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# Soldiers and Savants: an Enlightened Despot Discovers Egypt

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Soldiers and Savants:  
An Enlightened Despot Discovers Egypt  
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## Abstract:

This thesis examines Napoleon Bonaparte during his invasion of Egypt from 1798-1801 and how the campaign demonstrates an example of his Enlightened Despotism. The campaign was twofold: a military campaign and a scientific expedition. The military campaign began on July 1, 1798 and ended in failure and the surrender of the French forces. Despite this, Napoleon's greatest success in Egypt came when he brought 167 *savants* with him to collect and record all they found in Egypt both ancient and modern. He created the Institut d'Égypte whose work culminated in the twenty-three volume *Description de l'Égypte* which redefined the study of Egypt and Egyptology and the discovering and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone. Some of the prominent figures in the foundation of Egyptology were Claude Louis Bethollet, Gaspard Monge, Dominique Vivant, Baron Denon, Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier, and Jean-François Champollion. The French expedition is an example of Enlightenment universalism which is the discovery and learning from other peoples and cultures to gain knowledge while Napoleon himself conquered in the name of the Enlightenment ideas of freedom and revolution thus the twofold campaign demonstrates Napoleon Bonaparte as an Enlightened Despot. This thesis also examines how the campaign redefined the discourse of Orientalism and Edward Said's flawed interpretation of the campaign and the intentions of Napoleon and his savants in his profound and controversial work *Orientalism*.

## Introduction

Napoleon Bonaparte, who was always fascinated by the East, saw it as the key to French success in the Revolutionary Wars. In particular, he knew the importance of Egypt as the gateway to the region, a country not only vital to French strategic interests but one that could be “westernized” by being given revolutionary ideals. On July 1, 1798, the French fleet landed at Alexandria beginning a military campaign that ultimately ended in failure, but Napoleon’s project in Egypt not only was military but also scientific and historical. He brought with him 167 *savants* whose job was to collect and record all they found in Egypt both ancient and modern. The work of the scientific expedition culminated in the twenty-three volume *Description de l’Égypte* published between 1809 and 1828 redefined the study of Egypt and the discourse of Orientalism. The French expedition is an example of the Enlightenment universalism and Napoleon himself thus as an enlightened despot who conquered in the name of freedom and revolutionary ideals and also genuinely wanted the French *savants* to discover Egypt while also learning from the Egyptians.

Enlightened despotism is a form of absolute monarchy in which rulers were influenced by the Enlightenment. These Enlightened despots held that royal power emerged not from divine right but from social contract and reinforced their authority with the intent of improving the lives of their subjects. They tended to allow religious toleration, freedom of speech and press, and the right to have private property. They placed large emphasis on the arts, sciences, and acquisition of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> An example of an Enlightened despot is Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor. Joseph II wanted religious toleration, favored an overhaul of the judicial system to

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<sup>1</sup> A. Letin. *Enlightened Absolutism, 1760-90: A Documentary Sourcebook*. (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Averro Publications, Ltd. & Chadwyck-Healey, Ltd, 1985), ix.

have one system rather than many conflicting ones, wished for the destruction of feudal courts, provincial estates, and monastic orders, wanted to put education under a single system administered by a department of government, liberating the serfs and abolished restrictions on trade. He wanted to spread all of these reforms throughout his empire. He unsuccessfully tried to bring Constantinople under the power of the Holy Roman Empire and incorporate Enlightenment ideals there.<sup>2</sup> Although Joseph II like other Enlightened despots, such as Frederick the Great and Catherine the Great, were not completely successful, they were templates for Napoleon's Enlightened despotism that came later. Napoleon brought reforms to France and when he conquered territories, he brought these reforms there as well.

The archaeological and scholarly expedition was part of the Enlightenment tradition of universal knowledge and discovery. This led to the French *savants* discovering Egypt, possibly an Egypt of their own invention, and founding the academic field of Egyptology which is the study of Egyptian history, language, literature, religion, and art. Orientalism, which was used to analyze this expedition, is a term used by art historians and cultural studies scholars for the representation and imitation of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures by American and European writers, historians, and artists. To Edward Said, who defined the field for a generation and whose influence, although controversial, remains large, Orientalism is:

A way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other... the Orient has helped to define Europe... Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Bruun. *The Enlightened Despots*. 2 ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 60-71.

bureaucracies and colonial styles...The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Orientalism is a field in which the West describes the East, a structure in which the West describes itself by what it is not using the “Orient” as evidence of its own superiority. This clearly controversial idea of Orientalism focuses predominantly on the Middle Eastern portion of the “East” rather than Asia as a whole. Edward Said through his internal inconsistencies and stereotyping has a flawed interpretation of the French intellectual campaign in Egypt demonstrating a more caricatured and negative view of the French interpretation and response to the Egyptians. These internal inconsistencies are twofold: Said characterized the West as grossly stereotyping the East yet he through doing this stereotypes the West, and historically his portrayal of the campaign is flawed missing the awe and wonderment that the French had for Egypt. He was looking at the campaign through hindsight which inevitably caused his characterization to be flawed. The French instead were more in awe of Egyptian culture and people and embraced the nuances of Egyptian society rather than making gross generalizations and stereotypes.

#### Egyptology Prior to the Campaign

Ancient Egyptians had no conception of the past, no historical consciousness, no idea that the “past” was any different from the present. They believed, rather, that the world was in a vast, unchanging, inescapable cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. They did not study their own history, so that most written Egyptian history was written by non-native Egyptians primarily Greeks, who were greatly influenced by the culture of the Egyptians. The study of Egypt occupies a prominent place in classical literature as early as Homer. The first historian to look

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1-5.

into the history of Egypt was Herodotus. In his *Histories*, he explored and tried to explain Egypt. Although some of his information was wrong (i.e. his tour guide misinformed him about the inscriptions at the Pyramid of Giza), he still collected much material which captivated the Greeks who started to study Egyptian history to answer questions about the world. Where did mankind come from? Where did my society come from? How do people in older civilizations do things and why? Herodotus provided historical accounts and social commentary to provide answers to these questions.<sup>4</sup> There are other accounts of Egypt written by Classical authors: Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, and Plutarch.<sup>5</sup> Manetho who lived in Egypt during Ptolemaic rule, approximately 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, wrote the *Aegyptiaca* (History of Egypt) which was the first work that chronicled the reigns of the pharaohs and divided the rulers into dynasties.<sup>6</sup> This was the first work to study the dynastic rule of the pharaohs.

In the Middle Ages, the Bible was the main source of information about Egypt for European scholars. Then the next large-scale encounter between Europe and the Middle East was the Crusades (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) which opened the Middle East including Egypt to European experience and imagination. The Crusades brought Europeans face to face with Arab civilization and language and began the process by which Greek learning reentered Western Europe. During this time Greek literature dramatically increased the available materials dealing primarily with Egypt creating much interest in the country.<sup>7</sup> First circulated between 1357 and 1371, the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* was an account of his supposed journeys in Asia Minor,

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<sup>4</sup> Herodotus, John M. Marincola, and Audrey Selincourt, ed. *The Histories*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), Book 2, Chapters 5-99.

<sup>5</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 442.

<sup>6</sup> Manetho and W.G. Waddell. *The History of Egypt and Other Works*. (Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library, 1940).

<sup>7</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 443.

Armenia the Little and the Great, Tartary, Persia, Syria, Arabia, Upper and Lower Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Chaldea, Amazonia, India, and Jerusalem. During his time in Egypt, he served the Sultan of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> These stories further increased interest in learning and traveling to the Middle East and Egypt.

The Renaissance was characterized by a flowering interest in antiquity focusing on but not limited to the classical civilizations. This “classical humanism” was not merely academic, but was grounded on the premise that the wisdom and accomplishments of the ancients could serve as a model for present undertakings and as a motivation for excellence. Renaissance interest in Egypt was fueled by the obelisks and other Egyptian and Egyptianized monuments in Rome and elsewhere. Renaissance scholarship looked in classical texts on the Egyptian content and was intrigued by Egypt for its own sake, placing great importance of Egyptian religion. The Renaissance, in a sense, was picking up where the classical world left off, as Egyptian deities and mysteries had been the most popular in the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup>

The 17<sup>th</sup> century priest, Father Athanasius Kircher, a bridge between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, is the next important figure in Egyptology. Although he is often ridiculed for his unsuccessful attempts to read hieroglyphics, this learned Jesuit made significant contributions to Egyptian studies, as well as to other fields, such as Sinology and geography. He was the first European to write a Coptic grammar and the first to recognize it as a form of the ancient Egyptian language.<sup>10</sup> He also made legible copies of hieroglyphic inscriptions, as did his older

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<sup>8</sup> John Mandeville and Anthony Bale. *The Book of Marvels and Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.)

<sup>9</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 443-444.

<sup>10</sup> Peter N. Miller. “Copts and Scholars: Athanasius Kircher in Peirese’s Republic of Letters.” And Anthony Grafton. “Kircher’s Chronology.” In *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*. ed. Paula Findlen. (New York: Routledge, 2004.) 128-143 and 165-182.



contemporary G. Hoerwart von Hohenburg, author of the *Thesaurus Hieroglyphicorum*.<sup>11</sup> The rigorous explanation, measurement, and description of the Great pyramid at Giza by John Greaves, published in the *Pyramidographia* (1646), was one of the first instances of scientific archaeology in Egypt, just as Father Athanasius Kircher's Coptic grammar was the starting point of Egyptian philology.<sup>12</sup> The study of Egyptian art can also be said to have begun with a groundbreaking exposition of an aesthetic of Egyptian sculpture in its own terms by the eighteenth-century artist Giambattista Piranesi.<sup>13</sup>

Other breakthroughs in Egyptology came during the eighteenth-century. Father Claude Sicard, a French Jesuit and Supervisor of the Jesuit Mission in Cairo, produced the earliest known accurate map of the country.<sup>14</sup> Jean Baptiste Borguignon d'Anville was a geographer and cartographer whose maps of ancient Egypt were carefully and accurately prepared.<sup>15</sup> Bernard de Montfaucon, the French Benedictine monk and scholar who founded the discipline of paleography, compiled a 10 volume *L'Antiquite expliquée et representée en figures* (1719-1724), which reproduced, methodically grouped, all ancient monuments including many from Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Benoît de Maillet, the French consul general at Cairo, wrote the *Description de l'Égypte* in 1735.<sup>17</sup> Richard Pococke, English prelate and anthropologist, detailed his tours of the Near East and Egypt in his *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries* (1743).<sup>18</sup> Frederic Norden, Danish naval commander and explorer, published his *Voyage d'Égypte et de Nubie* which contained extensive documentation and drawings of his voyage through Egypt in 1737-1738. It

<sup>11</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 444.

<sup>12</sup> John Greaves. *Pyramidographia*. (Oxford: J. Hughs, 1737).

<sup>13</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 444.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 445.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 445.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard de Montfaucon. *L'Antiquite expliquée et representée en figure*. (Lausanne, Switzerland: University of Lausanne, 1724).

<sup>17</sup> Benoît de Maillet. *Description de l'Égypte*. (Lausanne, Switzerland: University of Lausanne, 1740).

<sup>18</sup> Richard Pococke. *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*. (Ghent: W. Bowyer, 1745).

contains realistic drawings of Egyptian monuments.<sup>19</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, German mathematician, cartographer, and explorer, compiled the highly influential two volume *Reisebeschreibung von Arabien und anderen umliegenden Ländern* and published a work with friend Peter Forsskål, naturalist of the Arabian expedition, *Flora Aegyptiaco-Arabica* describing the plant life of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> These works were an important influence on the *Description de l'Égypte* later published after the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt.

The Enlightenment was important in paving the way for deciphering pre-Coptic Egyptian. In the eighteenth-century, the Phoenician/Paleo-Hebrew script was completely deciphered, as was the script used for Palmyrene Aramaic.<sup>21</sup> The mathematical discoveries of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz of the seventeenth-century added to the ways to the decipherment procedures.<sup>22</sup> William Warburton, English critic and churchman, predicted some of the arguments of decipherers of pre-Coptic Egyptian by calling for the rejection of the symbolic/Neoplatonic approach in favor of a more phonetic approach.<sup>23</sup> Through all this, at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, Georg Friedrich Grotefend was making progress in the decipherment of Old Persian cuneiform while Sylvestre de Sacy and Johan Åkerblad achieved their initial successes in the decipherment of Demotic.<sup>24</sup> These seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century techniques would later influence Jean-François Champollion in deciphering and translating the Rosetta Stone. Thus Egyptology prior to the Napoleonic campaign was largely characterized by travelers' and military officers' accounts of what they

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick Ludvig Norden. *Voyage d'Égypte et de Nubie*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1800).

