EGYPT, THE FICTIVE THEATER OF NAPOLEON’S GLORY:
A CELEBRATION OF THE EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN
IN PAINTINGS, ARCHITECTURE,
AND
DECORATIVE ARTS

A THESIS IN
Art History

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
MASTER OF ARTS

by
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B.A., Washburn University, 2003

Kansas City, Missouri
2013
ABSTRACT

The reign of Napoleon Bonaparte was one of military glory, both real and imagined. In this thesis, I examine the promotion of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign (1798-1801), perhaps the most disastrous episode of his military career. Nonetheless, he commissioned paintings in honor of the expedition. I examine some of them, focusing on the propaganda tactics deployed. I then consider how these strategies were applied to the Description de l’Égypte, the publication dedicated to the Egyptian campaign. I then explore the promotion of the expedition in the areas of architecture, interior furnishings and the decorative arts. I examine the selection of sources from ancient Rome and Egypt, exploring in particular interiors by Napoleon’s lead architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine. Finally, I examine the decorative arts commemorating the Egyptian campaign, analyzing the influence of the publication Description de l’Égypte. My contribution to this thesis is the expansion of the realm of inquiry to include paintings, architecture,
urbanism, interior décor and decorative arts providing new insights into a project of propaganda which surpassed even the most powerful monarch Louis XIV.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Egypt, the Fictive Theater of Napoleon’s Glory: A Celebration of the Egyptian Campaign in Paintings, Architecture, and Decorative Arts,” presented by Abby Brianne Weiser, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Napoleon Bonaparte’s path to military glory began in 1784, when, at age fifteen he was admitted to the École Militaire in Paris. Bonaparte excelled in his military studies, and in 1785 was awarded a commission as a lieutenant in King Louis XVI’s army. Following the downfall of the Bourbon monarchy in 1792, Napoleon continued to move up the ranks and was promoted to the positions of captain and brigadier-general in the Revolutionary army. However, it was not until the final years of the Revolution that Bonaparte’s military career began to flourish. In 1795, the National Convention (1792-95) which had governed France, since the abolition of the ancien régime, was replaced by a ruling body of five men known as the Directory. It was under the Directory that Napoleon led his first military expedition, serving as commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy. The Italian campaign of 1796 and 1797 proved a great triumph for Bonaparte, earning him the reputation of a formidable military leader. While in Italy, Napoleon had his first taste of ruling power—an experience that, according to the general himself, he was not ready to relinquish: “I am only at the beginning of the course I must run. Do you imagine that I triumph in Italy in order to aggrandise the pack of lawyers who form the Directory, …? What an idea! … Let the Directory try to take the command from me, and they will see who is master. The nation must have a chief, and a chief rendered


2 The National Convention governed the country from 1792-1795, establishing the first French Republic. The Directory government that followed ruled France from 1795 until 1799.
illustrious by glory…”

Following his return from the Italian campaign, Bonaparte sought to further his power by proposing a military incursion of Egypt. The Directory had initially planned for the general to lead an invasion of England. However, Napoleon reasoned that a direct assault was not feasible. He advised that an expedition to Egypt, striking at Britain’s commercial trade interests in the East, would be a more effective plan of attack. Furthermore, by pursuing such an endeavor, Napoleon would be following in the footsteps of illustrious men such as Alexander the Great and Augustus, thus paving the way to establishing his own empire. On May 19, 1798, Bonaparte sailed for Egypt in command of the French army. Unlike in Italy, which Napoleon conquered with relative ease, the Egyptian campaign proved to be a difficult undertaking—one that resulted in military failure.

When the French army arrived in Egypt, it was able to assert some control over the Mameluke forces who ruled the country. However, this success was short-lived, as Bonaparte and his men faced continual resistance, not only from the enemy, but from the Egyptian populace. Contributing to the French army’s misfortune was a lack of food and supplies. In addition, the spread of disease severely weakened the troops. The most damaging blow to France’s military stance in Egypt, however, came from the British navy. On August 1, 1798, the French fleet stationed off the shore of Aboukir Bay near Alexandria was attacked by a British convoy under the command of Admiral Horatio

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3 Conversation with diplomat Count Miot de Melito on June 1, 1797, in Comte André François Miot de Melite, *Memoirs of Count Miot de Melito: Minister, Ambassador, Councillor of State and Member of the Institute of France, Between the Years 1788 and 1815*, ed. General Fleischmann, trans. Mrs. Cashel Hoey and Mr. John Lillie (New York: Scribner, 1881), 94.

Nelson. The outcome of this confrontation was devastating for Napoleon. The majority of his warships were destroyed and contact with France was severely impeded.\textsuperscript{5}

In the wake of this crushing defeat, Bonaparte tried to save face by extending his campaign to Syria. His attempt at a successful invasion was once again hindered, forcing him to withdraw from the region. Prior to this last-ditch effort in Syria, Napoleon began making plans to return to France. He ordered the few ships unscathed by the British naval attack to be readied for departure. In August of 1799, Bonaparte left Egypt and instructed the army he was abandoning to continue fighting in his absence.\textsuperscript{6} Napoleon landed in Paris two months later. In November 1799, he led a coup d’état that ousted the Directory and elevated him to the powerful position of First Consul.\textsuperscript{7} In 1804, he claimed the ultimate rank of Emperor. In the interim, France’s abandoned military forces in Egypt found their conditions worsened, culminating in defeat and surrender to the British in 1801.

