Egyptian antiquities and launched the field of Egyptology. Two additional albums dealt with Egypt in 1800. Along with the volumes of text they offered the most detailed depiction of a Middle Eastern society on the eve of the modern era. The final three albums illustrated the natural history of the Nile valley and Red Sea. So powerful was the Egyptian monumental architectural style as illustrated in the *Description* that it came to dominate the artistic sensibility of Napoleonic Europe.

Jabarti's account of his frequent meetings with the French savants at the Institute of Egypt and his astonishment at their learning demonstrate that at least a few Egyptian men of letters took an interest in French thought and were welcomed by the French scholars. Yet it is to be doubted that the influence of the French savants reverberated deeply throughout Egyptian society, even among the intelligentsia. French scientists were busy with practical assignments on behalf of the French military. They were meant to serve the interests of the French generals and not to fraternize with the Egyptian *ulama*.

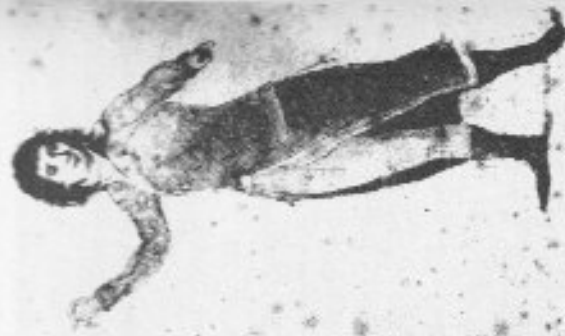
Jabarti's *Muddat* contained no disquisitions about the meaning for Egypt and its people of revolutionary France. Jabarti did not analyze the French motives for being in Egypt or speculate on the challenge French arms and ideas posed to Egypt's future. At all times Jabarti was the careful chronicler, the recorder of events, rather than the analyzer. Yet the text hinted that the invasion created new challenges for Egyptian society. To begin with, Jabarti offered two explanations for the French military success. First, he praised the French forces for their skill and zeal and likened them to early Islamic conquerors engaged in holy war. Such high praise for the French betokened

deep respect, even fear. In contrast, Jabarti scorned the Mamluk preparations and the terror and confusion which spread throughout the Egyptian population as they learned of the French advance on Cairo. Alexandria fell without resistance, according to Jabarti, because the Mamluks neglected its fortifications, fearing that they would be used by local opponents to undermine central Mamluk power.

The French efforts to administer Egypt receive a mixed, though largely negative, evaluation. Jabarti was cynical of Napoleonic proclamations and excoriated the French leader for his irreligion. Bonaparte's attack on the Papal See, far from winning Jabarti's approval, only demonstrated to the Egyptian chronicler Napoleon's attitude toward all religions.

Moreover, Jabarti disparaged the French effort to Arabize their propaganda and described the French writing in Arabic as vulgar and full of grammatical errors. He portrayed the French forces themselves, including Napoleon, whom Jabarti referred to throughout as *Sari Askar* (Commanding General), as rapacious. They were eager to lay their hands on people's property in illegitimate and deceitful ways. Yet Jabarti was intrigued with certain administrative innovations, not the least of which were the councils (*dikans*), by which the French sought to place themselves in contact with Egyptian notables. In two separate places he described in considerable detail the elaborate procedures, including secret ballots and voice votes, by which these councils designated their presidents. Although he offered no comment on these procedures and what the French intended by them, it was apparent that Napoleon's attempt to introduce French bureaucratic practices awakened this man's interest.

Jabarti's account of the French invasion and occupation is one of the finest chronicles of a European encounter with a non-European people as told from the vantage point of the non-European. We are fortunate to have available an expert translation undertaken by the distinguished Israeli scholar and



The geometrician Fozrier
(Drawing by Duterrre)

Andriat, Shmuel Moreh, and we are pleased to make this work accessible to readers once again.

The French wrote numerous accounts of their experiences in Egypt. There have also been many scholarly treatments of this important moment in Franco-Egyptian history. Among the best of the French eyewitness observations are the memoirs of Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, a schoolmate of Napoleon from their days at the military school at Brienne-le-Château in the early 1780s. Napoleon then employed Bourrienne as his private secretary beginning in 1797, and Bourrienne accompanied Napoleon on his campaign in Egypt. Although the two men had a falling out later in their careers and Bourrienne ceased to be Napoleon's private secretary and confidant, the memoirs, first published in 1829 and a popular sensation from the moment of their publication, make for interesting reading. They have been attacked for inaccuracies and for an animus against Napoleon, but the accounts selected for this book arose when Bourrienne was working along with Napoleon and have stood the test of time. According to Prince Metternich, commenting on the memoirs when they first appeared, they were "both interesting and amusing." Metternich went on to add that "they are the only authentic memoirs of Napoleon which have yet appeared. The style is not brilliant but that only makes them the more trustworthy." We have taken from this massive work those chapters which parallel the Jabarti account and time period.

The Napoleonic expedition marked a new era of more aggressive European relations toward the Middle East. Although the French and British were both compelled to withdraw their forces from Egypt, European-Ottoman relations had now swung decisively in favor of Europe. Foundations were being established for Europe's imperial sway in the Middle East. According to the eminent literary scholar Edward W. Said, the Napoleonic expedition crystallized deep-seated, long-held, and largely derogatory images which Europeans had of the Muslim world. We take pleasure in presenting Professor Said's stimulating discussion of the Napoleonic invasion and its impact on Western thought concerning the Orient in his important study, *Orientalism*.

Princeton

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through Bâb al-Jabal behind the Citadel where they shot them dead. They thereupon buried them in the ravine at the *Mizrâq* (a place where soldiers train in throwing javelins) at the foot of the Citadel and covered them with earth. However, most of the people did not know what had happened to them for days.

And on the morning of that day some of the Shaykhs rode to the Katkhudâ 'I-Pasha thinking that they were still alive. So he rode with them to the Šārī 'Askar and the Shaykhs spoke with him about this matter. The Šārī 'Askar said to them through the interpreter 'The Šārī 'Askar says to you that you should be patient, this is not the right time'. So they got up and left him. The latter also rose and went about his affairs. Then all the other Shaykhs arrived but did not find him so they went back.

On Tuesday several French soldiers came to al-Azhar quarter near the mosque and stood there. People suspected evil from them and stampeded. They shut the shops and vied with one another in fleeing. Their opinions differed concerning these soldiers and all related versions according to their own conjectures, thoughts, and twisted imaginations.

Then one of the Šāykh̄s went and informed the Šārī 'Askar of what was happening so they sent someone ordering them to leave. So they left. The people then returned and opened their shops, while the Wālī, the Aghâ, and Barthélemy passed [through the quarter] proclaiming safe-conduct. So the situation calmed down. It was said that one of the French officers had come to visit the guard (*qulbūq*) who resided near the shrine of al-Husaynī and sat with him for a while. Those soldiers were his corps and they stood there waiting for him. They may also have done so to frighten the people and intimidate them, fearing that a riot would break out, when the word spread that the Shaykhs had been killed.

On that day they wrote notices and posted them in the market-places proclaiming an amnesty, warning against stirring up riots and stating that the Muslims who had been killed were an equal compensation for the French who had been killed.