<sup>20</sup> Carsten Niebuhr. *Reisebeschreibung von Arabien und anderen umliegenden Ländern*. (Kopenhagen: Gedruckt in der Hofbuchdruckerey bey Nicolaus Möller, 1774-1778) and Peter Forsskål and Carsten Niebuhr. *Flora Aegyptiaco-Arabica*. (1775) can be found at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

<sup>21</sup> Donald B. Redford, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 445-446.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 446.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 446.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 447.

encountered in the country rather than extensive archaeological survey. Europeans, at this time, had little knowledge of ancient and modern Egypt and hieroglyphics had not been translated.

### “Orientalism” Prior to the Campaign

Egyptology is one thing, Orientalism is another. The first is at least notionally empirical. The second is explicitly theoretical, indeed ideological. Orientalism as a field was not defined until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it did not have a standard except its own to study or examine Egypt. The problem with Said is that the East is essential (constructed and invented) but there is an essential West (conquering and imperialistic). Both are created and not concretely demonstrated phenomena. This being said, for “Orientalists,” the first work that separates East from was Homer’s *Iliad*, and then in Aeschylus’s *The Persians* and Euripides’s *The Bacchae*.<sup>25</sup> These works demonstrated an Asia being talked about through the European imagination for the first time in written record. A line was drawn between the East and the West where the West is seen as powerful and articulate and the East defeated and distant. The East holds an appeal of mystery and danger. From this tradition Greek and Roman politicians, public figures, historians, and orators characterize the races, regions, nations, and minds of Asia Minor and the Greco-Roman world. The Greeks and Romans did this in a self-serving manner separating peoples to show their superiority over the Other. The Orient was later subdivided by the areas known, conquered, or visited by Alexander the Great and Herodotus.

Travelers like Marco Polo charting trade routes and setting up a system of commercial trade, the tales of Sir John Mandeville, the coming of Islam and the Muslim conquests, and later

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<sup>25</sup> Homer. *The Iliad*. Ed. Bernard Knox. Trans. Robert Eagles. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998). Aeschylus. *The Persians*. Trans. Janet Lembke and C.J. Herington. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Euripides. *The Bacchae and Other Plays*. Trans. Philip Vellacott. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1954).

the Crusades, all created a perception of the East based on glimpses from the West. European perceptions of Islam also played a fundamental role in defining the Orient. "Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma."<sup>26</sup> Islam took on this dangerous and terrifying form because Christian Europeans saw Islam as a heresy and a military threat. They were the enemy and they were to be feared.

In Dante's *Inferno*, Muslims, Avicenna, Averroës, and Saladin, were among the virtuous heathens in the first circle of the Inferno where their punishment is minimal for not having the benefit of Christian revelation. Dante clearly admired these men for their virtues and accomplishments, but due to not being Christian are still condemned to Hell.<sup>27</sup> Mohammad, or Maometto, the prophet of Islam was condemned to a far worse fate. He is located in the eighth of the nine circle of Hell in the ninth of the ten Bolgias of Malebolge. Mohammad is found after the lustful, the avaricious, the gluttonous, the heretics, the wrathful, the suicidal, and the blasphemous. Mohammad's crime puts him close to Satan. He is punished for being schismatic, believing that Islam is an off-shoot of Christianity and thus he is endlessly hacked from chin to anus. Ali, his nephew, who is condemned for creating the Sunni and Shiite schism, preceded Mohammad in line.<sup>28</sup> Islam is seen as being one of the greatest of sins because it broke away from Christianity and Christianity, to Dante, is the one true religion. Muslims as long as they are virtuous are still punished in Hell because they are not Christian.

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy: Volume 1: Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 97-109.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 325-335.

Throughout the Renaissance and the Enlightenment generalizations about the East, according to Edward Said, “are all declarative and self-evident; the tense they employ is timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength; they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent, which is sometimes specified, sometimes not.”<sup>29</sup> Said himself does this in his work as well. Thus the language that described the East from the Renaissance until the Napoleonic Campaign was demonstrated by their generalizations based on limited encounter with the Orient. Many of the authors discussed in the Egyptology section are part of defining the language and stereotypes of Orientalism. The travelers and scholars who wrote on the East up until the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt did not spend ample amounts of time studying the country and the people or really collecting or analyzing any of the monuments, practices, or religion. They assume they are mysterious, different, and exotic to create fear and call them primitive and barbarians to justify conquest and demonstrate Western superiority. The East was mentioned rarely in academic fields of study only as an obscure place known through exploits of earlier travelers and conquerors.

#### History of Egypt Until the End of the Eighteenth

The Egypt of Pharaohs, pyramids, and ancient monuments was not the Egypt that Napoleon encountered. After the Pharaonic epoch, Alexander the Great took control and his general Ptolemy established the Ptolemaic Kingdom, a powerful Hellenic state that extended from southern Syria in the east to Cyrene in the west and as south as Nubia. Alexandria was the capital, a center for Greek culture and trade. Cleopatra VII, the last of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs, committed suicide after her lover Mark Antony died. Egypt was then seized by Octavian and

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism*, 72.

placed under Roman rule which later transferred to Byzantine rule under Diocletian.<sup>30</sup> After a brief period of Persian rule, the Byzantines were able to reestablish their authority until the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. Egypt was invaded and conquered by the Islamic Empire. The control of Egypt remained under the Muslim Caliphate for the next six centuries with Cairo as the seat of the Caliphate under the Fatimids. With the end of the Kurdish Abbayid dynasty, the Mamluks, a Turco-Circassian military caste, seized Egypt in CE 1250. By the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt was the link of trade and travel between the Red Sea, India, Malaya, and East Indies.<sup>31</sup> This made Egypt of strategic importance not only to Muslim empires but to European empires as well.

Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1517 and later became a province of the Ottoman Empire. But the Ottomans were not able to keep control of their new province, reallocating funds to fight for wars in Europe. In addition, Egypt was struck by plague and famine which the Ottomans could not control.<sup>32</sup> The Ottomans still sent governors to Egypt and had control of the state, yet the Mamluk beys had effectively replaced the sultan's representatives as the source of administrative and economic control in the region.<sup>33</sup>

The Mamluk regime had no cohesive central government and was unstable, oppressive, and unpopular. The Mamluk system operated through a network of competing Mamluk families who each engaged in tax collection, employed troops, and engaged in trade with local merchants and European traders. Since there was no administrative center, the society was held together by

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Green. *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 BC: A Historical Biography*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 274, Joyce Tyldesley. *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt*. (London: Basic Books, 2008), 63, and Christopher Haas. *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 2006), 138-139.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Lewis, compiler. *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*. Vol. 1. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 84.

<sup>32</sup> Robert L. Tignor. *Egypt: A Short History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 176-181.

<sup>33</sup> Abd al Rahman al-Jabarti. *History of Egypt*. Ed. Jane Hathaway. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 331-332.

compromise and arrangements between various Mamluk families and merchants, the head of local guilds, and members of the religious order. Yet from time to time certain Mamluk families were able to have enough resources, troops, and clients to dominate the country. In 1740, a faction known as the Oazdagbli emerged victorious over all other Mamluk rival families. Ali Bey al-Kabir who ruled Egypt from 1760 to 1772 made Egypt virtually autonomous from Istanbul. Violent infighting continued between the Mamluk factions until in 1785, an agreement ended the wars. A faction led by Murad and Ibrahim Bey became the dominant force in Egyptian politics. As leaders, they strained ties between the Egyptian government and European traders by threatening them.<sup>34</sup>

After a year, these European merchants, fed up with Mamluk aggression appealed to the Ottoman Sultan to intervene on their behalf. The Ottomans, already planning on sending an expeditionary force to Egypt to recover the lost territory, in July 1786, launched an expedition and assaulted Cairo. They drove out Ibrahim and Murad and replaced them with their hated rival, Ismail Bey. Ibrahim and Murad fled south while the Ottomans pulled out of Egypt satisfied with their success. For the next several years the rival Mamluk factions in Egypt were held at a standstill. Ismail effectively ruled the north of Egypt while Ibrahim and Murad ruled the South. But this truce did not last. In 1790, a devastating plague swept through Cairo killing Ismail and his supporters. The Ottomans pardoned Ibrahim and Murad, reinstating them as the rulers of all of Egypt. Their time in power turned out to be disastrous. The infighting between families continued and their policy of high taxation that destroyed Egyptian trade. The towns of Damietta and Rosetta lost half their population while Cairo lost 40,000 people and Alexandria was almost completely obliterated. The rulers at this time were more concerned with their own

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<sup>34</sup> Robert L. Tignor. *Egypt: A Short History*, 188.

personal power than actually taking on the responsibility of ruling their kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Egypt, weakened by the plague and poor leadership, gave Europeans, particularly Napoleon, ample opportunity and reason to invade Egypt and take it as a colony.

### France Prior to the Campaign

France too was facing its own politically-charged conflicts, its revolution. A severe financial crisis made the people of France increasingly discontent with the incompetent King Louis XVI who continued to demonstrate indifference and decadence of the aristocracy. This bitterness coupled with Enlightenment ideals and radical sentiments led to the convocation of the Estates-General in May 1789. During 1789, the revolution saw the proclaiming of the Tennis Court Oath which asserted that sovereignty did not lie in the King but in the people themselves and their representatives, the Storming of the Bastille in July, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in August, and the Women's March on Versailles that forced the royal court back to Paris in October. The next few years of the revolution were dominated by arguments and struggles between various liberal factions and a right wing of supporters of the monarchy intent on thwarting major reforms and reestablishing the absolute monarchy.<sup>36</sup>

Under the Constitution of 1791, France became a constitutional monarchy with King Louis XVI sharing power with an elected Legislative assembly. The Legislative Assembly, which met for the first time on October 1, 1791, degenerated into chaos and failed within its first year. On August 10, 1792, insurgents and popular militias stormed the Tuileries Palace and took the royal family prisoner. A republic was declared in September 1792 and King Louis XVI was executed the next year. External European threats shaped the course of the revolution after the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 188-189.

<sup>36</sup> William Doyle. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86-135.



assassination of the King. The French Revolutionary wars began in 1792, and after initial reverses France conquered the Italian Peninsula, the Low Countries, and most of the territories west of the Rhine.<sup>37</sup> During this time, popular sentiments radicalized the Revolution significantly, culminating in the rise of Maximilien de Robespierre and the Jacobins. Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety created a virtual dictatorship during the Reign of Terror from 1793 until 1794 during which between 16,000 and 40,000 people were killed.<sup>38</sup>

On July 27, 1794, the Thermidorian Reaction led to the arrest and execution of Robespierre and other leading Jacobins. The Convention during this time passed the Constitution of Year III which took effect on September 27, 1795.<sup>39</sup> This new constitution established the Directoire and the first bicameral legislature in French history. The Napoleonic Wars led Napoleon on a conquest of Europe and the East to establish the ideals of the revolution and the Enlightenment, to discover and obtain knowledge of different people throughout the world, and to protect French trade interests.

### French Reasons for Invasion of Egypt

France had had its eyes on Egypt for a while, and so talk of an invasion was nothing new. Louis XV's foreign minister, the duc de Choiseul, had proposed a colony as early as 1769. The French believed that they would be welcomed by the natives as liberators from the brutal and violent regime. They also believed that the Ottomans would tolerate the invasion because the French were doing them a favor by subduing their increasingly autonomous subjects.<sup>40</sup> Holding visions of blessing Egypt with the gifts of their own revolution, a modern government, and the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 136-158 and 197-219.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 174-196 and 247-271.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 272-296.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Dwyer. *Napoleon: The Path to Power 1769-1799*. (New York: Bloomsbury Books, 2007), 351-354.

introduction of new laws favoring liberty while casting aside the older archaic Egyptian laws, the French believed the Egyptian people would welcome the French with open arms. In a letter to Talleyrand dated September 13, 1797, Napoleon as commander of the Army of Italy declared, "We must seize Egypt. This country had never belonged to a European nation... In order to take it, we would need to set out with 25,000 men, escorted by eight or ten ships of the line... I would be pleased, citizen minister, if you could arrange in Paris some meetings so that I can know what the reaction of the Porte would be to such an expedition to Egypt."<sup>41</sup> Napoleon himself believed that it was necessary for France to invade Egypt to show French dominance in the region because Egypt had never been subdued by any European power and was a gateway to trade in the region. Most of Napoleon's reasons for invasion were self-justificatory propaganda. His main reason for invasion was anti-British, "The day is not far off when we shall appreciate the necessity, in order really to destroy England, to seize Egypt."<sup>42</sup> This French plan was really Talleyrand's. He was the one, even more than Napoleon, who was in favor of invasion.