The Egyptian campaign is an episode from Napoleon’s military career that, despite the disastrous outcome, would be hailed as a triumph. This thesis examines the promotion of Bonaparte’s military endeavor in Egypt through various art forms. I begin with paintings celebrating the campaign, focusing on the propaganda devices deployed by Anne-Louis Girodet, Antoine-Jean Gros, and Louis-François Lejeune. In an assessment of that propaganda, the pioneering study from which all subsequent scholars draw is Edward Said’s \textit{Orientalism} (1978), the “West’s” ideological construction of “the Orient”.

Also fundamental for art historians and literary scholars has been Roland Barthes’

\textsuperscript{5} Schom, 115-116 and 138-144.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 167, 171-177 and 186.
\textsuperscript{7} This coup d’état took place on November 9, 1799.
analysis of the “Reality Effect”, the rhetorical device in which excessive detail is incorporated in an image or text to give the illusion of realism. Nearly as essential for art historians is Linda Nochlin’s 1989 article “The Imaginary Orient,” in which she perceptively applied the paradigms of both Said’s and Barthes’ to Orientalist paintings. Also valuable is Todd Porterfield’s *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1798-1836*. Porterfield examines the propaganda tactics employed in the paintings of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign, drawing upon the foundations laid by Said, Barthes, and Nochlin.

One propaganda tactic Porterfield did not focus on, but one I will examine, is the false portrayal of events surrounding the military campaigns in Egypt and Syria. David O’Brien, in *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros Painting and Propaganda under Napoleon*, provides a particularly incisive and extensive interpretation of Gros’s paintings produced in the service of Bonaparte’s reign. I draw upon O’Brien’s arguments and supplement them with insights that emerge from Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby’s *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*. I also explore in some depth the *Description de l’Égypte*, arguing that propaganda devices similar to those deployed in the paintings were introduced into images in this scholarly work.

I then turn to the impact of the Egyptian campaign on the architecture, interiors and decorative arts of Bonaparte’s reign. I begin my discussion with the administration’s appropriation of imperial monuments for their own architectural program. In my discussion of interiors designed by the architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine for

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Napoleon’s residences at Malmaison and Tuileries palace, I focus on plates in their publication *Recueil de décorations intérieures*. Included in that book are also illustrations of furnishings for patrons residing in the countries comprising Bonaparte’s Empire. Like the paintings, Napoleon’s architectural commissions—extending even to the interior decoration of his houses—cast his Egyptian campaign as a success. Even the apparently apolitical realm of the decorative arts is fully infused with propagandistic aims and an ideological strategy similar to those deployed in the paintings and *Description de l’Égypte*.
CHAPTER 2

THE PAINTINGS OF BONAPARTE’S MILITARY EXPLOITS IN EGYPT AND SYRIA

Although Napoleon Bonaparte’s Egyptian campaign of 1798-1801 was not a military victory, it was portrayed as a resounding success in the art created during his reign. This pretense of triumph was a result of the propaganda that permeated France during Bonaparte’s rule. In the promotion of his reign, Napoleon’s administration co-opted strategies employed by previous rulers, appropriating the use of art forms such as painting to glorify his image. The regime commissioned several paintings in honor of Bonaparte’s military exploits, including canvases celebrating the ill-fated Egyptian expedition. In order to convey military success, painters resorted to tactics such as falsely rendering events of the campaign. These painted fabrications conceal horrific acts of war committed by the French army in Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, artists imbued their paintings with authenticating elements to provide convincing depictions of reality. Another element of propaganda exhibited in these works was the portrayal of a superior French army juxtaposed with an uncivilized enemy. The same artistic devices would later be applied to images from the scholarly publication Description de l’Égypte.

When Bonaparte came to power as First Consul in 1799, there was not an aspect of French society immune to the glorification of his image. His reign was celebrated everywhere from literature to the arts. These modes of propaganda were not new to Napoleon’s regime; former sovereigns of France had employed similar methods of self-promotion. It reached an apex during the reign of Louis XIV, which witnessed an
extraordinary production of visual imagery in service of the king. Bonaparte’s administration was undoubtedly influenced by this precedent.

One manifestation appeared in Napoleon’s appropriation of commemorative medals for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. Several, in fact, were struck in celebration of the Egyptian campaign, despite the failed outcome. One medal portrayed Napoleon as the Roman god Mercury flying above the pyramids of Egypt and bore the inscriptions “the hero returns to his country” and “Bonaparte, liberator of Egypt” (figure 1).

Another manner in which Napoleon’s propaganda tactics mirrored those of his Bourbon predecessor was through his manipulation of the French press. During Louis XIV’s reign, journal articles frequently lauded the king’s actions. These publications were censored and heavily supervised by his regime and, therefore, void of any public opinion that would have presented the monarch in a negative light. This control of the press also existed under Bonaparte’s rule. However, his administration’s use of censorship was more extreme. At the start of his reign as First Consul, Napoleon shut down three-quarters of the newspapers printed in Paris. The few that remained in publication were subjected to intense scrutiny by the ministry of police, under the direction of Joseph Fouché. In addition to government-controlled newspapers, all published texts were heavily monitored. These items were inspected on a weekly, if not

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2 Brier, 15.