And on that day the French started a count of immovable property (*amīlāk*), registering it and demanding a stated imposition on it. However, no one opposed this or uttered a single word.

On that day the French removed the gates from the by-streets and small quarters which had no outlet to others. These were the places which had previously been left alone and their inhabitants had been

spared since they had settled with the French before the event, by bribing the guards and mediators. The by-streets of the Husayniyya quarter were treated in the same manner. After the event had passed the French changed their minds about leaving those gates in place, and went about removing them and bringing them to where gates were collected in al-Azbakiyya at Rašīf al-Khashshâb. There they smashed some of these gates and cut their beams to pieces, and transported others of them on carts to where they were setting up barricades in various parts of the city. Others were sold as firewood and the metal parts were also sold.

On Wednesday night a gang fell upon the gate of Taylūn and destroyed it, passing from there to the market itself, smashing the lamps. They broke into three stores and stole the goods of the Maghribī merchants which were in them, killing the guard and then leaving.

On the Thursday the Shaykhs went to the Šārī 'Askar and interceded on behalf of the son of al-Jawsaqī¹⁰⁰ the Shaykh of the blind men's guild who was being detained at the house of al-Bakrī. Their intercession was accepted by the Šārī 'Askar and he was freed.

The month of Jumādā al-Thānī

This month began on Saturday. On that day the French sent a number of notices throughout the country and posted up some in the market-places and alleys written by the French through the mouth of the Šāykh̄s, its contents being as follows:

'A copy of advice from all the 'ulama' of Islam in Cairo.

We seek refuge in God from all civil strife, be it in open or in secret. Before God we declare that we dissociate ourselves from all those people who spread evil upon the earth. We inform all the inhabitants of Cairo that disturbances have occurred in the city perpetrated by ruffians and evil people who stirred up malice between the subjects and the French soldiers after they had been friends and companions together. As a consequence, a number of Muslims were killed and some houses were looted. However, the kindness of God mysteriously came and the strife was suppressed by virtue of our intercession with General Bonaparte and this calamity ended. For he is a man of perfect wisdom who is compassionate and sympathetic towards the Muslims and filled with love for the poor and the miserable. And were it not for him the soldiers would have burnt the whole city, looted all the property, and killed the

entire population of Cairo. Therefore you should not stir up civil discord nor obey the commands of the wicked abettors of disorder nor heed the words of the hypocrites. Follow not the wicked ones and do not be off with those who perish, who are foolish and too incompetent to foresee the consequences; so that you may save your birthplaces and be at rest with regard to your families and religion. For verily God, glory be to Him, "giveth His kingdom to whom He pleaseth"¹⁰¹ and "ordained what He pleaseth"¹⁰². Thus we inform you that everyone who was involved in stirring up this civil discord, was killed to the last man. And thus God delivered the country and mankind from them. And our advice to you is that you should not throw yourselves into perdition by your own hands but busy yourselves with your own livelihoods, fulfil the obligations of your religion, and pay the taxes (*kharaḡ*) imposed upon you. For "Religion compels us to give you proper advice"¹⁰³. And let it be done with that'.

On this letter were the signatures of al-Bakri, al-Sharqāwī, al-Amīr, al-Šāwī, al-Fayyūmī, al-Mahdī, al-'Arīshī, al-Sīrsī, Muṣṭafā al-Damanhūrī, Muḥammad al-Dawākhīlī, and Yūsuf al-Shubrakhītī.

On that day the French ordered the remainder of those living by the Birkat al-Azbakiyya and its surroundings to pack and move from their houses so that their (the French) compatriots who were scattered about would come together and live in one single quarter. This was as a result of the fear of the Muslims which had gripped them and to such an extent that no Frenchman would go unarmed. He who had no arms would take a stick or a whip or the like. This happened after they had already felt safe with the Muslims and had ceased to bear arms at all and had played and joked with them. For example, when a Muslim would stroll at night alone and pass a group of Frenchmen they would joke with him and vice versa. However, after this incident (rebellion) occurred both sects felt mutually repelled and each was on his guard toward the other. The Muslims also desisted from going to the markets from sunset to sunrise.

On the fifth of that month the authorities released Ibrāhīm Efendi the secretary of the spies who went to his house.

On the eighth, they executed four Coptic Christians among them two carpenters who, it was said, had got drunk in a wine shop, and had roamed in their drunkenness breaking into some shops and stealing some things. It was also said that they had done this several times until the Copts finally got angry.

On that day they also wrote a number of notices and sent some copies to the country and posted up others in the quarters and markets, also written through (the mouth of) the Shaykhs. However the text of this notice exceeded the former. It was worded as follows:

'A copy of advice from the '*al-amā*' of Islam in Cairo.

We inform you, O inhabitants of cities and capitals of provinces, you the Faithful. And you, O inhabitants of the countryside, both bedouin and peasants. We inform you that Ibrāhīm Bey and Murād Bey and the rest of the Mamiūk faction sent letters and proclamations to all the provinces of Egypt in order to stir up civil discord among the people and they claimed that these letters were sent by His Majesty the Sultan and by some of his Viziers. But this claim is false and slanderous and the reason was that they were extremely grieved and distressed and that they were most infuriated by the '*al-amā*' of Cairo and its inhabitants since they did not agree to leave Egypt with them or to abandon their families and birthplaces. So they were intent upon causing civil discord and evil between the subjects and the French army in order to ruin the country and bring about the total destruction of its subjects. The cause of all this being the great distress that befell the Mamiūk faction at the loss of their rule and of their being deprived of the kingdom of Egypt. Had they been right in their claim that these letters were sent by the Sultan of Sultans, he would have despatched them openly by appointed Aghās from his court. Therefore we say to you that the French, unlike the rest of the European people, always have had affection for the Muslims, and their creed, and have hated the unbelievers and their nature. Indeed they are dear friends to His Lordship the Sultan, backing him as allies and faithful to his companionship and always ready to help him. The French love his friends and hate his enemies. For this reason there is great animosity between the French and the Muscovites since the latter are inimical to Islam and its followers who profess the Unity of God to the extent that the Muscovites wish to conquer Islāmbūl and in addition plan all manner of subterfuges and perverted intrigues in order to take all the Ottoman Muslim countries. But this will not happen because of the alliance with the French and their love for and backing of the Ottoman Empire. They (the Muscovites) are determined to take over the Aya Şofya and all the other mosques and turn them into churches wherein they can practise their corrupt rites and detestable religion of the Muscovites. Meanwhile the French nation is helping His Majesty the Sultan to conquer their

country, with God's will not leaving one of them alive. So we advise you, O provinces of Egypt, / Do not stir up civil discord or evil acts among people, do not oppose the French soldiers in any manner; for if you do, harm, destruction, and misfortune shall befall you. Do not heed the words of the abettors of disorder, "and obey not the bidding of those who commit excess, who act disorderly on the earth and reform not",¹⁰⁴ "and speedily have to repent of what ye have done".¹⁰⁵ What you have to do is but to pay the taxes (*kharaḥ*) imposed upon you, to all the tax-farmers (*mufazzizis*), that you may dwell in your birthplaces safely and be secure and at rest with regard to your families and property. For indeed His Excellency Bonaparte the grand Šārī 'Askar, Commander of the Armies (*Amīr al-Juyūsh*), agreed with us that he will not contest anyone in his practice of Islam, nor will he oppose us with regard to the laws which God has decreed upon us. What is more he will remove all the injustice from among the people and restrict himself only to collecting taxes. He will eliminate the financial injustices which the tyrants have invented. Do not set your hopes on Ibrāhīm or Murād but return to your Lord, the King of the Kingdom and Creator of His slaves. For His Prophet and most honoured Messenger said "Scrive is fast asleep, may God curse anyone who would awaken it among the nations".¹⁰⁶ Benedictions and peace upon him. And that is the end'.