Yet before these plans for invasion could be put into practice, the French had to analyze the role of the Ottomans. France and the Ottoman Empire had traditionally been allies, and despite their imperialistic ambitions, the French had no intention of making the Ottomans their enemy. The French plan hinged on the assumption that the Ottoman Empire would stay neutral during the French invasion and more ideally they hoped that they would consider the French to be a sort of necessary evil in order to vanquish their ancient foe, the Mamluks.<sup>43</sup> The French expected Ottoman anger but believed it would dissipate over time because in the French eyes, they would be doing the Ottomans a favor.

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<sup>41</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance inédite, officielle et confidentielle*. Vol. 3. (Paris: 1819-20), 294.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Dwyer. *Napoleon: The Path to Power 1769-1799*, 351-354.

While France's ambitions were to expand this trading empire extending across Egypt, Napoleon's personal ambitions were more despotic, bordered on conquering the world. First, Napoleon wanted to take the island of Malta, still ruled by Christians called the Knights of St. John, like Egypt though, their glory days were a distant memory. Napoleon planned to use this strategic island as a base to strike out against the Middle East and Egypt. Beyond that, he also wished to challenge British supremacy in India restoring French influence in the region that had been extinguished in the Seven Years War. In order to do this, Napoleon planned to execute a bold strategy to dig a canal through Suez to allow French ships to reach the Red Sea.<sup>44</sup> Napoleon's ambitions seemed to stretch further than Egypt and India.

In 1798, the year that the invasion of Egypt was launched, Napoleon was 29 years old. Europe, he said, is far too small for an Empire: "Nothing great can be achieved except in the Orient."<sup>45</sup> Napoleon's plan was to secure Egypt, drive the British out of India, then rouse the dormant Greeks to rise up against the Ottoman Empire, and capture Istanbul and restore it as Constantinople. After that, he would attack Europe from the East.<sup>46</sup> In that way, he would become a new Alexander the Great. His ambitions for Egypt differed from that of the French, but either way they collectively decided to invade Egypt and try to take the country by force in 1798.

### Invasion Plans

The French army traveling to Egypt was large, but nowhere near large enough to attempt permanent occupation. The French government intended to deliver reinforcements, but that plan hinged on the ability of the French fleet to proceed freely through the Mediterranean without

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*. (New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperback, 2007), 11-19.

<sup>45</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance inédite, officielle et confidentielle*. Vol. 3. (Paris: 1819-20), 308.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 11-12.

interference. Napoleon's expeditionary force contained 40,000 infantry, 1,200 cavalry, 171 field guns, 40 siege guns, and 2 companies of sappers and miners. This was deemed enough by the French government to not only conquer but also pacify Egypt. Later the French would learn they would need more troops to garrison the country and maintain a sizeable field army. Napoleon assembled an impressive cast of officers to accompany in Egypt: Joachim-Napoléon Murat, Auguste Frédéric Louis Viesse de Marmont, Louis-Nicolas Davout, Jean Baptiste Kléber, Jean Louis Ebénézer Reynier, Jean-Andoche Junot, and Thomas Alexandre Dumas. In order to transport this large army, Napoleon required a fleet the likes of which had not been seen since the Crusades. He had 335 transport ships, 13 ships of line, and 7 frigates.<sup>47</sup> France's expedition to Egypt was not only solely based on imperial glory. The army would also be accompanied by 167 *savants* whose purpose was to explore, collect, and record the history, language, literature, religion, and art of Egypt. The expedition was prepared at an alarming speed and in almost complete secrecy. The expedition was approved by Paris in April and a month later the expeditionary force was launched from Toulon.<sup>48</sup>

### Seizure of Malta

Napoleon set sail from Toulon on May 20, 1798, although for reasons of secrecy the fleet was launched from several ports including Marseille, Genoa, Civitavecchia and others on Corsica. Even the soldiers of the expeditionary force were not informed of their real destination until they were well out to sea. On June 9, Napoleon's large fleet was seen off the coast of Malta causing considerable terror throughout the populace. The Grand Master of the Knights of St. John, an aging Prussian named Ferdinand von Hompesch, decided to send Napoleon a message

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 47.

asking what his true intentions were. By the time it reached Napoleon the French had already landed on Malta, seizing the unfortified ports of the island with barely a shot fired.<sup>49</sup> Napoleon then dispatched one of his *savants*, Déodat Dolomieu, a former Knight of St. John, to try to influence the government of Malta to reach an agreement. Dolomieu was reluctant and his negotiating skills were poor.<sup>50</sup> The situation was further exacerbated by Napoleon's decision to dispatch a man named Poussielgue, who had lived on Malta the year before as a spy. When confronted by Poussielgue and Dolomieu, von Hompesch wavered which resulted in a tension-filled standoff that lasted for the entire day.<sup>51</sup>

On June 11, von Hompesch surrendered under the guarantee that he would receive an annual pension of 300,000 francs from the French government. Over the next week, Napoleon exiled all of the Knights and awarded each of them a modest pension depending on their length of service. The French spent one week on the island during which time Napoleon abolished religious orders, reformed the tax system, modernized the universities and hospitals, and he seized most of the treasure including items that had belonged to the Knights themselves.<sup>52</sup>

The next leg of the journey saw Napoleon come desperately close to an encounter with British Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson's fleet. Around midnight on June 23, French officers reported hearing signal guns from the British fleet. Napoleon evaluated the situation and ridiculed any suggestion that the British could be in the Mediterranean. He decided not to raise the alarm which allowed the fleet to pass safely into the night avoiding the British fleet. Nelson,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 50.

on the other hand, not being able to locate the French fleet frustrated sailed north away from Napoleon.<sup>53</sup>

### The Napoleonic Campaign in Egypt

Thirteen days after seizing Malta and continuing to elude the British Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, the French fleet was in sight of Alexandria, on the northeastern coast of Egypt. This is where the fleet disembarked on July 1, although initial plans were to land elsewhere. On the day prior to disembarkment, Napoleon told his troops, “I promise to each soldier who returns from this expedition, enough to purchase six arpents of land,” and added:

The peoples we will be living alongside are Muslim; their first article of faith is “there is no other god but God, and Mahomet is his prophet.” Do not contradict them, treat them as you treated the Jews, the Italians; respect their muftis and their imams, as you respected their rabbis and bishops. Have the same tolerance for the ceremonies prescribed by the Quran, for their mosques, as you had for the convents, for the synagogues, for the religion of Moses and that of Jesus Christ. The Roman legions used to protect all religions. You will here find different customs to those of Europe, you must get accustomed to them. The people among whom we are going treat women differently to us; but in every country whoever violates one is a monster. Pillaging only enriches a small number of men; it dishonours us, it destroys our resources; it makes enemies of the people who it is our interest to have as our friends. The first city we will encounter was built by Alexander [the Great]. We shall find at every step great remains worthy of French emulation.<sup>54</sup>

This quotation clearly demonstrates his Enlightened despotism. The idea of toleration as good in itself is part of the Enlightenment project, but Napoleon used toleration as a particularly useful tool in facilitating conquest. Telling his soldiers to respect and tolerate the Muslims as they did the Jews and the Italians demonstrates that Napoleon saw the Muslims as being equal to Europeans. Yet, Napoleon clearly did say this for tactical purposes. He compared the French to the Romans to show the ability of their army to conquer yet also respect the conquered peoples.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 56-60.

<sup>54</sup> Copies of Original Letters From the Army of General Bonaparte in Egypt, Intercepted by the Fleet Under the Command of Admiral Lord Nelson. (London: J. Wright, 1798), 235-236.

Did he really respect the peoples he conquered? Perhaps, but he knew the way to keep Egyptians happy was to respect their religion, and if he wanted them to fight with him against their Mamluk overlords, he would need their respect. Napoleon wanted his force to appear as liberators not conquerors, allowing for a smooth transition toward French rule in Egypt. He recognized the strategic purpose of Egypt and would do anything to gain it.

General Jacques-Francois de Menou was on the first ship to leave for Egypt and was the first Frenchman to land on Egyptian soil. Napoleon Bonaparte and General Jean Baptiste Kléber landed together and joined Menou that night at Fort Marabou in Alexandria. There they raised the tricolor. Prior to arrival, Napoleon was informed that Alexandria planned to resist the French force so he rushed to shore getting there sooner than he intended. At 2am on July 1, he marched with three columns of troops arriving by surprise beneath Alexandria's walls and ordering an assault on the city. Immediately the enemy put down their weapons and fled. The city did not have time to officially surrender and put itself under French discretion but, despite Bonaparte's orders, French soldiers broke into the city. On July 1, Napoleon paused in the city before infiltrating into the country, issuing a proclamation to the Muslim people in the city of Alexandria:

For too long the beys who govern Egypt have insulted the French nation and covered their traders in slanders. The hour of their punishment has come. For too long this horde of slaves, bought in the Caucasus and Georgia, have tyrannised the most beautiful part of the world; but God, on whom all depends, has ordained that their empire shall end. People of Egypt, they have told you that I come to destroy your religion, but do not believe it; [tell them] in reply [that] I come to restore your rights, punish the usurpers and that I respect God, his prophet and the Quran more than the Mamluks. Tell them that all men are equal before God; wisdom, talents, virtues are the only things to make one man different from another... Is there a more beautiful land? It belongs to the Mamluks. If Egypt is their farm, then they should show the lease that God gave them for it... Cadis, cheiks, imans, tchorbadjis, [I ask you to] tell the people that we are true Muslims too. Wasn't it us who destroyed the Knights of Malta? Wasn't it us who destroyed the Pope who used to say that he had a duty to make war on Muslims? Wasn't it us who have at all

times been friends to the Great Lord and enemies to his enemies? ... Thrice happy are those who will be with us! They shall prosper in their fortune and in their rank. Happy are those who will be neutral! They will get to know us over time, and join their ranks with ours. But unhappy, thrice unhappy, are those who shall arm themselves [to fight] for the Mamluks and who shall fight against us! There shall be no hope for them, they shall perish.<sup>55</sup>

Napoleon's proclamation that he worshipped God more than the Mamluks and that the French people themselves were Muslims, showed that he was trying to rally the Egyptians to the side of the French against the Mamluks. Napoleon presented himself and the French army as liberators of Egypt from tyranny and oppression. He used the excuse of the mistreatment of French merchants as justification for the invasion of Egypt. Unsurprisingly Egyptians themselves, including jurist and historian Abd al-Rahman Al-Jabarti, were not convinced. Al-Jabarti did not believe a word of it. He recognized, as did most Egyptians, that Napoleon was using the phrasing and rhetoric to turn the Egyptians against the Mamluks in favor of the French who they believed would not treat them any better than the current leadership.<sup>56</sup>

When the expeditionary force had completely disembarked, Vice-Admiral François-Paul Brueys d'Aigalliers was ordered to take the ships to Aboukir Bay or Corfu instead of to the old port of Alexandria. These precautions were taken due to the imminent threat of the arrival of the British fleet which had been previously seen near Alexandria 24 hours before the French arrival. The purpose was to avoid a naval battle at all costs because a defeat at sea could have disastrous results stranding soldiers in Egypt. It was at the expeditionary force's best interest to go by land because if they get to Cairo at top marching speed they could frighten the enemy commanders and take them by surprise before any defense measures could be put into place.

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<sup>55</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte Letter to the People of Egypt, 2 July 1798 in *Correspondance inédite, officielle et confidentielle*. Vol. 3 (Paris: 1819-20), 305.

<sup>56</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti and Edward Said. *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French Occupation, 1798*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 2005), 36.



General Louis Charles Antoine Desaix on July 6 with his division and two cannons marched across the desert arriving at Demenhour, fifteen miles from Alexandria. At the same time Napoleon left Alexandria, leaving General Kléber in command of the city. General Charles Francis Joseph Dugua was ordered to march on Rosetta, with specific orders to seize and hold the entrance to the port containing the French fleet whose purpose was to follow to Cairo down the river's left bank and rejoin the army at Rahmanié. Napoleon arrived at Demenhour on July 8 where he met up with some General Desaix's force and on July 10 they marched on Rahmanié waiting on the fleet with their provisions. On July 12, the fleet arrived in Rahmanié and the army began to march at night tailed by the fleet.

The fleet, forced by violent gusts of wind, moved toward the army's left straight into the enemy fleet supported by musket fire from 4,000 Mamluks, peasants, and Arabs. The French fleet was numerically superior to their opposition, but they lost their gunboats in the attack. Hearing the sound of gunfire, Napoleon sent his land army to charge and attack the village of Chebreiss in retaliation which was captured after two hours of fierce fighting. The enemy then fled in complete disarray toward Cairo leaving 600 dead on the battlefield.