Although the regime’s system of censorship was extensive, it was not invulnerable to negative press. Damaging reports from other countries infiltrated France, posing a threat to Napoleon’s rule. The administration responded to these news leaks by printing denials in the French papers. Articles written by government officials, such as the secretary of state and the prefect of police, claimed these reports were merely rumors issued by France’s adversaries and were, therefore, not credible.\(^5\)

The immense influence Napoleon exerted over printed media began while he was still a general in the French army. During his Italian campaign, the young commander founded newspapers which printed material that helped shape his image as a Revolutionary war hero. Bonaparte further ensured he was represented in a positive light by writing his own military bulletins to the French Directory. He exaggerated his triumphs in Italy by promoting the fighting prowess of his troops over the inferior combative skills of opposing military regimes.\(^6\) Napoleon’s private secretary, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, attested to the general’s deceitful proclamations claiming: “The whole truth never appeared in Bonaparte’s despatches, when it was in any way unfavourable to himself. He knew how to disguise, to alter, or to conceal it when necessary. He not unfrequently altered the despatches of others, when they ran counter to his views, or were calculated to diminish the good opinion he wished the world should entertain of him.”\(^7\)

These self-promoting bulletins were of even greater importance during the French


occupation of Egypt from 1798-1801. Unlike his preceding military exploits in Italy, where coverage of the French army was continual, news from the Egyptian battlefront was not as frequent. The lack of communication was attributed to the long distance between Egypt and France, making it difficult for Napoleon to keep the Directory informed of his activities in the Middle East. This complication in correspondence was furthered by the devastating battle of Aboukir Bay on August 1, 1798. Following this failed encounter, contact with the Directory government was delayed, enabling damaging reports from the British to filter into France without a swift rebuttal from Bonaparte. However, in the event Napoleon’s dispatches did reach Paris, they contained only news of victory. Arriving two months after the naval debacle, Napoleon’s first reports consisted of triumphal land battles. Bonaparte portrayed himself as a compassionate conqueror who successfully maintained control over any opposition he encountered. When Napoleon did address news of military loss, such as the decimation of the French fleet, he transferred blame from himself to unruly officers, whom he accused of disobeying his command.8

Bonaparte’s dispatches helped minimize the negative aspects of the campaign, as did the articles printed in the French newspapers at the time. To compensate for the lack of information from Egypt, fabricated press releases containing news of victory were circulated throughout France in an attempt to mollify reports of failure. Editors of pro-Directory government publications discredited news of military loss, claiming that information from the enemy was not to be trusted. These contrived stories of triumph were likely successful in overshadowing negative press. In light of Napoleon’s preceding

8 Hanley, 64-67.
military victories in Italy, the French public had become infatuated by the general’s heroism. They were therefore, easily persuaded by stories of his glorious feats in Egypt.\(^9\) This promotion of Bonaparte’s flawless Egyptian expedition extended beyond printed media from the time of the campaign to the art scene of early nineteenth-century France.

During the Empire (1804-1815), the walls of the Salon were adorned with paintings that commemorated Napoleon’s military exploits. These celebratory masterpieces marked a return to large-scaled painting, which had been on the decline since the end of the ancien régime.\(^10\) The paintings commissioned by Bonaparte’s administration served as visual outlets for government propaganda. In a letter to a friend, the French artist Girodet lamented the restraints placed upon his artistic freedom under Napoleon’s patronage: “Alas, my friend, what you call my preference [i.e., his work] is nothing more than the pain, which I feel acutely, of having to finish what is asked of me by a certain deadline. We have all been enlisted, even if we don’t wear a uniform—paintbrush to the right, pencil to the left, forward march—and we march.”\(^11\)

At the forefront of this artistic propaganda agenda was Dominique Vivant Denon, one of Napoleon’s most trusted advisors. Denon’s work for Bonaparte began on the Egyptian campaign, during which he documented the occupied region, along with a scholarly commission of 164 intellectuals. He accompanied the French army on its military excursions, sketching battle scenes and various aspects of the Egyptian landscape. Following his artistic service during the expedition, Denon was appointed

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\(^9\) Hanley, 64-68


\(^11\) Quoted and translated by Ibid, 2.
Director General of the Musée Central under Napoleon’s rule. He served as lead administrator of the arts, performing tasks such as overseeing the regime’s painters. These canvases were exhibited at the biennial government Salon. Denon often worked in collaboration with Napoleon, dictating the subject matter portrayed in these works of art, thus ensuring Bonaparte was represented in a positive manner. Among the “acceptable” topics depicted in paintings at the time was the ill-fated Egyptian campaign.

In the eyes of the French public, Bonaparte had returned from Egypt a hero. An official announcement from October 1799, printed in the Clef du Cabinet, spoke of the general’s triumphant homecoming: “The hero who began this series of triumphs and who has become so glorious, Bonaparte, returns victorious from the Orient; … Victory which has never abandoned this hero seems to have wanted him to return to his country victorious.”12

In order to maintain this sense of naiveté, it was essential for artists to portray the failed expedition as a success. One manner in which they achieved this ruse was by painting false renditions of events pertaining to the campaign. A prime example of such fabrication is Anne-Louis Girodet’s Revolt of Cairo (figure 2a).

When the French army first arrived in Egypt, Napoleon issued a proclamation to the Egyptian people to assuage fears of foreign invasion. Bonaparte portrayed himself as a savior, assuring the residents of the invaded region that their way of life was to be respected by his men: “People of Cairo, … I came to destroy the race of the Mamelukes, to protect commerce and the natives … Do not fear for your families, your homes, your property, and especially for the religion of the Prophet, which I love.”13

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12 Quoted and translated by Hanley, 186.

circumstances surrounding the campaign worsened, many of Napoleon’s officers became unruly, pillaging villages and inciting terror among the Egyptians. Bonaparte himself violated his offer of peace. He ordered the destruction of several homes and mosques in an Arab quarter of Cairo to create a storage area for French artillery.\textsuperscript{14} These destructive acts committed by the French army resulted in a revolt led by the Muslim population of Cairo on October 21, 1798. It ended with a successful French takeover and the massacre of approximately two to three-thousand Egyptian civilians.\textsuperscript{15} Such a horrific episode from the campaign would hardly seem ideal material for a work of art meant to bolster the image of the ruler of France. However, in 1809, Girodet was commissioned by Denon to capture the incident on canvas.