Thus the letter terminated bearing the signatures of the aforementioned Shaykhs, written by the secretary of the Diwān, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mahdī.

On the thirteenth of the month they killed two people at Bāb Zuwayla, one of them a Jew. However, the reason for their execution was not ascertained.

On that day they removed objects placed in trust belonging to the daughter of Ibrāhīm Bey and her husband from the house of the father-in-law (*wasīb*) of Ibrāhīm Kakhudā Manāw who was formerly Kakhudā Mustahfizān. These objects were boxes containing gold-work, jewels, gold and silver vessels, household effects and clothing in great quantities.

On the fifteenth a group of French soldiers passed by the Gate of Zuwayla at night and broke into some of the shops belonging to the sugar makers and they robbed them of their sugar and the loss was theirs.

On that day it was pointed out that someone had two cases in trust



Garden of the Insitut d'Égypte

for Ayyūb Bey the Daftardār so they looked for him and ordered him to present them, which he did after denying several times that they were in his possession. Inside these cases they found jewelled weapons, strings of pearl beads, jewelled daggers, and the like.

On the twentieth they printed a number of notices which they posted up in the market-places, the content being: 'On Friday the twenty-first we intend to fly a vessel (*ḥalīw*) over al-Azbakiyya Pond by means of a device belonging to the French people'. As was their custom, the people made a great fuss about it. When the day came the people and many of the French gathered in the afternoon to see this wondrous event and I was among them. I saw a cloth in the form of a large tent upon an erected pole. The cloth was coloured in white, red, and blue. The pole upon which the cloth was suspended was set upon something like the cylindrical form of a sieve in the midst of which there was a bowl out of which came a wick immersed in certain oils. This bowl hung from intercrossing iron wires running from it to the cylinder. The cylinder itself was bound with pulleys and ropes which were held by people standing on the roofs of near-by houses. About an hour after the 'asr / they lit this wick and its smoke rose into the cloth and filled it. The cloth swelled and became like a ball. The smoke sought to rise to its centre but it did not find any exit, so it drew the apparatus aloft with itself. Meanwhile the people pulled it with ropes until it rose from the ground. They cut the ropes and it soared into the air, moving with the wind. Then it began to sail with the wind for a very little while and then its bowl fell with the wick, the cloth following suit. The French were embarrassed at its fall. Their claim that this apparatus is like a vessel in which people sit and travel to other countries in order to discover news and other falsifications did not appear to be true. On the contrary, it turned out that it is like kites which household servants (*farrāsh*) build for festivals and happy occasions.

That same night at the time of the 'ishā' (evening prayer) the French gave a display of fireworks, fire-crackers, and rockets in al-Azbakiyya. It seemed that that day and night was one of their festivals because the Šāri 'Askar invited the Shaykhs and notables among the merchants and all of them put on new garments. On that night the French passed through the markets very frequently and the dogs barked at them. So they threw poisoned bread to the dogs; the dogs ate it with the result that a great number of them died.

The next day people found the bodies of the dogs in the market-

places dead. So the French hired some people to drag the corpses to the dump.

On the twenty-fifth a number of soldiers set out for Murād Bey and also toward Kardāsa because of the bedouin. They also went to Suez and al-Šālihiyya. They took the camels of the water-carriers together with their waterskins and their donkeys. As a result the water supply dwindled and its price went up so that a skin of water cost ten *nigf* *fīḍās* if at all obtainable.

On that day they succeeded in uncovering several caches in various places in which there were chests, goods, arms, china and copper vessels in tremendous amounts, and the like. It was said that those who were in Kardāsa were bedouin known as 'Arab al-Ghazw nomads from Bani 'Ali, wandering during the year in the countryside and districts stealing and snatching whatever they came upon. It was also said that they were Maghribis whom Murād Bey had brought by means of 'Alī Pasha al-Tarābulusī, from parts of the Maghrib.

And so this month passed with its major and minor events which are impossible to record because of their great number.

Among these events was that in the Ghayf al-Nūbt adjacent to al-Azbakiyya they (the French) constructed some buildings with compartments and places for amusement and licentiousness including all kinds of depravities and unrestricted entertainment, among them drinks and spirits, female singers and European dancers and the like. One of their notables was in charge of it. On the day of its opening he held a banquet to which he invited the notables of the French and some of those of the Muslims and the Shaykhs. That night they set off a display of fire-crackers, rockets with firing and illuminations (*shammūk*). The French appointed attendants, cooks, and cupbearers. At its gate sat a man who would take from every person entering ninety *nigf* (*fīḍās*) and give him in return a piece of paper which would serve as a certificate allowing him to come and go on that day. And when someone would come to this place and occupy himself with food, drink, fornication, and gambling according to his heart's desire he would pay for each of these services according to what it cost. If he took a private compartment which would be his alone he had to pay rent for each month that he held it. He would then receive a key and furnish it as he wished. This service was not restricted to the French only but was available to anyone who wanted it, whether he be European, Muslim, Copt, Greek, or Jew.

Among these events also was the demolition of the courtyard of

the Nilometer (*qā'at al-miqyās*) in al-Rawḍa and the mosque of Abū Hubayra in al-Jiza. The French levelled the hill near al-Laymūn bridge and built towers and artillery points on it. They did the same to the hill which is at the al-Nāṣirī canal adjacent to the Maghribī and they filled in the part of the canal which was adjacent to it with earth. They tore down the Dikka bridge and filled in the area where it had stood with the debris of the adjacent mosque which they had demolished as well as that of houses surrounding it which they had also destroyed. They filled in the part near the bridge, making it level with the pavement at its banks continuing to the bridge. In the same way they demolished the buildings opposite the Šārī 'Askar's house and constructed in their place a wide square. They filled in the part of Birkat al-Azbakiyya which was opposite this square so that the bridge became level with the pavement. They also demolished the dwellings opposite this square on the other side and turned the area into a walled-up road running along the filled-in portion of the Nāṣirī canal, adjacent to the Maghribī which connects with Būlāq. They also demolished a great part of the house of 'Alī Katkhudā al-Ṭawīl near his dwelling. And they also filled in the part of the pond which was opposite it and also pulled down the houses opposite. They filled in the mouth of the canal of al-Raṭlī pond and cut down the trees of the garden of the secretary of the spices which is opposite the bridge of al-Raṭlī pond and cut the trees of the bridge, also demolishing its wall which is adjacent to al-Hājib bridge and from the other side they demolished the wall of the garden opposite it and cut down its trees and they made it into a road connecting with the mosque of Zāhir Baybars in the direction of al-'Ādiliyya. They pulled down the minaret of the mosque turning it into a tower, and flattened its walls as they wished and set upon it cannons and machines of war. And so it came about that the pedestrian who comes from the direction of Qubbat al-Naṣr and al-'Ādiliyya on his way to al-Azbakiyya, passes by way of the above-mentioned al-Zāhirī mosque to al-Hājib bridge then to the bridge of al-Raṭlī pond on to its filled-in canal until he reaches the road known as al-Shaykh Shu'ayb near the pottery factory. If he wishes to go to al-Azbakiyya he goes to the right towards Bāb al-Ḥadīd. If he wants al-'Adawī quarter and al-Sha'riyya Gate he has to go to the left. And they levelled these roads by evening the high places with the lower. They cut through part of the hill which was an obstacle to the road which is near the canal. They demolished the wall of al-Junayna and cut down some of its trees which are adjacent to Bāb al-

