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Irene A. Bierman, Ed., *Napoleon in Egypt*. Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 2003. v + 187 pp. Notes. \$49.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-86372-299-7.

Review by Ernest Tucker, U.S. Naval Academy.

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This recent volume is the product of a 1997 international conference held at UCLA to assess the continuing historical impact of Napoleon's invasion and occupation of Egypt (1798-1801). It features the contributions of scholars in a variety of academic disciplines trying to sort out "two centuries of polemics and differing historiographies arising from the French invasion of Egypt" (p. 1). This set of essays is of particular interest in light of projects currently underway in the Middle East to create new governments in the wake of invasions undertaken to replace existing regimes: enterprises whose consequences may eventually be reminiscent of aspects of what happened when the French came to Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century. Since these ten essays focus on a diverse set of issues, they will be discussed sequentially. The volume as a whole brings together a diverse collection of contributions on aspects of this important cultural encounter.

Like many conference paper collections, the book suffers from a lack of connection between the individual essays, which range over topics as diverse as medicine, archaeology, and geopolitics. One way to remedy this problem would have been to arrange the essays in a more purposeful order, or to include a longer general introduction to better weave together the diverse strands of argument.

The other problem with this volume is the lack of connection to discussions of the topic in the French academic community. None of the contributors are from French institutions; given that it was published in 2003, it would have been at least useful for the introductory essay to locate the papers with respect to the studies presented at numerous conferences on this subject held in France around the bicentennial of the event in the late 1990s. One significant conference, for example, was held at the Hôtel des Invalides in June 1998, and anyone wishing a more complete picture of contemporary scholarly discussion on this encounter would be well advised to consult its published proceedings as well as those of other such meetings. [1]

However, the book does present one of the first collections in English to simultaneously assess the invasion's impact on both Europe and the Middle East, and thus further helps erode remaining barriers that still divide academic disciplines as they assess the European and Middle Eastern pasts. The essays presented here spend less time engaging the broader issues of the scholarly debate on this topic than offering fresh views and perspectives on many specific questions.

The first essay is Nelly Hanna's summary of the long-term impacts of the French expedition. She describes how the unraveling of Ottoman control and the rise of a more autonomous Egypt were processes begun decades before the French arrived. She notes how French occupation accelerated the political and social transformations that occurred under the rule of Muhammad Ali (1805-49). In the end, the French failed in their attempt to challenge the emerging British presence, but they did secure a role in influencing the presence of early modern Egypt within a newly-emerging global economy.

Geoffrey Symcox then examines how the Egyptian invasion figured in the immediate ongoing confrontation then underway between Britain and France. Symcox accepts Said's thesis that the invasion provided "the formative moment for the discourse of Orientalism" (p. 13), but chooses to focus

on how Egypt was invaded as part of a larger strategy to force the English to make peace, as well as offer Napoleon the opportunity for a quick and decisive military victory—a way to secure his legitimacy in the context of the faltering Directory. The loss of the French fleet at Aboukir in August 1798 converted this plan for a limited tactical gain into an open-ended occupation. This unplanned outcome set the stage for the emergence of Orientalism due to the more substantial cultural encounter that followed, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

One aspect of this encounter is the focus of the next essay, Stuart Harten's look into the production of the *Description de L'Égypte*. He argues that this work was more than just the beginning of Orientalism; its multiple agendas embodied several simultaneous technological and scientific projects of the late Enlightenment that Napoleon and the Directory were trying to promote. Harten observes that the two senior scientists in Napoleon's research commission in Egypt were Gaspard Monge and Claude-Louis Berthollet, who had worked with him to transfer works of art, technology, and culture from other parts of Europe, particularly Italy and France. Such appropriations were not characterized as plunder of war, but as cultural "emancipations." The expedition to Egypt was thus couched as an important phase in a similar liberation of timeless ancient treasures as the patrimony of humanity, elevating the whole encounter to something beyond mere Orientalism.

Juan Cole, in the next essay, offers a groundbreaking take on how Egypt became constructed as a curious blend of "Other" and "Self" in the memoirs of French soldiers and civilians who had served in the expedition. He provides a fascinating glimpse into how these observers cast the things they saw there in the terms of their recent Revolution, taking "Egypt as a stage upon which to play out the contradictions and the battles of the 1790s in France itself" (p. 60). This, of course, resembled what the French did elsewhere, but there were interesting local twists in Egypt. For example, the most striking re-imagining he describes was how these writers saw the performances of belly dancers as vehicles for the establishment of Revolutionary liberty.

Nairy Hampikian then reveals a similar way in which the *Description* "saw" Pharaonic Egypt and Cairo as Enlightenment savants thought it ought to be "seen." She notes how this work defined subsequent methods of viewing Egypt and its monuments. A very good example of this can be found in how she describes the reconceptualization of the Sultan Hasan mosque from the vantage point of the Citadel, as seen by contemporary French artists.

The next group of essays discusses the variegated impact of the invasion on different aspects of Egyptian culture and society. Shmuel Moreh observes how al-Jabarti perceived the energy and dynamism of the French in stark contrast with the stodgy traditionalism of the Mamluk rulers. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot then describes how the invasion had little immediate impact on Muslim scholars and legists; while Amira Sonbol reveals in very convincing way how the bureaucratization and "modernization" of medicine based on French models actually caused the lowering of status for female medical personnel known as *hakimas*.

Finally, two essays treat the impact of Napoleon's campaign on modern Egypt. James Gelvin discusses several recent interpretations of this event, focusing on how the Nasserist project to "recover" the eternal Egyptian past was a kind of adaptation of the Napoleonic and Enlightenment quest for "authenticity." In the last essay, Fayza Haikal looks at the domestic use of ancient Egyptian symbols to "invent" an Egyptological tradition which fueled "Egyptomania" in the mid-twentieth century. She characterizes the 1974 Egyptian monument to the unknown soldier as bringing ancient Egyptian and traditional Islamic symbolism together in an innovative way.

The wide-ranging and well-argued collection of essays in this volume marks it as a significant contribution to the discussion of this episode. Many more such conferences should be convened to explore the long-term historical impacts of key encounters between the Middle East and the West since Napoleon's time, and this provides a good model for them.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Nelly Hanna, "Ottoman Egypt and the French Expedition: Some Long-Term Trends"
- Geoffrey Symcox, "The Geopolitics of the Egyptian Expedition, 1797-1798"
- Stuart Harten, "Rediscovering Ancient Egypt: Bonaparte's Expedition and the Colonial Ideology of the French Revolution"
- Juan R.I. Cole "Mad Sufis and Civic Courtesans: The French Republican Construction of Eighteenth-Century Egypt"
- Nairy Hampikian, "Cairo: The Seen and the Unseen in the *Description de l'Égypte*"
- Shmuel Moreh, "Napoleon and the French Impact on Egyptian Society in the Eyes of al-Jabarti"
- Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "Social and Political Changes after the French Occupation"
- Amira Sonbol, "The French and Egypt's Medical Profession"
- James Gelvin, "Napoleon in Egypt as History and Polemic"
- Fayza Haikal, "Egypt's Past Regenerated by Its Own People"

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#### NOTES

[1] See Jacques Perot, ed., *La campagne d'Égypte, 1798-1801: mythes et réalités: actes du colloque des 16 et 17 juin 1998 à l'Hôtel national des Invalides* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998) as well as Henry Laurens, Charles C. Gillispie, et. al., *L'expédition d'Égypte: 1798-1801* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1989). In English, see Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Science and Polity in France: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Years* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2004), pp. 557-599.

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