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Rosemary Brindle, Trans. and Ed., *Guns in the Desert: General Jean-Pierre Doguereau's Journal of Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition*. Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 2002. xv + 200 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-313-32512-X.

Review by Maya Jasanoff, University of Michigan.

Few episodes better portray Napoleon Bonaparte's career in all its ambition, bravura, and farce than the 1798-1801 invasion and occupation of Egypt. Few, too, are as poorly served by scholarship. Compared with the reams of archival documents, memoirs, images, maps, military analyses, and works of history and fiction that together chronicle every step of Napoleon's better-known exploits in central Europe or Russia, the campaign in Egypt and Palestine of 1798-99 has generated considerably less attention.

It was, of course, a failure--on that much, surely its historians would agree--and some might say fiasco. Napoleon's 36,000-strong Armée d'Orient landed in Alexandria on July 1, 1798, and took Cairo in the space of three weeks. But their rapid success was illusory. On August 1, Admiral Nelson demolished the French fleet at Aboukir Bay, leaving the Armée d'Orient effectively marooned. In Upper Egypt, meanwhile, French forces were harassed by the Mameluke commander Murad Bey; and in other parts of the country, the would-be occupiers were faced by popular uprisings, notably in Cairo in October, 1798. Perhaps to save face, Napoleon marched north into Palestine in the winter of 1799 and captured the port city of Jaffa in grisly style: thousands of Arabs were massacred, hundreds of French troops struck down by the plague. He next spectacularly failed to take Acre, again with great loss of life, and retreated back to Egypt. For Napoleon himself, the Egyptian expedition would end in August, 1799, when he sailed secretly to France, leaving only a letter of instructions behind. But his stranded and beleaguered army remained. Napoleon's successor, the beloved Jean-Baptiste Kléber, was knifed through the heart in June, 1800, by a Syrian assassin (often described as a "Muslim fanatic"); and *his* successor, Jacques "Abdallah" Menou (who had converted to Islam in order, it was said, to marry a bathhouse-keeper's daughter) was widely loathed and vainly resisted the British and Ottomans before capitulating, at last, in September, 1801. The decimated army was evacuated to France on British ships.[1]

Part of the reason for the relative historiographical neglect of the Egyptian invasion concerns sources. Many contemporary French documents related to the occupation of Egypt were destroyed, and most of the surviving diaries and journals are not in print, let alone available in English. Another part of the reason, and probably the larger part, concerns interpretations. French historiography is still so routinely divided along the lines of political change that continuities between periods, particularly across the Revolution, are often overlooked. The Egyptian campaign falls straight into the gulf between "Revolutionary" and "Napoleonic" historiography.[2] Some may even find this accident of periodization convenient, for Napoleonic history remains deeply Eurocentric. (The "rêve orientale" receives all of seven pages in Jean Tulard's *Napoléon: ou le mythe du sauveur*. [3]) For Bonapartists in particular, there is also the tricky matter of explaining or justifying Napoleon's flight, a stain (like the murder of the Duc d'Enghien) in the *légende noire* of his career. Finally, in the wake of the late, great Edward Said's portrayal of the Egyptian expedition as a founding moment in modern Orientalism, analysis has more often focused on the intellectual and cultural consequences of the invasion than on the event itself.

Given the relative dearth of available historical sources, primary or otherwise, Rosemary Brindle's translation and edition of one campaign journal--kept by Jean-Pierre Doguereau, an artillery lieutenant in the 5th Regiment of Foot--is a particularly welcome addition. Prefaced by a short introduction that outlines the campaign and supplemented with a useful biographical appendix, the volume represents a material contribution to an under-served subject. But what precisely does it add to our understanding?