The force the next day took respite at Cherbreiss then continued forward on their pursuit to Cairo. On July 20, the force arrived a half mile outside of the village of Embabé. It was an extremely hot and uncomfortable day and the army wished to rest from their exhaustion, but Napoleon wanted them to keep pushing forward. He drew up 25,000 troops for battle approximately 9 miles from the Pyramids of Giza. It is said that Napoleon showed his left flank the pyramids and right before the attack shouted, "Think of it, soldiers; from the summit of these

pyramids, forty centuries look down upon you.”<sup>57</sup> Napoleon believed that the battle to come would have historical significance and shouted this line to the troops so they knew what had come before. He wanted them to fight their hardest and show that the French army had a place among the strength and prowess of the past. He was in awe of the wonders of Ancient Egypt and wanted his troops to recognize their importance and pay attention to them. This battle became known as the Battle of the Pyramids, ending with a French victory over an enemy Mamluk force of 21,000 troops. Napoleon’s strategy during this battle was using a larger version of a common infantry square with cannons and supplies safely on the inside to defeat the Mamluk cavalry. At the end of the battle there were 300 French and approximately 6,000 Mamluk troops killed.

General Dominique Martin Dupuy’s brigade continued pushing forward pursuing the routed enemy and at night entered Cairo which had been abandoned by Murad and Ibrahim Bey. On July 22, notable members of Cairo’s religious and political elite went to the aftermath of the Battle of the Pyramids at Giza to meet with Napoleon and surrender the city to him. Three days later on July 25, Napoleon moved the French army headquarters there. General Desaix and his force were then dispatched to follow Murad Bey who had left Cairo with his troops moving toward Upper Egypt. At Elkanka, an observation corps was put in place to keep watch on the movements of Ibrahim Bey who was at the time heading toward Syria. Napoleon himself led the pursuit of Ibrahim and at Salahie defeated him pushing Ibrahim and his troops entirely out of Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

Most of the ships that had dropped off Napoleon and his forces traveled back to France leaving a small fleet of ships on the Egyptian coast to support and supply the troops. The British

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<sup>57</sup> Charles-François François. *Journal du Capitaine François, dit le Dromadaire d’Égypte*. (Princeton: C. Carrington, 1903), 202.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 124-128.

fleet during this time had been searching in vain for the French fleet. On August 1 though, the British discovered the French fleet in a strong defensive position in the Bay of Aboukir. The French took this strategic position believing that they were only vulnerable for attack on one side because the other side was protected by the shore. Yet, during the Battle of the Nile the British fleet under command of Admiral Horatio Nelson maneuvered their ships between the shore and the French fleet thus enabling the British to attack the French from both sides. In just a few hours, 11 of the 13 French ships and 2 of the 4 French frigates were either captured or destroyed with the 4 remaining ships escaping and being put into retreat. This damaged Napoleon's goal of establishing a larger French presence in the Mediterranean Sea, instead putting it completely under British control. The news of the French fleet's defeat to the British reached Napoleon en route back to Cairo from defeating Ibrahim Bey in Salahie, but Napoleon was not worried, Charles Mullié, French historian and biographer, states:

This disastrous event did not disconcert [Bonaparte] at all — ever impenetrable, he did not allow any emotion to appear that he had not tested in his mind. Having calmly read the dispatch which informed him that he and his army were now prisoners in Egypt, he said "We no longer have a navy. Well! We'll have to stay here, or leave as great men just as the ancients did". The army then showed itself happy at this short energetic response, but the native Egyptians considered the defeat at Aboukir as fortune turning in their favour and so from then on busied themselves to find means to throw off the hateful yoke the foreigners were trying to impose on them by force and to hunt them from their country. This project was soon put into execution.<sup>59</sup>

Although Napoleon saw this defeat as an opportunity to use the might of his land force against the Egyptians, the Egyptians saw the French naval defeat as an opportunity to formulate a plan to defeat the French and escape from Napoleon's despotism.

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Muill . *Biography of celebrities military army and sea 1789-1850*. (Paris: Poignavant and Company, 1852), 109.

After defeat at the Battle of the Nile, Napoleon's land forces had success in consolidating power in Egypt, although they faced multiple nationalist uprisings. In Cairo, Napoleon set up a pavilion in the city center and from within he presided over a 'fête du Nil' an elaborate invented liturgy where he gave the signal to throw into the floats the statue of the river's fiancée, Napoleon's name and Mohammad's were uttered together in the same acclamations, on his orders gifts were given to the people, and he gave kaftans to his major officers. This shows the French appreciation of modern Egypt. Napoleon did not utter his name with the pharaohs of the past but with Mohammad showing connection and appreciation for the modern Egyptians. He did this to try to influence and gain support of the Egyptian populace.

This effort to gain support was largely unsuccessful. Napoleon continued issuing proclamations that showed him as the liberator of the Egyptian people from Ottoman and Mamluk oppression, praised Islam, and claimed friendship between the Ottoman Empire and the France in spite of French intervention in Egypt. In a letter to Sheikh El-Messiri in August 1798, Napoleon wrote, "I hope...I shall be able to unite all the wise and educated men of all the countries and establish a uniform regime based on the principles of the Quran which alone are true and which alone can lead men to happiness."<sup>60</sup> However, Napoleon's secretary Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne wrote that Napoleon had no serious interest in Islam or any other religion beyond their political value:

Bonaparte's principle was...to look upon religions as the work of men, but to respect them everywhere as a powerful engine of government...If Bonaparte spoke as a Mussulman (Muslim), it was merely in his character of a military and political chief in a Mussulman country. To do so was essential to his success, to the safety of his army, and...to his

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<sup>60</sup>Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance Napoleon*. Edited by Henri Plon. Vol.4, No. 3148. (Paris: H. Plon, J. Dumaine, 1861), 420.

glory... In India he would have been for Ali, at Thibet for the Dalai-lama, and in China for Confucius.<sup>61</sup>

Thus Napoleon continued to use Islam as a way to promote his political agenda and despotism in Egypt rather than genuinely respecting it for its own sake. After his return from defeating Ibrahim Bey, Mohammad's birthday was celebrated with great spectacle, he was granted the title Ali-Bonaparte by the divan, and Napoleon proclaiming himself the worthy son of the Prophet and favorite of Allah. He used Islam and Egyptian practices as a tool to gain support of the Egyptian people.

But most the Egyptians remained unconvinced. Any and all means were used to force the French "infidels" out of Egypt including sudden attacks and assassinations. Military executions of the Egyptians who attacked the French did not deter them and other Egyptians continued attacking them showing that in the end the French may have been in Egypt but they were not really their masters.

September 22, 1798 was the anniversary of the founding of the First French Republic and Napoleon organized the most extravagant celebration possible. Napoleon ordered a grand circus to be built in the largest square in Cairo with 105 columns round the edge and a colossal inscribed obelisk at the center. Seven classical altars were inscribed the names of heroes killed in the French Revolutionary Wars, whilst the structure was entered through a triumphal arch on which was displayed the Battle of the Pyramids. This annoyed the locals because the painting of

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<sup>61</sup> Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne. *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*. Edited by R.W. Phipps. Vol. 1. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 168-169.

the Battle of the Pyramids flattered the French while mocking the defeated Egyptians the French were trying to win over as allies.<sup>62</sup>

After Napoleon made himself master of Egypt by force, he tried to give Egypt what he saw as the benefits of Western Civilization. Cairo began to take on the appearance of a European city with the city's administration being confided to a divan (privy council) chosen from among the best men in all the province. Other cities received municipal institutions. An Institut d'Égypte of French scholars made in Cairo with Napoleon joining as the President of the Institut. As a legislator, Napoleon set up a library, a chemistry laboratory, a health service, a botanical garden, an observatory, an antiquities museum, and a menagerie. Scholars, under Napoleon's orders, made a comparable table of Egyptian and French weights and measures, wrote a French- Arabic dictionary, and calculate a triple calendar (Egyptian, Coptic, and European). Two journals were established in Cairo, one for literature and political economy under the name *Décade égyptienne* and the other for politics under the name *Courrier égyptien*.<sup>63</sup> Through these efforts, Napoleon demonstrated that he was more than a conquering despot but an Enlightened despot who wanted to give the Egyptians the benefits of Western civilization while learning and discovering Egypt.

The French forces could no longer hope for reinforcements from France due to the navy's devastating defeat at Aboukir, but Napoleon tried to overcome this problem by enlisting slaves in Egypt between the ages of 16 and 24, turning the 3,000 sailors who survived the defeat at

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<sup>62</sup> Nicolas-Philibert Desvernois. *Mémoires: 1789-1815, L'expédition d'Égypte, le royaume de Naples*. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1898), 139.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 191-203.

Aboukir into a *legion nautique*.<sup>64</sup> To prevent the inhabitants of Cairo from aiding the Arabs in night attacks against the French, a curfew was imposed and fence erected. Yet, Napoleon removed these fences because he believed that the Egyptians could use these fences as barricades if they rose against the French. This removal of the fences proved to be justified by events that soon followed.

On October 22, 1798, while Napoleon was taking inspection in old Cairo, the people of the city were distributing weapons and fortifying positions at the Great Mosque. General Dupuy, named commander of Cairo, was the first person to be killed, then Józef Sulkowski, Napoleon's friend and aide-de-camp. Incited by the sheikhs and imams of the city, the Egyptian people swore by the Prophet to exterminate all Frenchmen they met at home or in the streets.<sup>65</sup> Crowds of Egyptians went to the gates of the city to prevent Napoleon from entering which forced him to take a detour to get into the city via the Boulaq gate.

At this point, the French army's situation was critical. The British were threatening coastal towns, Murad Bey was still running with his forces in Upper Egypt, and Generals Menou and Dugal were only barely able to hold onto the territory in Lower Egypt. The Arabs and the Egyptians found common cause with those rising up against the French in Cairo. Thus the whole desert was taking up arms against the French. A manifesto, recognizing the French deceptive claims, was widely published throughout Egypt during this time, stating:

The French people are a nation of stubborn infidels and unbridled rascals... They look upon the Quran, the Old Testament and the New Testament as fables... Soon, troops as numerous as they are formidable will advance on us by land, at the same time ships of the line as high as the mountains will cover the surface of the seas... If it please Allah, it is

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<sup>64</sup>Dominique Vivant Denon. *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte*. Vol. 1. (London: Peltier, 1807), 63.

<sup>65</sup>Nicolas Turc (Nakoula el-Turk). *Chronique d'Égypte 1798-1804*. Trans Gaston Wiet. (Cairo: Le Caire, 1950), 54.

reserved for you to preside over their [i.e. the French's] entire destruction; as dust is scattered by the wind, there will not remain a single vestige of these infidels: for the promise of Allah is formal, the hope of the wicked man will be deceived, and the wicked men will perish. Glory to the Lord of the worlds!<sup>66</sup>

The French were looked on as infidels who came into Egypt to conquer the people rather than set them free. Despite this, Napoleon did not feel particularly threatened. Under his orders, the Arabs were beaten back and forced to retreat into the desert and the artillery was turned on Cairo. Napoleon hunted down the rebels from street to street forcing them to amass in the Great Mosque. Strangely, the sky was covered in clouds and thunder was rumbling, an uncommon occurrence in Cairo. The residents, being religious, considered this to be a sign from heaven to stop the rebellion against the French, and they begged for mercy from their enemies. Napoleon replied, "He [God] is too late – you've begun, now I will finish!"<sup>67</sup> Napoleon then ordered the cannons to open fire on the Great Mosque, and the French broke down the gates surrounding the mosque and stormed into the building massacring the Egyptians inside.

This allowed to Napoleon once again to gain control of Cairo. He then set out to find and capture the authors and instigators of the revolt. Multiple sheikhs and many Turks and Egyptians were convicted of starting and participating in the revolt and were thus executed. To punish the city, he raised taxes and the city's divan was replaced by a French military commission. To negate the manifesto against the French, they posted a proclamation in all the conquered cities in Egypt, ending in the words, "Stop founding your hopes on Ibrahim and Murad, and put your trust

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<sup>66</sup> Dominique Vivant Denon. *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte*. Vol. 1, 105-106

<sup>67</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 5. 221.



in He who has empires in his discretion and who creates men.”<sup>68</sup> While Napoleon remained in Egypt, there was no further revolt.