Ḥadīd. They also pulled down the walls and buildings which intervene between Bāb al-Ḥadīd and the public square which is just outside the mosque of al-Maqs which is used as a place for selling millstones. All this in order to connect this road with al-Azbakiyya. They built fortifications, towers, and buildings on Tall al-'Aqārib in al-Nāṣiriyya. They demolished several of the Amir's houses and they took the rubble and marble to the buildings on the hills and other places. To the administrators of affairs (managers), the astronomers, scholars, and scientists in mathematics, geometry, astronomy, engraving and drawing, and also to the painters, scribes, and writers they assigned al-Nāṣiriyya quarter and all the houses in it, such as the house of Qāsim Bey, the Amir of the Pilgrimage known as Abū Sayf, and the house of Ḥasan Kāshif Jarkas which he founded and built to perfection, having spent upon it fantastic sums of money amounting to more than a hundred thousand dinārs. When he had completed plastering and furnishing it, the French came and he fled with the others and left all that it contained, not having enjoyed it for even a whole month. The administrators, astronomers, and some of the physicians lived in this house in which they placed a great number of their books and with a keeper taking care of them and arranging them. And the students among them would gather two hours before noon every day in an open space opposite the shelves of books, sitting on chairs arranged in parallel rows before a wide long board. Whoever wishes to look up something in a book asks for whatever volumes he wants and the librarian brings them to him. Then he thumbs through the pages, looking through the book, and writes. All the while they are quiet and no one disturbs his neighbour. When some Muslims would come to look around they would not prevent them from entering. Indeed they would bring them all kinds of printed books in which there were all sorts of illustrations and *cartes (kartāt)* of the countries and regions, animals, birds, plants, histories of the ancients, campaigns of the nations, tales of the prophets including pictures of them, of their miracles and wondrous deeds, the events of their respective peoples and such things which baffle the mind. I have gone to them many times and they have shown me all these various things and among the things I saw there was a large book containing the Biography of the Prophet, upon whom be mercy and peace. In this volume they draw his noble picture according to the extent of their knowledge and judgement about him. He is depicted standing upon his feet looking toward Heaven as if menacing all creation. In his right hand is the sword and

in his left the Book and around him are his Companions, may God be pleased with them, also with swords in their hands. In another page there are pictures of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. On another page a picture of the Midnight Journey of Muḥammad and al-Burāq and he, upon whom be mercy and peace, is riding upon al-Burāq and he, Rock of Jerusalem. Also there is a picture of Jerusalem and the Holy Places of Mekka and Medina and of the four Imāms, Founders of the Schools and the other Caliphs and Sultans and an image of Islāmbūl including her Great Mosques like Aya Şofya and the Mosque of Sultan Muḥammad. In another picture the manner in which the Prophet's Birthday is celebrated and all the types of people who participate in it (are shown); also (there are) pictures of the Mosque of Sultan Sulaymān and the manner in which the Friday prayers are conducted in it, and the Mosque of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī and the manner in which prayers for the dead are performed in it, and pictures of the countries, the coasts, the seas, the Pyramids, the ancient temples of Upper Egypt including the pictures, figures, and inscriptions which are drawn upon them. Also there are pictures of the species of animals, birds, plants and herbage which are peculiar to each land. The glorious Qur'ān is translated into their language! Also many other Islamic books. I saw in their possession the *Kitāb al-Shifā'* of Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, which they call *al-Shifā'* by heart and which they translated into French. I saw some of them who know chapters of the Qur'ān by heart. They have a great interest in the sciences, mainly in mathematics and the knowledge of languages, and make great efforts to learn the Arabic language and the colloquial. In this they strive day and night. And they have books especially devoted to all types of languages, their declensions and conjugations as well as their etymologies. They possess extraordinary astronomical instruments of perfect construction and instruments for measuring altitudes; of wondrous, amazing, and precious construction. And they have telescopes for looking at the stars and measuring their scopes, sizes, heights, conjunctions, and oppositions, and the clepsydres and clocks with gradings and minutes and seconds, all of wondrous form and very precious, and the like.

In a similar manner they assigned the house of Ibrāhīm Katkhudā al-Sina'ārī and the house of the former Katkhudā Zayn al-Fiqār and neighbouring houses to the studios and knowledgeable ones. They called this *al-Madāris* (the Schools) and provided it with funds and copious

allowances and generous provisions of food and drink. They provided them with a place in the house of the above-mentioned Ḥasan Kāshif and built in it neat and well-designed stoves and ovens, and instruments for distilling, vaporizing, and extracting liquids and ointments belonging to medicine and sublimated simple salts, the salts extracted from burnt herbs, and so forth. In this place there are wondrous retorts of copper for distillation, and vessels and long-necked bottles made of glass of various forms and shapes, by means of which acidic liquids and solvents are extracted. All this is carried out with perfect skill and wondrous invention and the like.