Denon’s choice of subject was likely influenced by the military climate in Europe at the time. The painting was commissioned during Bonaparte’s campaign in Austria, where he encountered strong resistance. That setback was temporary for Napoleon, who was able to suppress the rebellion through a series of combat victories.\textsuperscript{16} In his Revolt of Cairo, Girodet depicted a similar French triumph over insurgents, thus conveying the message that Bonaparte was able to overcome any military obstacle. Girodet portrayed the intensity of battle with a tumultuous clash between French and enemy forces. An explosion of action occurs in the foreground of the painting, as a French soldier, with his sword raised mid-flight, charges fearlessly towards an adversary. The standing, nearly nude Bedouin fighter on the receiving end of this attack leans back with his arm reaching behind him, brandishing a weapon in defense. The depiction of these figures suspended

\textsuperscript{14} Schom, 160-161.

\textsuperscript{15} O’Brien, 134.

in action is highly dramatic; to heighten this drama Girodet used strong diagonals in the forms of the advancing French army and the retreating enemy. An aspect of theatricality is also present in the facial expressions of the combatants in the foreground. The calm, determined visage of the French soldier is juxtaposed with the crazed desperate faces of his opponents.

It is interesting to note that in his portrayal of the enemy Girodet appears to have been inspired by ancient precedents. The Bedouin fighter in the foreground of the painting mirrors a depiction of the Gallic chieftain from the Hellenistic sculpture of the *Suicidal Gaul and his Wife* (figure 3). The fellow combatant whose lifeless form is draped over the arm of the Bedouin also resembles a piece from antiquity, specifically a sculpted rendering of a fallen Patroclus supported by Menelaos (figure 4).

The dark subject of Girodet’s *Revolt of Cairo* was dangerous to paint on a grand scale. The portrayal of an act of dissension against the French troops implied Napoleon’s presence in Egypt had not been entirely successful. This image of opposition could have jeopardized Bonaparte’s rule, encouraging the French populace to resist his authority as the Egyptians had done. Girodet addressed this dilemma by not depicting the true instigators of the attack. As Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby has compellingly argued, Girodet replaced the dissenting Egyptians with Mameluke forces. The standing nude Bedouin fighter locked in confrontation with the French soldier in the foreground of the painting is shown supporting a lavishly clothed combatant on the verge of death. The extravagant dress of the dying man was associated with Mameluke warriors, who were known for

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17 Grigsby, 140. In her discussion of *The Revolt of Cairo*, Grigsby makes a brief reference to these Hellenistic sculptures, implying they may have influenced Girodet’s portrayal of the Bedouin and his fallen comrade.
their ornate robes.\textsuperscript{18}

Prior to Napoleon’s departure for the campaign, the Directory had issued a decree in an attempt to justify French military presence in Egypt. The government reasoned that France’s intervention was necessary to end the oppressive rule of the Mamelukes.\textsuperscript{19} It was therefore beneficial to Bonaparte’s administration that Girodet portray these proclaimed tyrants as the resistors to French occupation. By not depicting the Egyptian civilians as the initiators of the revolt, Girodet masked the horrible truth that the very people Napoleon vowed to protect had denied his rule and died for their resistance. This misrepresentation must have been encouraged by Denon, who often supplied artists with material for their commissions. According to Grigsby, there are striking similarities between the attire of the enemy forces depicted in Girodet’s painting and the sketches of Mamelukes taken by Denon during the campaign.\textsuperscript{20}

Another group of combatants falsely represented in this melee are the Bedouins, who often fought alongside the Mamelukes and were known for their bellicose nature.\textsuperscript{21} The sumptuous robes of the dying Mameluke in the foreground of the painting are made more prominent by the bare physique of the Bedouin warrior supporting his frail frame. Girodet’s nude rendering emphasizes the primitive character of the opposition, as does his depiction of the gruesome decapitation. In the foreground of the painting, a disembodied head of a fallen French soldier dangles from the hand of an adversary (figure 2b). Girodet’s prominent placement of the beheading in the center of the

\textsuperscript{18} Grigsby, 133-134 and 143.

\textsuperscript{19} Schom, 80-81.

\textsuperscript{20} Grigsby, 133.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 134.
composition could have been potentially damaging to Napoleon’s image, as it recalled horrific actions by the French army during the Egyptian campaign. Enemy reports surfacing at the time of the expedition accused Bonaparte and his men of committing atrocities such as decapitation. As an act of retribution against the unruly Egyptians, Napoleon ordered the beheading of several prisoners, instructing that their remains be disposed of in the Nile River. Bonaparte, himself, confessed to this grisly act in a military dispatch addressed to a General Reynier: “Tranquility is perfectly restored in Cairo … The rebels have lost a couple thousand men; every night, we cut thirty heads, and many of the leaders; this, I believe, serve them a good lesson.”

In his portrayal of decapitation Girodet once again misrepresented true events surrounding the revolt. Girodet transferred blame for the beheadings committed by the French army to an enemy known for such violence. During the Egyptian campaign, several of Napoleon’s men had suffered similar attacks at the hands of Bedouins, who slit the throats of French soldiers lost in the desert. In his painting, Girodet intensified the brutal act by contrasting the fierce facial expression of the executioner with the calm visage of the victim. Girodet’s exaggerated portrayal of the enemy’s aggressive demeanor catered to Western stereotypes of the East, thus providing a convincing representation of events in the eyes of the French public. By contrasting the sophisticated French army with an uncouth enemy, Girodet justified the violent scene that unfolds before the viewer. He conveyed the message that it was France’s obligation to civilize

22 Henri Plon and J. Dumaine, eds., *Correspondance De Napoléon Ier* (Paris: Typographie De Henri Plon, Imprimeur De L’Empereur, 1860) no. 3539, 5:96. This dispatch from Napoleon was sent on October 27, 1798, six days after the revolt in Cairo.