In mid-May 1798, Jean-Pierre Doguereau boarded the warship *Spartiate* at Toulon with his younger brother Louis, also an artillery lieutenant. Like virtually everyone else on the mission, Doguereau had no idea of his final destination; all they knew was that they were sailing east, and sailing off, somehow, to challenge the British. In mid-

June the Armée d'Orient arrived at Malta, which surrendered to the French after only the briefest shows of resistance. (It helped that the majority of the Knights were distinctly elderly and French.) Recording these early events, Doguereau reveals himself to be a fairly observant soldier--and a soldier through and through. He was tremendously impressed by Valetta's harbor (one of the most amazing natural harbors in the Mediterranean), by its fortifications, and its cannon (which he busily counted); he was rather less impressed by the women ("not handsome and generally very impudent"), the language ("bad Italian and bad Arabic"), and the sweltering, sunbaked climate (p. 6). On that score, certainly, he was soon to encounter worse.

Doguereau's journal is at its best when it comes to experiential details like these. His account of the French disembarkation at Alexandria, for instance, offers a vivid image of soldiers packed into small landing craft, buffeted and soaked by the waves of the bay, seasick to a man, and terrified of being dashed against the rocks of this uncharted coast (p. 7). Doguereau's descriptions of long desert marches are equally uncomfortably evocative: artillery wagons pulled through "sand up to the axles" by straining camels in double-harness (p. 51); torrential rains on the way to Syria, "our horses up to their bellies in thick mud" (p. 59); poor provisions, crippling heat, frequent fevers, and the miserable refreshment of brackish, dirty, foul-tasting water to drink.

There is plenty here for critics of Napoleon and his planners. As Doguereau's journal clearly indicates, the army routinely faced problems of intelligence, supply, and medical care. Doguereau's regiment was one of those to accompany Napoleon into Palestine, and the journal offers a day-by-day account of the long, botched siege of Acre, in which Doguereau's brother Louis was badly wounded. There is also a chilling reference to the fate of the French plague victims in Jaffa. Retreating through the city on their way back to Egypt in May, 1799, Doguereau and his companions met a dreadful scene: "There were plague victims in every corner, lying in tents and on the cobblestones, and the hospitals were filled with them. We left many of them behind when we left. I was assured that steps had been taken to prevent them falling alive into the hands of the Turks" (p. 99). Those steps are now notorious: it was alleged that Napoleon ordered that the sick be poisoned to death, en masse. In sharp contrast to the image of Napoleon as an Enlightenment *roi thaumaturge*, which appears in Baron Gros's celebrated 1804 painting, *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken at Jaffa*, he was in actual fact little more than a *roi tueur*.^[4]

This journal is fundamentally a military record, kept by a reasonably--but by no means extraordinarily--observant and articulate officer. And its chief value lies in that very matter-of-factness. One is reminded in places of the remarkable diary of Jakob Walter, the German infantryman whose autobiography provides unusual testimony of Napoleon's Russian invasion (among other episodes) from the perspective of an ordinary soldier.^[5] Though Doguereau was an officer and his journal thus lacks the sheer rarity-value of Walter's, it offers the same cool, sustained reminder that war, when you are the one actually waging it, is much less about grand goals, or even about battles, than it is about the kind of straw you find to sleep on, about finding a cloak to keep you warm and dry, and about whether you and your friends manage to stay healthy and whole.

Doguereau's journal notably does not, however, have anything of the flair of that best-known eyewitness account of the Egyptian expedition: Vivant Denon's 1802 *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte*. Denon, a painter by training, was one of the hundred or so savants to accompany the expedition, and the first to visit Upper Egypt. His account sings with the sheer excitement of encountering the staggering monuments of the Nile Valley, which very few Europeans had hitherto seen. His lavishly-illustrated book was so popular that it is credited with helping to kick off Egyptomania in western Europe. Denon's *Voyage* was notable for another reason, too. The book suggested just how successfully Napoleon managed to convert what was, by any account, a dismal military defeat into a tremendously effective piece of cultural propaganda. (Denon, for his part, shamelessly fawned over his Revolutionary and Bonapartist mentors.) This recasting of military defeat as cultural victory would achieve its greatest, weightiest embodiment in the *Description de l'Égypte*, the monumental compendium of the savants' research, published in 23 folio volumes between 1809 and 1828. Despite Said's indictment of the *Description* as an insidiously Orientalist project, the savants are still small heroes in France. The 1998 bicentennial of the Egyptian expedition--and specifically the work of the savants--was *celebrated* in France, in a way few Britons, for instance, would commemorate (let alone celebrate) the Battle of Plassey, which secured British rule in Bengal.^[6]