Now that Napoleon had Egypt securely under his control, he used his time to visit the Suez and see with his own eyes the canal known as the Canal of the Pharaohs which had been made in antiquity by the order of the pharaohs between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Before setting out on this expedition, he gave Cairo back its right to self-government. A new divan was made of 60 Egyptian members replacing the French military commission. Napoleon, whenever he could, accompanied the *savants* on expeditions to look upon the wonders of Ancient Egypt. Accompanied by several of his colleagues from the Institut d'Égypte and followed by a 300 man escort, Napoleon set out for the Red Sea. After three days marching across the desert, they reached Suez. They completed fortifications at Suez then Napoleon crossed the Red Sea and on December 28, 1798, he moved into Arabia to see the renowned fountains of Moses. He then with his caravan went back to the Suez and after much exploration; they found the remains of the ancient canal built by Senusret III and Necho II.<sup>69</sup>

While Napoleon was on this expedition, the Ottomans in Constantinople received word of the French fleet's defeat at the Battle of the Nile at Aboukir, and the Ottomans believed this meant the end for Napoleon and his force leaving them trapped in Egypt. Sultan Selim III, believing this was a great opportunity, decided to wage war against the France and sent two armies to Egypt. The first army left Constantinople with 12,000 troops from Damascus, Aleppo, Iraq, and Jerusalem under the command of Jezzar Pasha. The second army began in Rhodes with approximately 8,000 soldiers under the command of Mustafa Pasha. The Sultan also knew he

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<sup>68</sup> Abd El-Rahman El-Djabarti. *Merveilles biographiques et historiques, ou Chroniques*. Vol. 6. (Paris: Le Caire, 1888), 79-80. .

<sup>69</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 264-274.

would get about 42,000 extra soldiers from Albania, Constantinople, Asia Minor, and Greece. They planned two offensives against the French forces in Cairo: one from Syria, across the desert of Salhayeh-Belbays-El Kankah, and another from Rhodes by sea landing in Aboukir area or Damietta, the port city.<sup>70</sup>

During the canal expedition in January of 1799, Napoleon and his forces were informed of the hostile movements of the Ottomans and that Jezzar Pasha had captured the desert fort of El-Arish, located ten miles from Syria's frontier with Egypt. Seeing that war with the Ottomans was inevitable and that he would not be able to defend against the full force of the Ottoman army, Napoleon decided the best defense would be offense. A quick victory over the Ottomans in Syria would allow the French more time to prepare against the Ottoman forces in Rhodes.

For the impending attack, he prepared approximately 13,000 soldiers who were placed in divisions under the command of Generals Jean Louis Ebénézer Reynier, Jean Baptiste Kléber, Louis André Bon, Jean Lannes, a cavalry division under Joachim-Napoléon Murat, a brigade of infantry and cavalry under Brigade chief Jean-Baptiste Bessières, camel-company, artillery under Elzéard Auguste Cousin de Dommartin, and engineers and sappers under Louis-Marie-Joseph-Maximilian Caffarelli du Falga. Every infantry and cavalry division had 6 cannons. Napoleon placed 16 siege cannons on ships in Damietta under the command of Captain P.J. Standelet. He also sent contre-admiral Jean-Baptiste Perrée to Jaffa with siege artillery pieces.<sup>71</sup>

General Reynier and the vanguard moved quickly into Arish, a city in the North Sinai, and captured it, destroyed part of the garrison, and forced the other part to take refuge in the city's castle. Also during this time, he put Ibrahim Bey's Mamluk forces to flight and captured

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<sup>70</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 5. 512.

<sup>71</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 30. 18.

their camp. Napoleon's force left Egypt on February 5, 1799, and seven days after leaving Cairo, Napoleon met up with General Reynier and his forces in Arish and destroyed one of the city's castle towers. After two days, the city's garrison surrendered and some even joined the French forces.

After marching 60 miles across the desert the French force headed by Napoleon and General Reynier arrived in Gaza where they took respite for two days then moved onto the city of Jaffa. Surrounded by high walls flanked by towers, Jezzar Pasha left the defense of this city to an elite set of troops with artillery manned by 1200 Ottoman gunners. Jaffa was one of the main gateways into Syria. Its port could be used by the French fleet to bring troops in from Egypt and a large part of the success of Napoleon's expedition into Syria depended on the fall of the city. This meant that before moving further into Syria Napoleon had to capture the city. So, from March 3 to 7, Napoleon laid siege on Jaffa.

After the four day siege, all the outer works were under French. Napoleon, as a result, sent a Turk into the city to demand surrender. The commander beheaded the Turk despite his neutrality and ordered an attack on French forces. The city's commander was rebuffed and that same evening, the French forces bullets caused one of the city's towers to fall. Despite the defender's resistance, Jaffa fell to Napoleon's force. The resistance lasted for two days and two nights. The French force took prisoner of 4,000 troops who were sent to Egypt to be shot or beheaded by an executioner. Although this was a vengeful execution against his enemy, Napoleon's actions have been justified by those who say that he could neither afford to hold such a large number of prisoners nor let them escape to join Jezzar Pasha's forces.<sup>72</sup> Before Napoleon

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<sup>72</sup> Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourienne. *Mémoires de Napoleon Bonaparte*. Vol. 2. (Paris: C. Scribner's sons, 1831), 320-322.

left Jaffa to continue with his forces into Syria, he set up a divan for the city along with a hospital on the site of a Carmelite monastery at Mount Carmel. Although not part of Egypt, Napoleon wanted to give the Syrians the benefits of the Enlightenment as well. The hospital was built to treat those soldiers who had caught the plague. Some soldiers had displayed symptoms since the start of the siege. A report by generals Louis André Bon and Antoine-Guillaume Rampon on the plague's spread worried Napoleon, but he nonetheless tried to calm his army by consoling them and telling them the plague was nothing.<sup>73</sup>

After the capture of Jaffa, the army moved toward the coastal town of Acre. On the way, Napoleon's forces captured Haifa including the munitions and provisions stored there, the castle at Jaffet, the castle at Nazareth, and the town of Tyre. The siege of Acre began on March 18, but the French were unable to take the town. Here the Syrian campaign took an unexpected standstill. The newly created Ottoman infantry elites, the Nizam-I Cedid, under command of Jezzar Pasha defended the city while British and Ottoman fleets reinforced and resupplied the troops.

After sixty days of repeated attacks between the two sides and two vicious and inconclusive assaults, the city remained uncaptured by French forces. The city, at the time, was waiting for reinforcements by sea as well as a large army which was being formed in Asia under the Sultan's orders to march against the French. While waiting for reinforcements, Jezzar Pasha ordered a general attack which was supported by its own artillery and a naval bombardment by the British against Napoleon's camp. Napoleon's forces pushed Jezzar Pasha's columns back against their own walls then went to help Kléber who was retrenched in the ruins. Napoleon used a strategy offered to him by the enemy's position. He sent Murat and his cavalry across the

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<sup>73</sup> L'Agenda de Malus. *Souvenirs de la campagne d'Égypte*. (Paris: Champion, 1892), 140-143.

River Jordan to defend the river crossing and Honoré Vial and Rampon to march on Nablus, a city in the northern West Bank, while Napoleon himself put his troops between the Ottomans and their arsenals. These maneuvers were successful and became known as the Battle of Mount Tabor. The Ottomans were taken by surprise in more than one position at once and were forced to retreat leaving their camels, tents, provisions, and 5,000 dead on the battlefield.<sup>74</sup>

In May 1799, Napoleon and his forces returned to Acre to besiege the city. He did this in response to learning that contre-amiral Perrée had landed with reinforcements at Jaffa which included seven artillery pieces at Jaffa. Napoleon ordered two assaults on the city which were vigorously repulsed by Jezzar Pasha's forces. A fleet was seen flying the Ottoman flag, and Napoleon believed he must capture the city before this fleet arrived with reinforcements for the Ottomans. Two more assaults were ordered and both were rebuffed. A fifth attack was then ordered by Napoleon which took the outer works of the city, fixed the French tricolor in the ramparts, pushed the Ottomans into retreat into the city, and forced the Ottoman's fire to yield. The city of Acre was about to surrender.

However, Edmond Louis Antoine Le Picard Phélippeaux, a French émigré to Great Britain and engineer officer, who was one of Napoleon's classmates at the École militaire, was fighting on the Ottoman side for the British. Phélippeaux ordered cannons to be placed in the most advantageous positions in the city and new trenches to be dug behind the ruins in which Napoleon's forces had seized. Concurrently, Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith, commander of the British fleet, and his forces landed in Acre and the Ottoman reinforcements from Rhodes landed. The British were able to successfully blockade French supply into the harbors. These factors plus renewed courage on the side of the Ottomans pushed Napoleon's forces back. Three

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<sup>74</sup> Le Chasseur Pierre Millet. *Souvenirs de la campagne d'Égypte*. (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1903), 105-106.

consecutive French assaults were rebuffed by the combined Ottoman and British forces. After the last failed assault, Napoleon thought it would be unwise to continue trying to take Acre, and on May 21, 1799, he ordered his forces to return to Egypt and consoled them with the proclamation, "After feeding the war for three months in the heart of Syria with a handful of men, taking forty guns, fifty flags, 10,000 prisoners, razing the fortifications of Gaza, Kaïffa, Jaffa, Acre, we shall return to Egypt."<sup>75</sup>

The situation of the French at this point was critical. The Ottoman and British forces had the ability to harass the French force as it retreated toward Egypt. The French force was tired and hungry due to the British blockade, and the force was carrying a large number of soldiers who were suffering from the plague. They carried these plague sufferers in the rear of the force because carrying them in the middle would spread the disease to healthy troops. There were two hospital depots on the way back to Egypt: Mount Carmel and Jaffa. Napoleon ordered all the patients at Mount Carmel to evacuate to Jaffa and Tentura. All gun horses were abandoned before Acre and to set an example, Napoleon and his officers handed their horses to the transport officer and walked with their soldiers. This was all in preparation to get any French citizen safely to Egypt.

To try to conceal the French retreat, the army left Acre at night. When Napoleon arrived at Jaffa, he ordered evacuations of plague sufferers to three different points: one by sea to Damietta, one by land to Gaza, and another by land to Arish. During the French retreat, they destroyed by sword and fire livestock, crops, and houses, and Gaza was the only city to be spared for remaining loyal to Napoleon throughout the battle. To quicken the pace of the retreat, Napoleon took a very controversial step of killing prisoners and plague-stricken men along the

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<sup>75</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 5. 429-430.

way to Egypt. His supporters during the time argued that this was a necessary step for Napoleon to take because he had the Ottoman forces in pursuit not far behind and the prisoners and sick would slow them down.<sup>76</sup>

After being away from Egypt for four months, the expedition arrived back in Cairo with 1,800 wounded while 600 men died from plague and 1,200 died in action. Meanwhile, the Ottoman and British emissaries sent news to Egypt of Napoleon's setback in Acre stating that Napoleon's expeditionary force was mostly destroyed and Bonaparte died. After hearing these rumors, Napoleon decided to destroy them by re-entering Egypt as if he was the head of a triumphal army with his troops holding palm branches and emblems of victory. Upon entering Cairo, he proclaimed to the people:

He is back in Cairo, the *Bien-Gardé*, the head of the French army, general Bonaparte, who loves Mahomet's religion; he is back sound and well, thanking God for the favors he has given him. He has entered Cairo by the gate of Victory. This day is a great day; no one has ever seen its like; all the inhabitants of Cairo have come out to meet him. They have seen and recognized that it is the same commander in chief, Bonaparte, in his own person; but those of Jaffa, having refused to surrender, he handed them all over to pillage and death in his anger. He has destroyed all its ramparts and killed all those found there. There were around 5,000 of Jezzar's troops in Jaffa — he destroyed them all.<sup>77</sup>

Napoleon tried to portray himself as the victor of the campaign in Syria to demonstrate his power to the Egyptian people. He refused to show himself as a loser in any sort of capacity and demonstrated he was the all-powerful leader who subdued Egypt and will keep it under his control. He used propaganda as a weapon of war.