24 Schom,121
the East by triumphing over barbarism. This biased viewpoint pertains to Edward Said’s pioneering study of Orientalism, which he defined as “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”).” This moral juxtaposition was a strategy employed by painters in an attempt to promote French imperialism and is an artistic device that will be revisited later in this chapter.

In addition to the Egyptian campaign, the administration’s artists masked the military truths of Bonaparte’s Syrian expedition. Realizing that his hopes for a successful occupation of Egypt were futile, Napoleon sought to salvage his military endeavor by invading Syria. His attempt at redemption, however, was not as victorious as anticipated. The French troops encountered a strong resistance from both Turkish and British forces, with the campaign ending in defeat at a failed attack on the city of Acre. Napoleon was able to exert some control in regions such as Jaffa, where prior to laying siege he ensured the protection of the city’s inhabitants. Once again, Bonaparte did not honor this promise. He ordered the execution of three-thousand Turkish troops held captive by the French army. Prior to Napoleon’s coronation in 1804, news of this carnage resurfaced in Europe. Included among these damaging reports were accounts of Bonaparte’s inhumane treatment towards his own men.

During the Syrian campaign, the main impediment preventing successful French occupation was the outbreak of plague, which severely decimated Napoleon’s troops. In light of this epidemic and the continual resistance met from the enemy, Bonaparte was

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26 Porterfield, 47.
27 Ibid, 53.
forced to evacuate the region. Burdened by the prospect of transporting plague-ridden soldiers back to Egypt, Napoleon ordered his doctors to administer opium to the diseased troops. This deadly command backfired, however, as several of the men survived the attempted poisoning. Many lived to recount the horrors of Jaffa to English forces that arrived shortly after Bonaparte’s departure. As a result of this encounter with the French army, accounts of the shocking incident were widespread in England throughout Napoleon’s rule. For example, in 1804, a caricature making reference to this episode from the campaign was printed in the English press. The satirical sketch mocked Bonaparte’s impending coronation, containing a rendering of his imperial crown adorned with a bottle of poison surmounted by a skull and crossbones (figure 5). The administration’s response to such damaging images was a propaganda tour-de-force by French artist Antoine-Jean Gros.

In 1804, Gros painted *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa*, a work of art commissioned by Napoleon himself (figure 6). The painting was exhibited at the government Salon that same year. It was deemed a masterpiece by Denon and fellow artists, who crowned the canvas with a celebratory wreath and held a banquet in Gros’s honor. The work was further glorified in a report submitted by Napoleon’s Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, who stated: “This painting has only admirers. People from all classes, after having studied it for a long time, appear moved. Several have said with

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28 O’Brien, 94-97.
29 Grigsby, 90-91
30 O’Brien, 111-112.
emotion: ‘It is the Emperor’s most beautiful action.’”31 This excessive praise from regime officials and painters was attributed to Gros’s idealized portrayal of Napoleon, which dispelled negative accounts of the Syrian campaign. Gros contradicted enemy claims of tyranny by depicting Bonaparte as a compassionate leader.32 Napoleon is positioned in the center of the painting with his hand extended towards the infectious body of a plague victim, a gesture that implies he is sympathetic to the plight of the ailing man. The theatricality of this act is heightened by the cautionary presence of Napoleon’s doctor René Desgenettes. Standing behind the French commander, the physician looks on with an expression of trepidation, raising his arm as if to prevent Bonaparte from touching the diseased soldier.33

The interaction between Napoleon and the plague victim in Gros’s painting may be interpreted a number of ways. The first pays homage to a monarchical custom in Europe. Napoleon’s gesture evokes the healing power of kings, or the belief that a sovereign possessed the supernatural ability to treat scrofulous abscesses with just the touch of his hand.34 By depicting a similar act, Gros implied Bonaparte was able to cure his destitute troops, drawing comparisons to esteemed monarchs like Louis XIV, who was known for such rituals.35 This intended correlation to the Bourbon king was noted

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32 O’Brien, 98.


35 Burke, 43.
by French writer François René de Chateaubriand, who in 1814 wrote: “… Bonaparte poisons the plague victims of Jaffa; a painting is made that presents him touching, by an excess of courage and humanity, these same plague-stricken men. It was not like this that Saint-Louis healed the ill presented to his royal hands with a touching and religious confidence.”

Given the painting was commissioned around the time of the coronation, Gros’s rendering may also be understood as a reference to Napoleon’s rise to power as Emperor of France. Bonaparte’s contrapposto stance recalls adlocutio poses of Roman emperors prevalent in ancient imperial sculpture.

In addition to these illustrious correlations, Napoleon’s gesture has religious connotations, with his healing touch being perceived as Christ-like. In regards to form, Gros’s rendering also recalls representations of the Doubting Thomas by artists such as fifteenth-century Renaissance sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio (figure 7). Bonaparte’s pose in Jaffa is almost identical to that of Verrocchio’s saint, with a similar extension of the arm and right leg. The gestures of the plague victim on the receiving end of Bonaparte’s touch mimic those of Christ. These religious associations are reinforced by Gros’s use of a mosque for a background setting, through which a heavenly light shines upon the miraculous scene.

The most likely source for Gros’s rendering of Bonaparte was the Apollo

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36 Quoted and translated by Grigsby, 99.