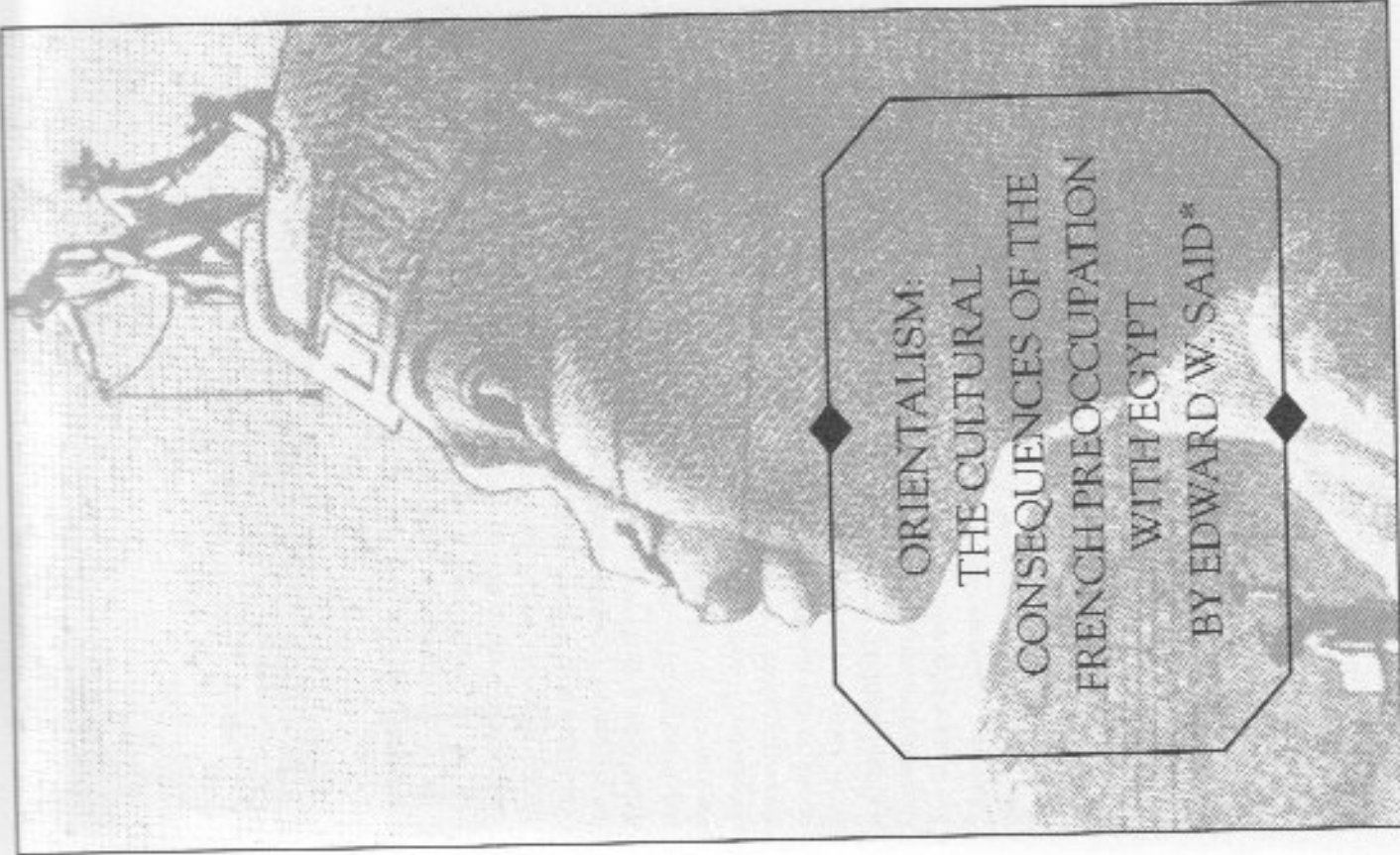
On that day the news arrived of the death of Şāliḥ Bey, Amir al-Ḥajj. He had set out for Jerusalem with the Maḥmal of the Pilgrim-mage, placed it there and then returned to Gaza where he became ill with fever for several days and died.

The month of Rajab

Rajab started on a Sunday. On the third of this month Shaykh al-Sadāt celebrated the birthday of Sayyida Zaynab at the bridges of Sibā'. The Şārī 'Askar Bonaparte was invited. He came to the house in which the Shaykh dwelt on the eve of the celebration and that was the house of Ayyūb Jāwish. He had supper with his people of distinction and after that returned home, riding.

On that day the French executed one of the soldiers called Muṣṭafā Kāshif, one of the *mamūks* of Ḥusayn Bey who is known as Shuft. He had escaped together with the other escapers and had come back without permission and had hidden in the house of Shaykh Sulaymān al-Fayyūmī. The Shaykh Sulaymān handed him over to Muṣṭafā the Aghā Mustahfāz in order that he might obtain safe-conduct for him. When the latter informed the French of his presence they ordered his execution. So they killed him and then cut off his head with which they roved through the town, proclaiming 'This is the punishment of those who re-enter Cairo without the permission of the French'.

On Thursday the fifth of the month the Şārī 'Askar of the Qalyūb district came to Cairo with Sulaymān al-Shawārbī who was the Shaykh of the district. When they arrived they took the Shaykh to the Citadel and imprisoned him there. It was said that the French had stumbled upon a letter of his which he had sent to Siryāqūs at the time of the revolt, inciting people of this area to revolt and ordering them to make



ORIENTALISM:
THE CULTURAL
CONSEQUENCES OF THE
FRENCH PREOCCUPATION
WITH EGYPT
BY EDWARD W. SAID*



Napoleon's enlistment of several dozen "savants" for his Egyptian Expedition is too well known to require detail here. His idea was to build a sort of living archive for the expedition, in the form of studies conducted on all topics by the members of the Institut d'Égypte, which he founded. What is perhaps less well known is Napoleon's prior reliance upon the work of the Comte de Volney, a French traveler whose *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* appeared in two volumes in 1787. Aside from a short personal preface informing the reader that the sudden acquisition of some money (his inheritance) made it possible for him to take the trip east in 1783, Volney's *Voyage* is an almost oppressively impersonal document. Volney evidently saw himself as a scientist, whose job it was always to record the "état" of something he saw. The climax of the *Voyage* occurs in the second volume, an account of Islam as a religion.¹ Volney's views were canonically hostile to Islam as a religion and as a system of political institutions; nevertheless Napoleon found this work and Volney's *Considérations sur la guerre actuel de Tiers* (1788) of particular importance. For Volney after all was a canny Frenchman, and—like Chateaubriand and Lamartine a quarter-century after him—he eyed the Near Orient as a likely place for the realization of French colonial ambition. What Napoleon profited from in Volney was the enumeration, in ascending order of difficulty, of the obstacles to be faced in the Orient by any French expeditionary force.

Napoleon refers explicitly to Volney in his reflections on the Egyptian expedition, the *Campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, 1798-1799*, which he dictated to General Bertrand on Saint Helena. Volney, he said, considered that there were three barriers to French hegemony in the Orient and that any French force would therefore have to fight three wars: one against England, a second against the Ottoman Porte, and a third, the most difficult, against the Muslims.² Volney's assessment was both shrewd and hard to fault since it was clear to Napoleon, as it would be to anyone who read Volney, that his *Voyage* and the *Considérations* were effective texts to be used by the

European wishing to win in the Orient. In other words, Volney's work constituted a handbook for attenuating the human shock a European might feel as he directly experienced the Orient: Read the books, seems to have been Volney's thesis, and far from being disoriented by the Orient, you will compel it to you.

Napoleon took Volney almost literally, but in a characteristically subtle way. From the first moment that the *Armée d'Égypte* appeared on the Egyptian horizon, every effort was made to convince the Muslims that "nous sommes les vrais musulmans," as Bonaparte's proclamation of July 2, 1798, put it to the people of Alexandria.³ Equipped with a team of Orientalists (and sitting on board a flagship called the Orient), Napoleon used Egyptian enmity towards the Mamelukes and appeals to the revolutionary idea of equal opportunity for all to wage a uniquely benign and selective war against Islam. What more than anything impressed the first Arab chronicler of the expedition, Abd-al-Rahman al-Jabarti, was Napoleon's use of scholars to manage his contacts with the natives—that and the impact of watching a modern European intellectual establishment at close quarters.⁴ Napoleon tried everywhere to prove that he was fighting for Islam; everything he said was translated into Koranic Arabic, just as the French army was urged by its command always to remember the Islamic sensibility. (Compare, in this regard, Napoleon's tactics in Egypt with the tactics of the *Regenerimiento*, a document drawn up in 1513—in Spanish—by the Spaniards to be read aloud to the Indians: "We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses [the King and Queen of Spain] may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey," etc. etc.)⁵ When it seemed obvious to Napoleon that his force was too small to impose itself on the Egyptians, he then tried to make the local imams, cadis, muftis, and ulemas interpret the Koran in favor of the Grande Armée. To this end, the sixty ulemas who taught at the Azhar were invited to his quarters, given full military honors, and then allowed to be flattered by Napoleon's admiration for Islam and Mohammed and by his obvious veneration for the Koran, with which he seemed perfectly familiar. This worked, and soon the population of Cairo seemed to have lost its distrust of the occupiers.⁶ Napoleon later gave his deputy Kleber strict instructions after he left always to administer Egypt through the Orientalists and the religious Islamic leaders whom they could win over; any other politics was too expensive and foolish.⁷ Hugo thought that he grasped the tactful glory of Napoleon's Oriental expedition in his poem "Lui":