So, a military journal of the Egyptian campaign also, then, serves to remind readers of the fact that it *was* a campaign: bloody, hellish, and a lot longer than its participants would have liked--Doguereau among them. By February 1801, he was suffering from "a dreadful depression" (p. 169) and traveled out of Cairo in hopes of finding

solace: "I rode my horse in the desert and in the woods, dreaming gloomily of our future; my thoughts were all somber.... To complete the melancholy... a dreadful wind from the south arose in the evening, causing whirlwinds of sand; the horizon seemed to be ablaze, and it was difficult to breathe" (p. 171). "My dearest wish," he later writes, "[was] to return to France" (p. 174). It is well past time to move beyond savants'-eye visions of the expedition--an enduring legacy of Napoleon's own successful propaganda--and Doguereau's journal helps to do that.

It is also time to modify the thrust of *Orientalism*, which tends to wash over distinctions between individual perceptions and representations of "the Orient," and to assume a one-way flow of power and knowledge. Doguereau makes his share of "Orientalist" judgments--largely about the violence and rapacity of Turks and Arabs--though fewer, probably, than one might expect.[7] As to the balance of power, or the appropriation of knowledge, looking to Doguereau's day-by-day record suggests that he, at any rate, along with most of his brothers-in-arms, was far from the Foucauldian center: as a fighting soldier he was as much in the hands of his superiors as were the Egyptians they attempted to conquer.

It remains to say a word about the introduction and notes accompanying this journal. Dates, thankfully, are converted from the Revolutionary calendar to the Gregorian; endnotes to each chapter clarify incidental points. The appendix, with brief biographical sketches of leading officers and prominent figures, is also helpful. But these supplements are not ample. On the whole, the 12-page introduction fails to reach beyond the technical particulars of the campaign. Nor does it tie the event, in any detail, into either the Revolutionary context or into the Napoleonic future to come. And the sparse bibliography does not cite any of the recent scholarly work in the area. The editor's principal contribution is for military historians who may be interested in comparing Doguereau's observations with other primary accounts of battles. This is a pity, since a journal of this campaign--on the cusp of Revolutionary and Napoleonic history, on the cusp of cultures and continents--could, with the right presentation, be enlightening to so many more.

NOTES

[1] The best day-by-day chronicle of the invasion is Henry Laurens, *L'expédition d'Égypte 1798-1801* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

[2] This point is raised by Todd Porterfield in his brilliant *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1798-1836* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[3] Jean Tulard, *Napoléon: ou le mythe du sauveur*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1987), pp. 93-102.

[4] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Rumor, Contagion, and Colonization in Gros's Plague-Stricken of Jaffa (1804)," *Representations* 51 (Summer, 1995): 1-46.

[5] Jakob Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier*, ed. and intr. Marc Raeff. (New York: Penguin, 1993).

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 87. On commemoration, see for example the catalogue of the bicentennial exhibition at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle: Yves Laissus, ed., *Il y a 200 ans, les savants en Égypte* (Paris: Nathan, 1998). Denon's *Voyage* was also reprinted in the bicentennial year.

[7] Cf. a thoughtful recent reading of some contemporary journals in the context of Orientalism: Juan R. I. Cole, "Mad Sufis and Civic Courtesans: The French Republican Construction of Eighteenth-Century Egypt" in Irene A. Bierman, ed., *Napoleon in Egypt* (Portland, Oreg.: Ithaca Press, 2003), pp. 47-62.

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