The army at Cairo was able to get the rest and supplies it needed to recover, but this recovery was not a long one. Murad Bey had eluded the pursuit of Generals Desaix, Belliard, Donzelot, and Davoust and entered further into Upper Egypt. To prevent this, Napoleon

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 508-509

<sup>77</sup> Nicolas Turc (Nakoula el-Turk). *Chronique d'Égypte 1798-1804*, 65-66.

marched with his forces to attack him at Giza. During this time, an Ottoman fleet of 100 ships was off the coast of Aboukir threatening Alexandria. Instead of returning to Cairo, Napoleon ordered his generals to meet the army under the command of the Pasha of Rumelia, Säid-Mustapha, who joined with Murad and Ibrahim Bey against the French force in Egypt. Before leaving to attack this force, Napoleon wrote a letter to Cairo's divan stating, "80 ships have dared to attack Alexandria but, beaten back by the artillery in that place, they have gone to anchor in Aboukir Bay, where they began disembarking [troops]. I leave them to do this, since my intention is to attack them, to kill all those who do not wish to surrender, and to leave others alive to lead in triumph to Cairo. This will be a handsome spectacle for the city."<sup>78</sup>

Napoleon first moved into Alexandria from which he moved further into Aboukir where the Ottomans strongly garrisoned the fort. Säid-Mustapha's army had 18,000 soldiers and supported by several cannons with trenches defending it on the land side with open communication with the Ottoman fleet on the seaside. Bonaparte ordered an attack on July 25, 1799 and the Battle of Aboukir began. Within a few hours, the Ottoman trenches were taken and 10,000 Ottomans drowned in the ocean. The rest were either captured or killed on land. General Murat captured Mustapha, his son, and all his officers who were sent back to Cairo as a part of a French triumphal procession. After seeing Napoleon with these high-ranking prisoners, the people of Cairo welcomed Napoleon as a Prophet-warrior who previously had predicted his own triumph with such a remarkable exactitude.<sup>79</sup>

The land battle at Aboukir partially restored Napoleon's reputation, but that was his last action in Egypt. By this time, the Egyptian campaign was bogged down felt that there was

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<sup>78</sup> Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourienne. *Mémoires de Napoleon Bonaparte*. Vol. 2, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 5. 541.



nothing left to do in Egypt that was worthy of his ambition and he recognized his forces in Egypt were not sufficient enough for an expedition to anywhere else in the Orient. He also saw his forces getting weaker from losses in battle and sickness and would soon be taken prisoner and destroyed by his enemies which would inevitably destroy Napoleon and his army's prestige which they gained through the many victories they had won. Napoleon thus decided to return to France leaving his forces behind. During the prisoner exchange in Aboukir and through the *Gazette de Francfort* Sidney Smith had sent him, Napoleon had been in contact with the British fleet, from which he learned of the events in France. Napoleon saw that France needed him and would welcome him back with open arms because France was thrown into retreat, their enemies recaptured France's conquests in Europe, the people were unhappy with their government, and was nostalgic for the peace that Napoleon brought through the Treaty de Campo Formio.<sup>80</sup>

He kept secret this plan to leave Egypt and return to France except with a small number of friends whose discretion and loyalty were earned and known. In August 1799, Napoleon left Cairo on the pretext of visiting the Nile Delta accompanied by scholars Gaspard Monge, mathematician, and Claude Louis Berthollet, chemist, the painter Dominique Vivant, Baron de Denon, and generals Berthier, Murat, Lannes, and Marmont to make his actions not look suspicious. On August 23, 1799, he transferred his powers as commander in chief to General Kléber through a proclamation to the army. The news was taken poorly by the French soldiers because they felt that Napoleon was abandoning them, but they remained confident in General Kléber's ability to lead. That night, the frigate *Muiron* with three other ships escorting her left for France with Napoleon and his escort.<sup>81</sup> On their 41 day journey back to France, they did not meet a single enemy ship to stop them. On October 1, Napoleon's small fleet entered the port of

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<sup>80</sup> Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourienne. *Mémoires de Napoleon Bonaparte*. Vol. 2, 363.

<sup>81</sup> Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourienne. *Mémoires de Napoleon Bonaparte*. Vol. 3, 2.

Ajaccio where violent winds kept them until October 8 when they set out for France. On the same day, they anchored in the roads off Fréjus. At 6 PM, he, accompanied by his chief of staff Berthier, set off for Paris after stopping at Saint-Raphaël where he built a pyramid commemorating his expedition.

Under the terms of a treaty negotiated by General Kléber and Admiral Smith of the British navy, the French force Napoleon left behind was supposed to be honorably evacuated in early 1800, but British Admiral George Keith Elphinstone, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Keith broke the treaty by sending an amphibious assault of 30,000 Mamluks to attack Kléber and his forces. The French army defeated the Mamluks at the Battle of Heliopolis in March 1800 and then Kléber suppressed another revolt in Cairo. On June 14, a Syrian student, Suleiman al-Halabi, assassinated General Kléber. The command of the French forces was passed down to Menou who held command of these forces from July 3, 1800 until September 1801.

The French at this time were under continual harassment from the new Anglo-Ottoman land offensive. They were defeated by the British in the Battle of Alexandria on March 21 and then the French unsuccessfully tried to seize Alexandria from August 17 until September 1801. After, Menou surrendered to the British. Under the terms of the surrender, the British general Ralph Abercromby allowed the French force to be sent back to France in British ships. Also as part of the surrender, Menou handed over priceless Egyptian antiquities including the Rosetta Stone. On June 25, 1802, they signed the Treaty of Paris which ended all hostilities between France and the Ottoman Empire and restored Egypt to Ottoman control.<sup>82</sup> Thus the military expedition of the French in Egypt ended with French holding no land in Egypt or anywhere else

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 409-420.

in the East. Although this campaign ended in failure, it demonstrated the despotic aspect of Napoleon's Enlightened despotism.

The *savants*, the Institut, the Description, the Rosetta Stone, and the Formation of Egyptology

Despite the military defeat, when Egypt was under French control from 1798 until 1801, one of the most important developments of Napoleon's venture was not the battles but the discovery of Egypt. This was a "rediscovery" of Ancient Egypt and a growth of knowledge about the subject for Europeans. Napoleon brought with him on his expedition to Egypt 167 *savants* which included engineers and artists, members of the Commission des Sciences et des Arts, the mathematician Gaspard Monge, the chemist Claude Louis Berthollet, Vivant Denon, the mathematician Jean-Joseph Fourier (these four will be described in further detail later), the geologist Dolomieu, Henri-Joseph Redouté, the physicist Étienne Malus, the naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the botanist Alire Raffeneau-Delile, and the engineer Nicolas-Jacques Conté of the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers. The original aim of this group was to help the army open the Suez Canal, map out roads, and build mills to supply food. Under Napoleon's tutelage, they founded the Institut d'Égypte with the goal to disseminate Enlightenment values throughout Egypt through interdisciplinary work.

The aims of the institute were recorded as: "to encourage progress and to propagate 'lumières' in Egypt; to further the research, study and publication of the natural history, industry and history of Egypt; to give its opinion on questions put to it by the government."<sup>83</sup> The subjects covered in the Institute meetings ranged from creating calendars of Egypt and the Orient, studies of flora and fauna, geological, mineralogical, physical and geological studies of

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<sup>83</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondence*, Vol. 4. 383.

the country to itineraries, works on the history, and the demography and public health of the Egyptians. *Le Decade Égyptienne* was a scientific review set up by the Institute to record any findings and through the course of the expedition these scholars observed and drew monuments, people, buildings, animals, flora, and fauna in Egypt and became deeply interested in the country's customs and resources.<sup>84</sup> Jean-Joseph Fourier, who eventually became head of the Institute, described the goal of the Institute and the French as a whole as, “[T]o abolish the tyranny of the Mamluks, to extend irrigation and cultivation, to open a constant communication between the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf, to form commercial establishments, to offer the Orient the useful example of European industry, finally to render the constitution of the inhabitants softer and to procure them all the advantages of a perfected civilization.”<sup>85</sup> The goals for the *savants* were more than scientific and historical exploration. They also created an entire field of study about Egypt both ancient and modern as they tried to make Egypt “more civilized” through European technology and government. The goals were explicitly Orientalist in thought and language. Egypt was part of the “Orient” that would be offered the useful example of Western industry. The question is this – who learned more from whom? That is the subject of the remainder of this paper.

Between 1751 and 1774, French scholars produced the *Encyclopédie* that summarized information read by the skeptical but idealistic eyes of the ‘enlightened.’ This was part of the Enlightenment project of universal knowledge which is summarized in Denis Diderot’s preface to the first edition:

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<sup>84</sup> Louis de Laus de Boisy, “The Institute of Egypt,” *Napoleon: Symbol for an Age, A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 42-45.

<sup>85</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondence*, Vol. 4. 385.

In truth, the aim of an encyclopedia is to collect all the knowledge scattered over the face of the earth, to present its general outlines and structure to the men with whom we live, and to transmit this to those who will come after us, so that the work of past centuries may be useful to the following centuries, that our children, by becoming more educated, may at the same time become more virtuous and happier, and that we may not die without having deserved well of the human race.<sup>86</sup>

Napoleon wanted his *savants* to take the idea of the *Encyclopédie* and apply this technique to a non-European country for the first time. The final result of the research and hardship of the Institute and the *savants* was the monumental *The Description de l'Égypte* which was commissioned directly by Napoleon Bonaparte became an unparalleled work of collective scholarship. The final work would draw from data already published journal *Le Decade Egyptienne*, the newspaper *Courier de L'Égypte*, the four volume *Mémoires sur l'Égypte*, *Voyage dans las Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte* by Dominique Vivant Denon and the collection of an abundance of notes and illustrations from the *savants*.<sup>87</sup> This work was prepared over a quarter of a century and the first edition published under the title *Description de l'Égypte ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée frances publie par les odres de sa Majeste l'Empereur Napoleon le Grand* in 1809 consisted of 9 quarto volumes and eleven volumes of plates in a new format which made it easier for dissemination and academic study. The purpose was to display the wonders of Egyptian antiquity, provide an accurate map of Egypt, and examine the life of modern Egypt. The observations of the historians, antiquarians, surveyors, chemists, physicists, mathematicians, geologists, zoologists, botanists, and biologists, who went with Napoleon and his force to Egypt, were illustrated by artists. There were initially 600

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<sup>86</sup> Denis Diderot, ed. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. (Paris: André le Breton, Michel-Antoine David, Laurent Durand, and Antoine-Claude Briasson, 1751–72), preface.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 45-48.

sketches and eventually 900 pictures produced by 400 engravers.<sup>88</sup> This monumental work was little known in France after its first publication thus Louis XVIII, Napoleon's successor, called for a new edition to be produced for the benefit of the *savants* who had dedicated so many years to the project. Over 2,000 people, a year, worked on preparing this publication. The second edition volumes are divided up as follows: Antiquities – Descriptions, Antiquities – History, The Present day, and Natural History.<sup>89</sup> This volume was distributed throughout France and the rest of Europe making it much better known than its predecessor. It became the fundamental work for the study of Egypt both ancient and modern.

The *Description* was the fruit of the labors of the Institut d'Égypte founded by Napoleon in Cairo in August 1798. The Institute was separated into four sections: mathematics, physics, political economy, and literature and the arts. Each section was limited to a maximum of 12 members, but there were a large number of periphery *savants* who moved between each section. A large number of these people made up the original 167 members of the Commission of Arts and Sciences who became part of Napoleon's inner circle. Napoleon wanted to be as well-advised as possible and thus was considered one of the best informed men of his time. He elected himself to the mathematical section and when he was not on the field of battle, he was free to attend the Institute's sessions.<sup>90</sup> This anticipated his participation in the discussions that led to the Code Napoleon a few years later. He chose the mathematician, Gaspard Monge, and

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<sup>88</sup> Commission des Sciences et Arts d'Égypte. *Description de l'Égypte*. (Paris: Imprimerie imperial, 1809).

<sup>89</sup> Commission des Sciences et Arts d'Égypte. *Description de l'Égypte*. (Paris: Imprimerie imperial, 1822).

<sup>90</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte. *Correspondance*. Vol. 4, 383-386.

chemist, Claude Louis Berthollet, to be leaders of the Institute. Berthollet was the director of this enterprise until his death in 1822.<sup>91</sup>

Claude Louis Berthollet was one of the leaders of the Institut d'Égypte. He was a member of the physics and natural sciences section of the Institute. Prior to the campaign, his involvement in the Enlightenment project can be seen in contributions to the field of chemistry. Through his great developments in chemistry, he became an active member of the Academy of Science in 1780. Berthollet, along with Antoine Lavoisier and others, devised a chemical nomenclature which serves for the basis of the modern system for naming chemical compounds. He was the first to introduce the use of chlorine gas as a commercial bleach in 1785, determined the elemental composition of ammonia gas in 1785, produced a modern bleaching liquid in 1789, produced potassium chlorate known as Berthollet's Salt, and was one of the first chemists to recognize the characteristics of reverse reaction and thus chemical equilibrium. During the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, Berthollet became active in politics. He was one of the scientists trusted by the Committee of Public Safety with emergency amplification of munitions production. He taught at the École Normale and was one of the founders of the École Polytechnique. He became a friend of Napoleon, whom he accompanied to Italy to collect painting and sculptures from May 1796 to October 1797 and to Egypt in 1798, and in Egypt helped to set up the Institut d'Égypt along the lines of the Parisian Académie des sciences which was at the forefront of scientific development in Europe.<sup>92</sup> Berthollet's support of the French Revolution and Napoleon demonstrated his connection and willingness to spread the Enlightenment project. He modeled the Institute after the Académie des sciences which was at

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 390-391.

<sup>92</sup> Nina Burleigh. *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 7.

the vanguard of scientific research and development at that time showing his willingness to bring scientific development and Enlightenment ideals to the Egyptians.