Au nil je le retrouve encoré,
L'Égypte respandit des feux de son aurore;
Son astre impérial se lève à l'Orient.
Vainqueur, enthousiaste, éclairant de prestiges,
Prodige, il étonna la terre des prodiges.
Les vieux scheiks vénéraient l'émit jeune et prudent.
Le peuple redoutait ses armes incoutées;
Sublime, il apparut aux tribus éblouies
Comme un Mahomet d'occident.⁸

(By the Nile, I find him once again,
Egypt shines with the fires of his dawn,
His imperial orb rises in the Orient.

Vicor, enthusiast, bursting with achievements,
Prodigious, he stunned the land of prodiges.
The old sheikhs venerated the young and prudent emit.
The people dreaded his unprecedented arms.
Sublime, he appeared to the dazzled tribes
Like a Mahomet of the Occident.)

Such a triumph could only have been prepared before a military expedition, perhaps only by someone who had no prior experience of the Orient except what books and scholars told him. The idea of taking along a full-scale academy is very much an aspect of this textual attitude to the Orient. And this attitude in turn was bolstered by specific Revolutionary decrees (particularly the one of 10 Germinal An III—March 30, 1793—establishing an *école publique* in the Bibliothèque nationale to teach Arabic, Turkish, and Persian)⁹ whose object was the rationalist one of dispelling mystery and institutionalizing even the most recondite knowledge. Thus many of Napoleon's Orientalist translators were students of Sylvestre de Sacy, who, beginning in June 1796, was the first and only teacher of Arabic at the *École publique des langues orientales*. Sacy later became the teacher of nearly every major Orientalist in Europe, where his students dominated the field for about three-quarters of a century. Many of them were politically useful, in the ways that several had been to Napoleon in Egypt.

But dealings with the Muslims were only a part of Napoleon's project to dominate Egypt. The other part was to render it completely open, to make it totally accessible to European scrutiny. From being a land of obscurity and a part of the Orient hitherto known at second hand through the exploits of

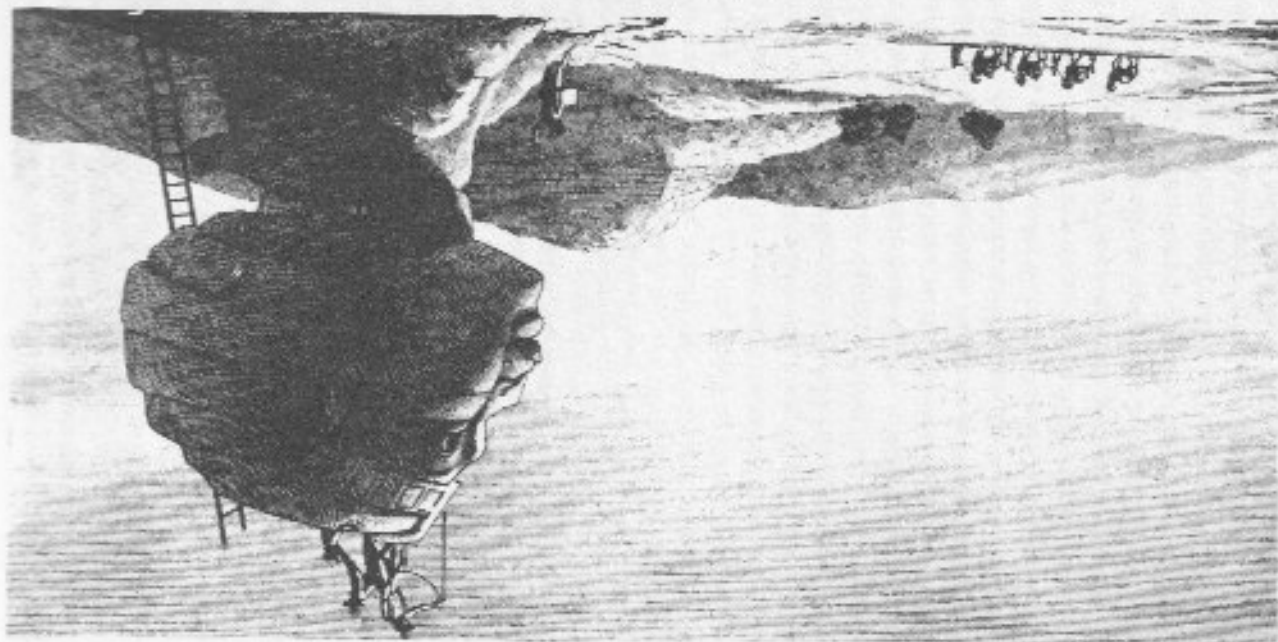
earlier travelers, scholars, and conquerors, Egypt was to become a department of French learning. Here too the textual and schematic attitudes are evident. The Institut, with its teams of chemists, historians, biologists, archaeologists, surgeons, and antiquarians, was the learned division of the army. Its job was no less aggressive: to put Egypt into modern French; and unlike the Abbé Le Masquier's 1735 *Description de l'Égypte*, Napoleon's was to be a universal undertaking. Almost from the first moments of the occupation Napoleon saw to it that the Institut began its meetings, its experiments—its fact-finding mission, as we would call it today. Most important, everything said, seen, and studied was to be recorded, and indeed was recorded in that great collective appropriation of one country by another, the *Description de l'Égypte*, published in twenty-three enormous volumes between 1809 and 1828.¹⁰

The *Description's* uniqueness is not only in its size, or even in the intelligence of its contributors, but in its attitude to its subject matter, and it is this attitude that makes it of great interest for the study of modern Orientalist projects. The first few pages of its *préface historique*, written by Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier, the Institut's secretary, make it clear that in "doing" Egypt the scholars were also grappling directly with a kind of unadulterated cultural, geographical, and historical significance. Egypt was the focal point of the relationships between Africa and Asia, between Europe and the East, between memory and actuality.

Placed between Africa and Asia, and communicating easily with Europe, Egypt occupies the center of the ancient continent. This country presents only great memories; it is the homeland of the arts and conserves innumerable monuments; its principal temples and the palaces inhabited by its kings still exist, even though its least ancient edifices had already been built by the time of the Trojan War. Homer, Lycurgus, Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato all went to Egypt to study the sciences, religion, and the laws. Alexander founded an opulent city there, which for a long time enjoyed commercial supremacy and which witnessed Pompey, Caesar, Mark Antony, and Augustus deciding between them the fate of Rome and that of the entire world. It is therefore proper for this country to attract the attention of illustrious princes who rule the destiny of nations.