38 Grigsby, 74.

39 Schlenoff, 158.
Belvedere,\textsuperscript{40} which was on display in the Louvre during Napoleon’s reign (figure 8). This sculpture from classical antiquity was among the spoils of war from Bonaparte’s 1796-1797 Italian campaign. Gros was a member of the Commission des Arts that seized priceless works of art during the expedition and therefore had exposure to pieces such as the Apollo Belvedere.\textsuperscript{41} Napoleon’s pose in the Jaffa painting was clearly derived from the antique sculpture. As the god of plague and healing, Apollo was an ideal source for Gros’s depiction of a ruler who cures his plague-ridden troops.

Although the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa was a highly contrived work of art intended to discredit allegations of Bonaparte’s deplorable deeds, the painting portrays something akin to his actions. While in Syria, Napoleon did make publicized visits to a hospital in Jaffa that housed plague victims.\textsuperscript{42} The intent behind these calls was to project an image of a caring leader providing comfort to his ailing troops. Written accounts of these trips, however, portrayed the commander as being less compassionate. Napoleon’s private secretary Bourrienne wrote that when the general visited the plague victims, he moved quickly through the rooms of the infirmary avoiding all contact with the diseased men.\textsuperscript{43} In his 1802 memoirs, Bonaparte’s physician Desgenettes provided a different version of events that coincide with Gros’s benevolent representation: “Finding themselves in a narrow and very encumbered chamber, he [Bonaparte] helped in lifting the hideous cadaver of a soldier whose shredded clothes were soiled by the opening of an abscessed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} O’Brien, 102.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 38 and 102.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Schom, 178.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte, ed. Ramsay Weston Phipps (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 1:214.
\end{itemize}
plague sore.” The inclusion of Napoleon’s doctor in the *Jaffa* painting seems to verify the events portrayed, further discrediting negative press. This attempt by Gros to validate his work of art is what Todd Porterfield refers to as an “authenticating strategy”.

Porterfield’s discussion of this artistic device pertains to Roland Barthes’ paradigm on the “Reality Effect”, in which an abundance of detail is applied to an image or text to convey a sense of realism. This propaganda tool was incorporated in the portrayals of the Syrian and Egyptian campaigns.

In order for these paintings to be convincing depictions of military success, it was necessary for artists to provide a seemingly genuine representation. To ensure this feeling of authenticity, Napoleon’s administration established guidelines for painters to follow. When depicting battle scenes, for example, they were instructed to provide a precise rendering of the combat environment. Artists were encouraged to paint the time of day the battle took place and to incorporate specific details of the landscape that would suggest an eyewitness account. This façade of realism is evident in Gros’s oil sketch of the *Battle of Nazareth*, which celebrates the most successful military encounter of the Syrian campaign (figure 9).

The sketch commemorates a confrontation that occurred on April 8, 1799, between six thousand Turkish forces and five hundred French troops. Despite being significantly outnumbered, the French army was able to defeat the enemy. In wake of this victory, Napoleon declared the battle was to be memorialized in a monumental

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44 Quoted and translated by Porterfield, 55.


46 Barthes, 146.

47 Porterfield, 51-52. These specifications were outlined in the official program for the 1801 Salon.
painting. A competition ensued, with Gros being awarded the final commission at the
1801 Salon, where his preliminary oil sketch was exhibited. Displayed alongside his
work was a map of the actual combat zone provided by a General Junot, who led the
French counter-attack against the Turkish forces (figure 10). The inclusion of this artifact
from the campaign attested to the truthfulness of the events portrayed in Gros’s canvas,
suggesting that the oil sketch was an historical military document.48

As Porterfield has convincingly demonstrated, the work of art was further
“authenticated” through Gros’s use of light. According to military reports, fighting
occurred between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm. Although none of them witnessed the
actual event, critics of the 1801 Salon believed that Gros had precisely depicted the Mid-
Eastern sky as it would have appeared at the time of the battle.49 The slight presence of
sunlight in the foreground of the painting is subdued by the billowing clouds of gunfire in
the distance—a palette which suggests a late afternoon sky. Regardless of his efforts,
there are aspects of Gros’s oil sketch that undermine any sense of realism. There is a lack
of clarity in the Gros’s frenzied brushstrokes, which blur the rendering of the dueling
forces and landscape in the background of the composition. Gros, furthermore, deviated
from Junot’s accompanying diagram by making alterations to the scenery and battle
movements. Gros excluded much of the topographical detail and reversed the positions
of the two groups of combatants illustrated in the general’s map.50

Gros’ work on the Nazareth commission was never completed and the large
scaled canvas was recycled for other masterpieces such as his 1806 Salon entry The

48 Porterfield, 47 and 51.

49 Ibid, 52.

50 Ibid, 47.
Battle of Aboukir (figure 11). The painting depicts Bonaparte’s final military victory in Egypt following his return from Syria and prior to his departure for France. The encounter between French and Turkish forces took place on July 25, 1799, near the waters where Napoleon’s fleet had been destroyed a year before. The French army had redeemed itself in the eyes of Bonaparte, who boasted of the victorious outcome in a correspondence from August 1, 1799: “The name of Aboukir was fatal to all French; the day of July 25 has rendered it glorious.”