Gaspard Monge was a leader, with Berthollet, of the Institut d'Égypte and was appointed president of the Egyptian Commission. He was part of the mathematics division of the Institute. His commitment to Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals stemmed from his childhood where his parentage prevented him from getting into the École Royale where he later was given a position. He was a strong supporter of the Revolution, and was appointed Minister of the Maine by the Legislative Assembly in 1792 in which he stayed until April 10, 1793. When the Committee of Public Safety made an appeal to academics to assist in defense of the republic, he wholly applied himself, distinguishing himself by writing *Description de l'art de fabriquer les canons and Avis aux ouvriers en fer sur la fabrication de l'acier*. He took an active part in establishing the École Normale and the École Polytechnique where he taught geometry. From May 1796 to October 1797, he was in Italy with Berthollet and some artists selecting paintings and sculptures to bring back to France and while there he became friendly with Napoleon. When he returned to France, he was appointed Director of the École Polytechnique, and in early 1798, he was sent to Italy that ended in the establishment of the short-lived Roman Republic. After, he joined the Napoleon Expedition and accompanied Napoleon to Syria. Studying there, he continued to work on perfecting his *Application de l'analyse à la géométrie* by analyzing Egyptian pyramids and other monuments.<sup>93</sup> Not only did he bring with him to Egypt Enlightenment and revolutionary principles, but also he applied the knowledge he gained from Egyptian monuments leading to the invention of descriptive and differential geometry. He

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 7.



embodied the Enlightenment project fully; he helped bring Enlightenment ideals to the Egyptians and gained knowledge from them applying it to his field of study.

Dominique Vivant, Baron Denon was part of the artistic and literature section of the Institute and became the most prominent and well-known artist of the Egyptian campaign. Denon had no written or spoken opinion of the Revolution because he spent most of the time in other countries, though, he did resolve to go back to Paris after his property was confiscated and was only spared due to his friendship with revolutionary painter David. After the Revolution, he frequented the house of Madame de Beauharnais, Napoleon's wife, where he met and befriended Napoleon. At Napoleon's invitation, he joined the Egyptian expedition and thus found the materials for his most important and artistic work. He was the first artist to view the grand remains of Upper Egypt while accompanying General Desaix and rushed his paintings into print in 1802 in *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* which meant the public initially gained an aesthetic appreciation rather than a scientific appreciation of Egypt that came with the *Description*.<sup>94</sup> Denon's pictures and descriptions were later sourced and published within the *Description* as well. This work crowned his reputation both as an archaeologist and an artist and sparked the revival of Egyptian architecture and decorative arts in Europe. After the campaign, Napoleon appointed him head of the Musée Napoléon, later renamed the Louvre.<sup>95</sup> His archaeological and artistic work helped spark Egyptomania bringing knowledge and culture about Egypt to Europe.

Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier was part of the mathematics section of the Institute. Fourier was enthusiastic about the ideals of the revolution but was opposed to the Terror, even though he

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<sup>94</sup> Dominique Vivant Denon. *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte*.

<sup>95</sup> Nina Burleigh. *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt*, 8.

supported Robespierre. He was imprisoned briefly during the Terror but was saved from the guillotine by his friends in academia who vouched for him. In 1795, he was appointed to the École Normale and then succeeded Joseph-Louis Lagrange at the École Polytechnique. He went with Napoleon to Egypt and was made governor of Lower Egypt and secretary of the Institut d'Égypte. He contributed several mathematical papers to the Institute and began his empirical work upon his *Théorie analytique de la chaleur* (The Analytic Theory of Heat). He wrote the original preface to the *Description de l'Égypte* and contributed greatly to the work. He became the head of the Institute after Berthollet's death in 1822. His major influence on Egyptology came from his influence on another person. Fourier was appointed prefect of Grenoble in 1801 and met Jean-François Champollion, at age 11, and introduced him to the ink pressed copy of the Rosetta Stone. From that point on, Champollion dedicated himself to the translation of ancient Egyptian. Fourier's first influential encounter with Champollion and subsequent relationship supported Champollion's translation of ancient Egyptian.<sup>96</sup> Jean-Joseph Fourier believed in revolutionary ideals and like the rest of the executive board of the Institute, wished to bring them to Egypt. He also learned a great deal from Egypt helping him form his analytical theory of heat and collected objects from Egypt and the ink-pressed copy of the Rosetta Stone that later influenced Champollion translate ancient Egyptian. He not only brought Enlightenment ideals to Egypt but also learned from Egypt and transmitted it to a younger generation which symbolizes the Enlightenment project as described by Diderot.

Besides these four important *savants*, the other 163 all played a vital role in the discovering of Egypt both ancient and modern as well. Since the *savants* did not know nor understand the hieroglyphs they found, they surmised what the symbols might have meant. Most

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 158-162.

were trained in the art of perspective drawing so not only did they make up meanings of symbols but they also could imagine what a building looked like without actually ever seeing it. Thus they created scenes based on what they thought it would look like which led to mistakes and misinterpretations of architecture and building layouts for monuments they did not see. For example, the shrine of Kom Ombo which was completely covered by sand was shown incorrectly surrounded by an open courtyard and the temple at Edfu.<sup>97</sup> Despite this, some of the evidence the *savants* collected to this day are the best we have. Several sites depicted in the *Description* were later destroyed: the temple of Contralatopolis, a victim of then modernizing of Mehemet Ali; the temple of Antaeopolis that was swept away by the Nile in 1821; the temple of Amenhotep III, on the island of Elephantine that lasted until 1822.<sup>98</sup> Although the paws of the Sphinx at Giza were covered by sand during this time, the pictures of the *savants* show the face in better condition than it is in today, due to the pollution of modern Cairo eating into the stone.<sup>99</sup> Although Napoleon himself refused to enter the Great Pyramids, the artists were more courageous. The thrill of discovery is present in the portrayal and their perspective of the chambers within the Great Pyramids. This excitement carried over in their discovery of the huge statues of Rameses, whom they knew by his Greek name Ozymandias, and the Colossi of Memnon. Even the ruins at Karnak proved overwhelming and thrilling to the *savants*.<sup>100</sup> They created extremely detailed descriptions and drawings and took their time examining and analyzing these monuments. They were meticulous and made it their goal to collect and depict everything they saw. At Dendera, Denon discovered and recorded a zodiac on the ceiling estimated to be 15,000 years old. Another was found at Esna. Thus in the *Description*

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<sup>97</sup> Dominique Vivant Denon. *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte*, 184.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 187.

astronomers discussed at length what they believed they meant.<sup>101</sup> The amount of antiquities still intact and able to be analyzed allowed for the *savants* to believe that no ancient civilization was as well preserved as ancient Egypt. Whether these depictions were accurate or not, they were the best they had at the time and played an fundamental role in the formation of Egyptology as a solidified field of study. Although the descriptions of some of the monuments and hieroglyphics have become obsolete, the drawings and illustrations are still used in Egyptology today.

Despite this major focus on ancient Egypt, not all the *savants* were lost in the past. Even if pollution and disease ran rampant in modern Egypt, it was the modern Egyptians that Europeans would have to work with. They appreciated what they could learn from modern Egypt and the Egyptians while also wishing to bring to them the benefits of the Enlightenment. One of the most important and first papers incorporated into the *Description* was Monge's "Explanation of the Optical Phenomenon Called a Mirage" which demonstrated how and why a mirage appeared eliminating irrational fears that mirages had induced.<sup>102</sup> Also, René-Nicolas Dufriche, Baron Desgenettes, French military doctor and the chief doctor to the French army in Egypt, set up a hospital to treat the native Egyptian population.<sup>103</sup> This allowed the *savants* to see firsthand the diseases that afflicted the Egyptian populace while also meeting native Egyptians in general.

The French had more to learn than to teach the modern Egyptians. The *savants* were at home recording Egyptians at work: setting blindfolded oxen to extract water from underground reservoirs in the delta or as far south as the First Cataract, using an intricate system of dolabs (irrigation equipment) to pump water from a well on to their gardens, and other farming and

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Strathern. *Napoleon in Egypt*, 305-306.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 198

<sup>103</sup> *Le Décade*. (Cairo, 1798-1799), 6.

The discovery of the Rosetta Stone was reported in the *Courier de l'Égypte*, the official newspaper of the French expedition, in September. The Institute then made copies and sent them to all learned institutions in Europe. After the French surrendered, the stone was sent to England along with other artifacts confiscated by the British, although General Menou put up a bitter struggle to keep the Stone in French hands. The ancient Ptolemaic Greek of the text, albeit different from Attic Greek, was easily translated and disseminated in French and Latin after translation. The first scholar to make any progress on making correlation and translating of the three scripts of the Stone was the remarkable English linguist, Thomas Young, who was also a renowned scientist and foreign secretary of Royal Society of London. The Stone, dating from the reign of Ptolemy v Epiphanes, contained the Greek proper names Ptolemy and Cleopatra which Young recognized. He noticed that at corresponding points in the hieroglyphic text were oval rings or cartouches surrounding certain signs. Young concluded that the Egyptian signs must be equivalent to the Greek originals. He could offer conceivable solutions implying that, instead of looking at the Egyptian hieroglyphics in purely symbolic terms as others have previously suggested, the ancient Egyptians had used an alphabet system at least for foreign words. Further, he noticed that characters resembled equivalent ones also in Demotic script (written Coptic Egyptian). The conclusion he drew from this was that the Demotic script and Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics were only partly phonetic also consisting of symbolic characters as well.<sup>110</sup> After announcing this discovery to the academic community, Young could get no further with the Stone.

The person who was able to read hieroglyphics for the first time as system was only eight years old when Napoleon was in Egypt. Jean-François Champollion was a linguistic genius. He

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas Young. "Remarks on the Ancient Egyptian Manuscripts with Translation of the Rosetta Inscription" in *Archaeologia* vol. 18 (1817), 1-15.

mastered the Classical languages as a child and joined his brother Jean-Jacques in Grenoble where he met Jean-Joseph Fourier who at that time was head of the local administration. Fourier, while on a trip visiting a local school, saw the enthusiasm of Jean-François and invited him to see his antiquities collection that he collected from his time in Egypt during Napoleon's campaign, which included papyri and inscribed stones adorned in hieroglyphics. After seeing these marvels, Jean-François Champollion made it his life goal to be able to read and translate hieroglyphics. For years he went through the rigid Napoleonic schooling and gradually mastered all known oriental languages both ancient and modern including Aramaic, Syriac, and Chaldean.<sup>111</sup> Most scholars originally believed that the Stone's third language was not Demotic (Coptic).

Champollion grasped that Coptic was more important for the purposes of translating the Stone was Coptic. Before Champollion, in 1802, Silvestre de Sacy, French Orientalist, identified five names in the Demotic script (Alexandros, Alexandraia, Ptolemaios, Arsinoe, and Epiphanes) while Johan David Åkerblad, Swedish diplomat and scholar, published an alphabet of 29 letters that he identified from the Greek names in the Demotic text.<sup>112</sup> Yet, they could not identify the remaining characters of the Demotic text. In Egypt during the campaign, the French had dealing with the Christian Copts who made up approximately ten percent of the population. The Copts were called Αἰγύπτιος meaning native to the land. The language of Copts which was almost nearly extinct was a direct descendant of the ancient Demotic Egyptian that was found on the

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel Meyerson. *The Linguist and the Emperor: Napoleon and Champollion's Quest to Decipher the Rosetta Stone*. (New York: Random House Trade, 2005), 56.

<sup>112</sup> Silvestre de Sacy. *Lettre au Citoyen Chaptal, Ministre de l'intérieur, Membre de l'Institut national des sciences et arts, etc: au sujet de l'inscription Égyptienne du monument trouvé à Rosette*. (Paris, 1802) and Johan David Åkerblad, *Lettre sur l'inscription Égyptienne de Rosette: adressée au citoyen Silvestre de Sacy, Professeur de langue arabe à l'École spéciale des langues orientales vivantes, etc.; Réponse du citoyen Silvestre de Sacy*. (Paris: L'imprimerie de la République, 1802)

Rosetta Stone. By the time, the French invaded Egypt only a few villages in the South spoke Coptic and the only other place where the language could be found was in sacred texts.<sup>113</sup> Luckily for Champollion though in 1805 a former Coptic monk came to Grenoble and offered to teach him. By 1809, in Paris, Champollion wrote: "I only dream in Coptic and Egyptian..."<sup>114</sup> He believed that Coptic and Ancient Egyptian were the earlier and later forms of the same language: Coptic was the modern key to unlock the ancient tongue.