No considerable power was ever amassed by any nation, whether in the West or in Asia, that did not also turn that nation toward Egypt, which was regarded in some measure as its natural lot.¹¹

Because Egypt was saturated with meaning for the arts, sciences, and government, its role was to be the stage on which actions of a world-historical importance would take place. By taking Egypt, then, a modern power would



French scholars measuring the sphinx

naturally demonstrate its strength and justify history; Egypt's own destiny was to be annexed, to Europe preferably. In addition, this power would also enter a history whose common element was defined by figures no less great than Homer, Alexander, Caesar, Plato, Solon, and Pythagoras, who graced the Orient with their prior presence there. The Orient, in short, existed as a set of values attached, not to its modern realities, but to a series of valorised contacts it had had with a distant European past. This is a pure example of the textual, schematic attitude I have been referring to.

Fourier continues similarly for over a hundred pages (each page, incidentally, is a square meter in size, as if the project and the size of the page had been thought of as possessing comparable scale). Out of the free-floating past, however, he must justify the Napoleonic expedition as something that needed to be undertaken when it happened. The dramatic perspective is never abandoned. Conscious of his European audience and of the Oriental figures he was manipulating, he writes:

One remember the impression made on the whole of Europe by the astounding news that the French were in the Orient. . . . This great project was mediated in silence, and was prepared with such activity and secrecy that the worried vigilance of our enemies was deceived; only at the moment that it happened did they learn that it had been conceived, undertaken, and carried out successfully. . . .

So dramatic a *coup de théâtre* had its advantages for the Orient as well:

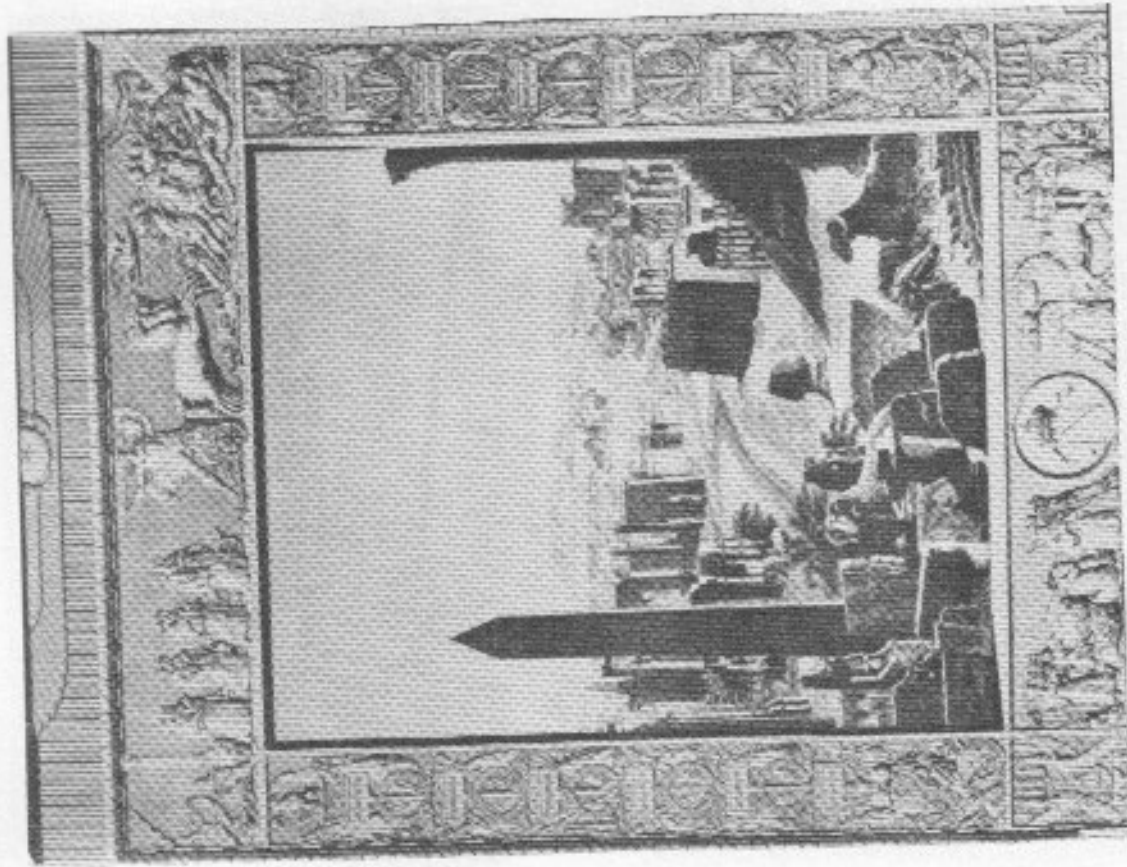
This country, which has transmitted its knowledge to so many nations, is today plunged into barbarism.

Only a hero could bring all these factors together, which is what Fourier now describes:

Napoleon appreciated the influence that this event would have on the relations between Europe, the Orient, and Africa, on Mediterranean shipping, and on Asia's destiny. . . . Napoleon wanted to offer a useful European example to the Orient, and finally also to make the inhabitants' lives more pleasant, as well as to procure for them all the advantages of a perfected civilization.

None of this would be possible without a continuous application to the project of the arts and sciences.¹²

To restore a region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own benefit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West; to subordinate or underplay military power in order to aggrandize the



Frontispiece of "Description de l'Égypte" published under the auspices of General Kléber (Drawing by Létitje, architect in the Armée d'Orient)



Explorations by the Institut d'Égypte

project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient; to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition with full recognition of its place in memory, its importance to imperial strategy, and its "natural" role as an appendage to Europe; to dignify all the knowledge collected during colonial occupation with the title "contribution to modern learning" when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives; to feel oneself as a European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time, and geography; to institute new areas of specialization; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematise, tabulare, index, and record everything in sight (and out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers: these are the features of Orientalist projection entirely realized in the *Description de l'Égypte*, itself enabled and reinforced by Napoleon's wholly Orientalist engulfment of Egypt by the instruments of Western knowledge and power. Thus Fourier concludes his preface by announcing that history will remember how "Égypte fut le théâtre de sa [Napoleon's] gloire, et préserve de l'oubli toutes les circonstances de cet événement extraordinaire."¹³