In his depiction of the military encounter, Gros appears to have again provided an accurate portrayal, having consulted sketches of the battle drawn by Denon. During the confrontation, the French army had been able to infiltrate the enemy’s lines of defense forcing them to flee towards the ships from which they came. Gros effectively portrayed this retreat with a mass of French soldiers threatening to trample the Turkish forces as they desperately try to escape to the water’s edge. In contrast to the Nazareth sketch, Gros clearly rendered the combat environment. He used clean brushstrokes incorporating the smallest of details such as warships and military tents, which are visible from the far background of the painting. Moreover, Gros depicted Fort Aboukir, a landmark associated with the battle site where several Turks sought refuge following the skirmish. Gros also made the fighters more discernible, painting portraits of French

51 Porterfield, 53.
52 Plon and Dumaine vol. 5 no. 4329, 545.
53 Schlenoff, 163.
54 Schom, 183.
soldiers, such as that of General Joachim Murat, who commissioned the work. The inclusion of these details implies an accurate depiction. However, like the Battle of Nazareth, there are parts of the Aboukir painting that indicate a contrived version of events.

As Girodet had done in Revolt of Cairo, Gros contrasted the civilized demeanor of Napoleon’s army with a crude adversary. This juxtaposition was noted at the 1806 Salon by art critic Pierre Chaussard, who commented: “On one side, […] calm and superiority, enlightened valor, and on the other, brutal fits of rage, stupid ferocity, and blind courage.” The tranquility displayed on the faces of the advancing French soldiers is contrasted with the panic-stricken expressions of the fleeing enemy. Gros’s theatrical rendering of the battle further lends to this manufactured representation. Like Girodet, Gros used strong diagonals to exaggerate the action of the painting. The turning point of combat resulting in French victory over the Turkish opponents was the dramatic charge led by Murat. The prominent placement of the general in the center of the painting emphasizes this heroic feat, with Murat advancing towards the enemy, wielding his sword in attack. As the general charges forward, his horse rears up on its hind legs, elevating the pair above the retreating enemy. While the Turkish forces scatter towards the sea, their leader appears to be engaged in a tug of war. He attempts to pull a fellow fighter back into the fray, and in turn, is grabbed by a soldier who offers up his weapon in surrender.

55 O’Brien, 136-138. It is important to note that Gros also included several portraits of French soldiers in the Battle of Nazareth; however, these likenesses were blurred by the artist’s frantic brushstrokes. By contrast, the rendering of Murat in the Battle of Aboukir is much clearer.

56 Quoted and translated by Ibid, 138.

57 Ibid, 137.
This grouping of Murat and enemy fighters in the foreground of the painting recalls Charles Lebrun’s *The Crossing of the Granicus*, commemorating Alexander the Great’s first military triumph against the Persians (figure 12). As David O’Brien points out in *After the Revolution*, the equestrian portrait of Murat is similar to the rendering of Alexander in Lebrun’s battle painting. The reclining nude figure beneath the French general and the deceased warrior lying at the foot of the Turkish leader are also comparable, mimicking the fallen forms of Alexander’s enemies.\(^{58}\) Lebrun’s painting belongs to the *Triumphs of Alexander* series commissioned by the French crown. The intent behind these works was to equate the sun-king’s rule with that of the ancient conqueror.\(^{59}\) By incorporating quotations from Lebrun’s canvas, Gros drew similar correlations. Gros likened Napoleon’s military triumphs to those of both Alexander the Great and the Bourbon monarch.

Another artist known for employing “authenticating strategies” to convince the viewer of the reality of the depiction was Louis-François Lejeune. In the same year Gros painted the French victory at Aboukir Bay, Lejeune depicted a similar triumph in the *Battle of the Pyramids*—a military encounter that led to Napoleon’s successful occupation of Cairo (figure 13a).\(^{60}\) The desire to present an eyewitness account of the Egyptian battlefront is clear in this portrayal of the French army’s victory over Mameluke forces. When compared to Gros’s *Nazareth* sketch and *Aboukir* painting, Lejeune’s *Battle of the Pyramids* provides a more accurate representation of war. Unlike Gros’s

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\(^{58}\) O’Brien, 138.

\(^{59}\) Louis XIV equated his reign with that of Alexander the Great, and by commissioning these tableaus he ensured his subjects would draw similar correlations. Burke, 28.

\(^{60}\) The battle of the pyramids took place on July 21, 1798 along the Western banks of the Nile River.
renderings, in which the viewer is given an impossibly up-close perspective of combat, Lejeune painted the battle from a distance. The artist reduced the soldiers to mere dots on the canvas,\textsuperscript{61} thus creating a bird’s eye view.

Lejeune’s organized depiction of the French army is reminiscent of military formations employed during the Egyptian campaign. In an attempt to further validate the events portrayed in works of art, the administration instructed painters to accurately depict battle movements.\textsuperscript{62} In the far right corner of the painting, Lejeune has arranged the French troops into square-like battalions (figure 13b). This geometric configuration was used by Napoleon’s army on the battlefield as an effective line of defense against the approaching Mamelukes.\textsuperscript{63} Lejeune’s knowledge of such combat formations was attributed to his military background, having served as a general in the French army. Lejeune often painted the very battles he fought in, relying on his first-hand experience to create a realistic rendering of warfare.\textsuperscript{64} The accuracy of Lejeune’s work was reinforced by his testimony “I have painted what I have seen”, which he inscribed beneath his paintings.\textsuperscript{65}

Although Lejeune’s military service lent credibility to his depiction of the \textit{Battle of the Pyramids}, if Lejeune had fought in the confrontation, he could not have witnessed the encounter from the distance illustrated on the canvas. Lejeune’s account of the event

\textsuperscript{61} Grigsby, 111.

\textsuperscript{62} Porterfield, 51. This was another specification outlined in the government’s official program for the 1801 Salon five years before.

\textsuperscript{63} Grigsby, 109.

\textsuperscript{64} Porterfield, 66.