In 1815, a bilingual obelisk like the Rosetta Stone was found at Philae. When Champollion was able to get a copy of the script, he was able to add the proper names Berenice and Alexander to Young's collection. But his triumph though with this obelisk was to grasp that hieroglyphs operated in more than one way: they can sometimes be right to left, sometimes from left to right, sometimes from top to bottom, sometimes read like sounds (letters and syllables), sometimes read like symbols, and sometimes read like marks of status. On the basis of this and the foreign names on the Rosetta Stone, Champollion constructed an alphabet of phonetic hieroglyphic characters printed on his handwritten chart in his *Lettre à M. Dacier*, addressed at the end of 1822 to Bon-Joseph Dacier, secretary of the Paris Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and immediately published by the Académie.<sup>115</sup> This letter demonstrated a breakthrough to reading Egyptian hieroglyphics, for not only the alphabet chart and main text, but also the postscript where Champollion notes that similar phonetic characters appeared not only in proper Greek names but also in native Egyptian names. During 1823, Champollion identified the names of pharaohs Ramses II and Thutmose III written in cartouches in far older hieroglyphic

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<sup>113</sup> Timothy Wilson-Smith. *Napoleon: Man of War, Man of Peace*, 140-141.

<sup>114</sup> Jean-François Champollion. *Lettres à son Frère. 1804-1818*, ed. by Pierre Vaillant (Paris: L'Asiatheque, 1984), 95.

<sup>115</sup> Jean-François. Champollion, *Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques* (Paris, 1822).

inscriptions. Later in 1823, Champollion rushed into his brother's room to announce that he found out how to read hieroglyphics and subsequently fainted.<sup>116</sup> It took him five days to recover then he announced and published his findings.

The goal of Champollion's short life after finding these realizations was to establish Egyptology as an academic subject. He studied the best ancient Egyptian collection in Europe in Turin, he led an expedition to Egypt in 1828-1829, he continued his work on the Rosetta Stone, and drew on the Stone and many other texts to develop the first Ancient Egyptian grammar and hieroglyphic dictionary published by his brother after his death in 1832. Before he died, he tried to describe Ancient Egypt in Ancient Egyptian terms.<sup>117</sup> Champollion's ability to decipher and translate the text of the Rosetta Stone allowed for the translation of other inscriptions and works of Egyptian history and literature. The impact and importance of the Rosetta Stone was not only in founding the linguistic portion of Egyptology but also demonstrating the enthusiasm and genuine interest these deciphers had in gaining knowledge about the Stone and disseminating it throughout the world.

Egyptology as an academic subject derives from the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt. The *savants* whom Napoleon brought with to study and record Egypt both ancient and modern created the Institut d'Égypte whose efforts created the *Description de l'Égypte* that recorded monuments that no longer exist, created Egyptian calendars, studied and collected flora and fauna, studied geology, mineralogy, and geography, collected an extensive history of ancient Egypt, analyzed modern Egyptians, demography, and public health. This collaborative work was

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas Young. *An account of some recent discoveries in hieroglyphical literature and Egyptian antiquities: including the author's original alphabet, as extended by Mr. Champollion, with a translation of five unpublished Greek and Egyptian manuscripts* (London: John Murray, 1823).

<sup>117</sup> Jean-François Champollion *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens Égyptiens*. (Paris, 1824)



the foundation text to this new field of study. It gives precise accounts that create a basis of study on ancient Egyptian history, literature, religion, art, zoology, geology, mineralogy, and geography. Without the campaign and the work of the *savants*, some of the monuments and history would not be known due to their destruction and deterioration. The finding and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone also played the most important role in the formation of the study of Egyptology. Deciphering Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs paved the way for the translating of pyramid, obelisk, stela, and monument inscriptions and ancient Egyptian sacred and secular texts. Learning and uncracking hieroglyphics brought the study of Egyptology even further because it allowed people of the early 1800s to understand and read the words of the Ancient Egyptians themselves. Without the Napoleonic campaign and the finding of the Rosetta Stone, translation of hieroglyphics might have taken exponentially longer or may not have been completed at all. The Institut d'Égypte, the *Description de l'Égypte*, and the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone all fully embodied the Enlightenment project. They demonstrated the excitement and eagerness of the *savants* to go to Egypt and as much knowledge as possible not only for themselves but also for all Europeans and their descendants. The impact of the work of these *savants* on European society after the scientific expedition culminated in Egyptomania which refers to an increased fascination in Ancient Egypt and myriad manifestations. There was great aesthetic impact on literature, art, and architecture, but it also played a role in the discussion about race, gender, and national identity. Egyptian culture, whether trivial or not, permeated the minds of the Europeans at the time.

#### "Orientalism" During and After the Napoleonic Campaign

Napoleon's *savants* and the formation of the Institut d'Égypte helped Napoleon's idea to form a living archive of the expedition and to create foundations for all the *savants'* field of

study ranging from science to archaeology in Egypt. This monumental academic institution in Egypt was the first of its kind. It looked at all aspects of Egyptian society both ancient and modern. Not only did they analyze already established academic fields of study but also created the field of Egyptology whose foundation text is the twenty-three volume *Description de l'Égypte* which was collected by the savants. Although this created and elaborated on institutionalized academic fields, to Edward Said, it also created and cemented within them the language and discourse to describe the East. Egypt became a department of learning for France and due to its location as a focal point between Africa and Asia and Europe and the East, Egypt became the center of European knowledge and discourse about the East. Jean-Jacques Fourier in the original preface to the *Description de l'Égypte* stated Napoleon's intent when invading Egypt:

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.<sup>118</sup>

Not only does Fourier demonstrate the central importance of Egypt to the Orient and Europe, but also demonstrated Napoleon's belief that it was of upmost importance to bring the Enlightenment project to Egypt to bring the scientific knowledge of Europe to Egypt and the rest of the Orient. Egypt was going to be the example to the rest of the Orient on how to be more European.

According to Edward Said, Egypt was crafted and created in modern European terms and the purpose was:

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<sup>118</sup> Jean-Jacques Fourier. *Préface historique* in *Description de l'Égypte*, vol. 1. (Paris: Imprimerie imperial, 1809), preface.

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 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 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, schematize, tabulate, 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.<sup>119</sup>

He believed all of this was realized in the *Description*. The language, discourse, and stereotypes of the East were fully institutionalized with the *Description* and Institute. This language shows that Europeans need to come into the Orient and “fix” the Orient to help return it to its former glory and take it out of a primitive, barbaric state and bring it toward Western enlightened status. Through this, they formulated and created what the Orient is and was, not in the terms of the people who lived there but in the terms of the people studying, analyzing, and collecting information and putting it into an institutionalized field in the West. This language can be used as an imperialistic vantage point to justify and rationalize the reasons for colonial expansion. It also justifies the West’s colonization of the Orient as academic venture into modern learning and the dissemination of the newly discovered material. What this language does is show the East in Western terms thus taking the East out of relative “obscurity” and giving the West the dominance over the East particularly in the writing and study and places the West’s historical interpretation of the East of more importance. The purpose is to bring the Orient closer to

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<sup>119</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism*, 86.

Europe taking away any remnant of strangeness and hostility and make it a wholly European construct rather than its own unique embodiment with distinct places, people, and customs.

Taking Edward Said's opinion of European purpose in describing the Orient, the Egyptian campaign was analyzed. The French looked at the distinctiveness and impressive history of Ancient Egypt and characterized this period to be Egypt's "glory days." Ancient Egypt was the ideal civilization to the Europeans filled with extraordinary monuments, religious practices, hieroglyphics, and history while modern Egypt was the opposite, primitive and barbaric, and needed to be returned to its former greatness. Modern Egypt, at this time, was an example of what all of the Orient was to Europeans, a desolate place filled with disease, poverty, political unrest, and technological backwardness. The goals of Napoleon and his *savants* were to bring Egypt out of barbarism and to the enlightened world that came to fruition in the ideals of the French Revolution. They wanted to bring freedom, representative government, and technological progress to the people of Egypt as only a European power could do. The Institut d'Égypte under Napoleon's orders brought amenities of the West to Egypt such as libraries, improved health service, laboratories, and universities. Napoleon, as did most European leaders, used this as justification for invasion and said that it was his duty to bring Egypt and the rest of the Orient out of darkness toward European enlightenment, superiority, and progress. Through the *Description de l'Égypte* the *savants* formulated, gave shape, and defined Egypt in their terms. They choose what to include in the *Description* and through this defined what it was to be Egyptian which correlated directly to what it was to be from the Orient. What was important to the French *savants* on how Egypt was portrayed was how Egypt was portrayed without input from the Egyptians themselves. Egypt was thus depicted only within a European context and institutionalized within the academic field of Egyptology.

Yet Edward Said's interpretation of the Egyptian campaign leaves something to be desired. He left out the nuances and complexities of purpose, exploration, and collection of the materials of the scientific expedition and Napoleon and the savants themselves. When he discussed and demonstrated the West generalizing and stereotyping the East, he himself generalized and stereotyped the West by caricaturing them by simplifying Europeans into all being imperialistic, ethnocentric, and political. Said's account of the French expedition contains many factual, methodological, and conceptual errors, internal inconsistencies, and contradictions. That is not to say that everything he said is wrong. Europeans trying to "enlighten" the East, to Said, demonstrated the Europeans belief in their own superiority. This may be the case but Said missed the true purpose of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment not only helped bring the ideas of freedom and universal human rights and modern European technology but also the Europeans wanted to learn from the people they wished to bring the Enlightenment project. Also France during this time was still trying to discover French identity and how to enlighten themselves as well. They were not fully Enlightened themselves and wished to learn from other peoples. They wanted to collect the knowledge scattered all over the world and to share it with contemporaries and those that come after. In the case of the French expedition, it was not a one sided venture. The French wished to give the Egyptian the modern amenities of Europe while also gaining extensive knowledge about ancient and modern Egypt. These savants did not stereotype or generalize what they saw. They were genuinely excited about their endeavor and wanted to collect as much information as possible from Egypt to disseminate it to the masses. The purpose of this campaign, to Said, was the French conquering Europe, but the campaign proved to be the opposite: Egypt conquered France and then the rest of Europe. After the campaign, Egyptomania became the craze of the time. Egyptian culture, themes, and style

permeated almost every aspect of European life. Said's interpretation of the campaign proved to miss the true French intent for going to Egypt. He saw them going only as conquerors with preconceived notions and generalizations, but they went for intellectual growth and curiosity. Although this curiosity can be seen as proving Said's point about the exoticism and "otherness" of the East, this curiosity was more for the gaining knowledge rather than purely about seeing the exoticism of the East. They wanted to learn about them for the sake of learning. The *savants* did not go with imperialistic intentions, albeit clearly Napoleon did. Said's interpretation, although not completely incorrect, misses the essence and complexity of the *savants* and the campaign.

### Conclusion

The importance of the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt is undisputed. Although the campaign itself was a military failure, the enlistment of *savants* who studied, researched, and collected scientific, linguistic, and historical artifacts of both ancient and modern Egypt was an unbridled success. They collected and catalogued materials and monuments that would not have been known to modern scholars today due to deterioration and destruction, hieroglyphics may have still be a mystery, and it opened the doors to the study and analysis of ancient and modern Egypt. This demonstrates Napoleon as an Enlightened despot. He tried to conquer Egypt in the name of freedom and Enlightenment ideals while also bringing with him on the expedition 167 *savants* whose job was to gain as much knowledge about Egypt as possible. The soldiers and savants are part of one project of Enlightened despotism that clothes itself in revolutionary universalism particularly in the acquisition of knowledge. Without the scientific expedition, the field of Egyptology would not exist in the manner that it does today. It opened the door and gave a foundational understanding for more European exploration of Egypt and the Middle East as a whole. Although the collection and analysis of these materials created a new field of study

without which the Egyptians both ancient and modern would not be known in such great detail to Europeans, Edward Said, when analyzing this campaign, believed the creation of Egyptology after the campaign created and institutionalized a new language of Orientalism that stereotyping and stigmatized the Orient as being a region of necessary of conquest due to their backwardness. The idea that the West needs to conquer the East in order to civilize them, to bring them back to their past golden age, and to introduce them to modern European technology was what Said saw as the purpose for the French involvement in Egypt. His analysis of the French Egyptian expedition misinterprets the intentions of Napoleon and the *savants* in Egypt. Although Napoleon clearly had imperialistic ambition, Napoleon and the savants also had an intellectual and scientific focus as well. They wished to gain knowledge about ancient and modern Egypt to disseminate it throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Egyptomania was a result of the expedition thus showing Egypt and Egyptian culture conquering the minds and the imaginations of Europeans. The Napoleonic Campaign in Egypt demonstrates Napoleon's Enlightened despotism that is embodied in the military and scientific portions of this campaign.

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