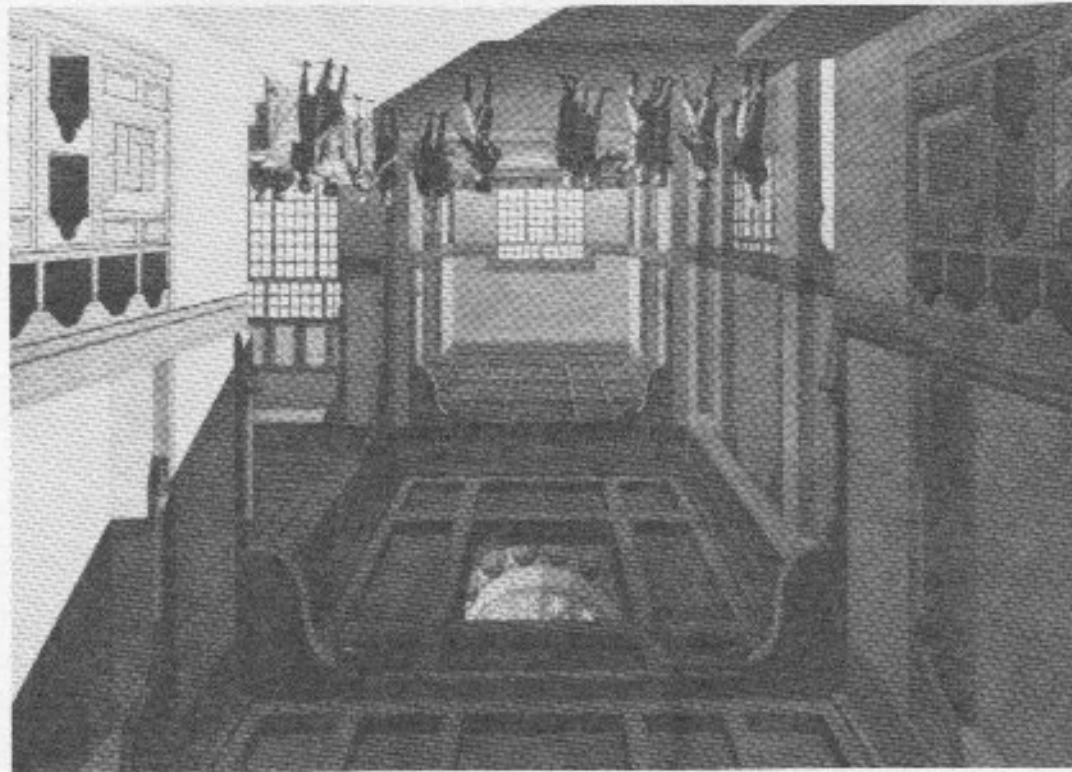


The *Description* thereby displaces Egyptian or Oriental history as a history possessing its own coherence, identity, and sense. Instead, history as recorded in the *Description* supplants Egyptian or Oriental history by identifying itself directly and immediately with world history, a euphemism for European history. To save an event from oblivion is in the Orientalist's mind the equivalent of turning the Orient into a theater for his representations of the Orient: this is almost exactly what Fourier says. Moreover, the sheer power of having described the Orient in modern Occidental terms lifts the Orient from the realms of silent obscurity where it has lain neglected (except for the inchoate murmurings of a vast but undefined sense of its own past) into the clarity of modern European science. There this new Orient figures as—for instance, in Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's biological theses in the *Description*—the confirmation of laws of zoological specialization formulated by Buffon.¹⁴ Or it serves as a "concraste frappante avec les habitudes des nations européennes,"¹⁵ in which the "bizarre jouissances" of Orientals serve to highlight the sobriety and rationality of Occidental habits. Or, to cite one more use for the Orient, equivalent of those Oriental physiological characteristics that made possible the successful embalming of bodies are sought for in European bodies, so that chevaliers fallen on the field of honor can be preserved as lifelike relics of Napoleon's great Oriental campaign.¹⁶

Yet the military failure of Napoleon's occupation of Egypt did not also destroy the fertility of its over-all projection for Egypt or the rest of the

Orient. Quite literally, the occupation gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon in Egypt, whose agencies of domination and dissemination included the *Institut* and the *Description*. The idea, as it has been characterized by Charles-Roux, was that Egypt "restored to prosperity, regenerated by wise and enlightened administration . . . would shed its civilizing rays upon all its Oriental neighbors."¹⁷ True, the other European powers would seek to compete in this mission, none more than England. But what would happen as a continuing legacy of the common Occidental mission to the Orient—despite inter-European squabbling, indecent competition, or outright war—would be the creation of new projects, new visions, new enterprises combining additional parts of the old Orient with the conquering European spirit. After Napoleon, then, the very language of Orientalism changed radically. Its descriptive realism was upgraded and became not merely a style of representation but a language, indeed a means of creation. Along with the *langues mères*, as those forgotten dormant sources for the modern European demotics were entitled by Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, the Orient was reconstructed, reassembled, crafted, in short, born out of the Orientalists' efforts. The *Description* became the master type of all further efforts to bring the Orient closer to Europe, thereafter to absorb it entirely and—centrally important—to cancel, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness and, in the case of Islam, its hostility. For the Islamic Orient would henceforth appear as a category denoting the Orientalists' power and not the Islamic people as humans nor their history as history.

Thus out of the Napoleonic expedition there issued a whole series of textual children, from Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* to Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient* to Flaubert's *Salammbô*, and in the same tradition, Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* and Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madīnah and Meccah*. What binds them together is not only their common background in Oriental legend and experience but also their learned reliance on the Orient as a kind of womb out of which they were brought forth. If paradoxically these creations turned out to be highly stylized simulacra, elaborately wrought imitations of what a live Orient might be thought to look like, that by no means detracts either from the strength of their imaginative conception or from the strength of European mastery of the Orient, whose prototypes respectively were Cagliostro, the great European impersonator of the Orient, and Napoleon, its first modern conqueror.



Bonaparte inaugurating the Institut d'Égypte in the palace of Hassan Kashi in Cairo (Drawing by Protais)

Endnotes

- ¹From "Orientalism" by Edward W. Said, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 81-88.
- ²Constantin-François Volney, *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* (Paris: Bossange, 1821), 2: 241 and passim.
- ³Napoleon, *Campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, 1798-1799: Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Napoléon* (Paris: Carnou, 1843), 1: 211.
- ⁴Thiry, *Bonaparte en Égypte*, p. 126. See also Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Reascension of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 12-20.
- ⁵Abu-Lughod, *Arab Reascension of Europe*, p. 22.
- ⁶Quoted from Arthur Helps, *The Spanish Conquest of America* (London, 1902), p. 196, by Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 573.
- ⁷Thiry, *Bonaparte en Égypte*, p. 200. Napoleon was not just being cynical. It is reported of him that he discussed Voltaire's *Mahomet* with Goethe, and defended Islam. See Christian Cherfils, *Bonaparte et l'Islam d'après les documents français arabes* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1914), p. 249 and passim.
- ⁸Thiry, *Bonaparte en Égypte*, p. 434.
- ⁹Hugo, *Les Orientales*, in *Oeuvres poétiques*, 1: 684.
- ¹⁰Henri Dehéraine, *Silvestre de Sacy, ses contemporains et ses disciples* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1938), p. v.
- ¹¹*Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, publié par les ordres de sa majesté l'empereur Napoléon le grand*, 23 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1809-28).
- ¹²Fourier, *Préface historique*, vol. 1 of *Description de l'Égypte*, p. 1.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. lii.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. xcii.
- ¹⁵Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire naturelle des poissons du Nil*, vol. 17 of *Description de l'Égypte*, p. 2.
- ¹⁶M. de Chabrol, *Essai sur les mœurs des habitants modernes de l'Égypte*, vol. 14 of *Description de l'Égypte*, p. 376.
- ¹⁷This is evident in Baron Larrey, *Notice sur la conformation physique des égyptiens et des différentes vocs qui habitent en Égypte*, suite de quelques réflexions sur l'embaumement des momies, vol. 13 of *Description de l'Égypte*.
- ¹⁸Cited by John Marlowe, *The Making of the Suez Canal* (London: Cresset Press, 1964), p. 31.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