\textsuperscript{65} Timothy Wilson-Smith, \textit{Napoleon and His Artists} (London: Constable, 1996), 161.
is further suspect due to his portrayal of the battle participants. At first glance, the painting is a seemingly objective representation of war, lacking the prejudices displayed in the combat scenes by fellow artists Gros and Girodet. Lejeune’s rendering of the enemy, however, reveals an element of subjectivity that is present in the works of art by his peers.

In contrast to the organized French troops, the Mamelukes are portrayed in a state of chaos. A detail from the left side of the painting reveals a cluster of enemy forces retreating in haste from the advancing French army (figure 13c). The imposing presence of Napoleon’s military causes the opposition to act recklessly, forcing them to ride their horses off a cliff. Unlike the numerous unidentifiable French soldiers, the Mamelukes are more individualized in their depictions. Fear and desperation are reflected in their gestures and facial expressions. The nondescript rendering of Bonaparte’s army evokes a sense of calm that corresponds with the disciplined structure of their military formations. This dichotomy between the composed French soldiers and the frantic enemy emphasized the former’s military superiority. By lauding the fighting skills of the French, Lejeune employed the propaganda tactic exhibited in Napoleon’s campaign dispatches, in which Bonaparte portrayed the enemy as inferior to embellish his battle victories.

66 Porterfield, 61.

67 Grigsby, 110-111.

68 The correlation between Lejeune’s calm portrayal of the French army and military superiority was noted by art critic Pierre Chaussard. See Porterfield, 63.
The endeavor by painters to bestow their works of art with a “documentary” quality was akin to publications such as the *Description de l’Égypte*. In response to the failed conquest of Egypt, Napoleon’s administration relied heavily on the scholarly element of the expedition to mask military defeat. Following the devastating naval attack at Aboukir Bay in 1798, Bonaparte founded the Institut d’Égypte. The organization consisted of intellectuals who accompanied the French army on the campaign, documenting aspects of the Egyptian environment. The cultural and scientific studies conducted by the savants were later collected in the publication *Description de l’Égypte*.\(^6^9\)

Although first published a decade after Napoleon’s departure from Egypt, the *Description* was used in the continual promotion of the failed campaign. The title page alone attests to the propaganda intent, containing the inscription “publié par les ordres de sa Majesté l’Empereur Napoléon le Grand.” It is interesting to note the implied reference to Louis XIV. He was known as “Louis le Grand”, a title no doubt appropriated from Alexander the Great, whose reign the monarch sought to emulate.\(^7^0\) The comparison to past heroic leaders is more directly stated in Joseph Fourier’s historical preface. He provides a lineage of Greco-Roman rulers, who like Bonaparte, had sought to occupy Egypt: “Alexander founded an opulent city there, which has long been an empire of trade, and which saw Pompey, Caesar, Mark Anthony and Augustus, deciding among them the fate of Rome and that of the entire world. The characteristic of this country is to attract

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\(^6^9\) The full title of the publication is *Description de l’Égypte, Ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l’expédition de l’armée Française* [Description of Egypt, Or collection of observations and research made in Egypt during the expedition of the French army].

\(^7^0\) Burke, 35.
the attention of illustrious princes, who regulate the destinies of nations.”

The Description was not the only publication dedicated to Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign. In 1802, Denon, who had accompanied the scholars on the expedition, produced his own account of the military endeavor entitled Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute d’Égypte. When compared to the Description, Denon’s Voyage is a less impressive representation of Egypt. The research conducted by Description scholars was more extensive, resulting in twenty-one large folio volumes published from the years 1809-1828. The images presented in the Description also possess a scientific quality that seems to be lacking in Denon’s publication. The precision exhibited in the plates was attributed to the careful scrutiny of the Egyptian landscape by the savants. The scholars measured the monuments and provided detailed architectural plans of these structures (figures 14 and 15). Several of the illustrations are archaeological in nature, with sketches of excavated human remains so realistically rendered that they possess a near photographic quality (figure 16).

The artistic devices exhibited in the Description de l’Égypte are comparable to those displayed in the previously discussed works of art. Plates from the Description convey an attempt to provide an eyewitness account of the expedition. Several views of the Egyptian landscape, for example, indicate a certain time of day, with sketches of ancient monuments bathed in shadows cast by the various angles of the sun (figure 17). The inclusion of such minute detail corresponded with eyewitness claims by campaign

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artists such as Lejeune, who stated: “I have painted what I have seen.”

Although predominantly a scientific publication, several of the images in the *Description de l’Égypte* possess painterly attributes that undermine the objectivity of the scholarly work. There is an element of fantasy to the plates as exhibited in a rendering of an Egyptian procession (figure 18). In this illustration, a pharaoh accompanied by his prisoners of war passes through a triumphal arch. This scene from the ancient past was invented by campaign scholars. An imaginative quality is also present in the frontispiece of the publication, which consists of a contrived rendering of various Egyptian monuments (figure 19). These structures have been removed from their original location and compressed into a single view. The architectural portico framing this manufactured landscape reinforces the picturesque aspect of the plate. The frieze at the top of the frame contains a triumphal battle scene, reminiscent of the one portrayed in Antoine-Jean Gros’s painting the *Battle of Aboukir* (see figure 11). Napoleon is depicted as a Roman charioteer advancing towards a group of Mameluke fighters. The elevated position of the horses and the retreating forms of the enemy recall Gros’s rendering of General Murat and the fleeing Turkish forces.

Another parallel between campaign paintings and the *Description de l’Égypte* is

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73 Wilson-Smith, 161.


76 Godlewska, 24.

the inclusion of Western biases in the portrayals of the Egyptian populace. As previously mentioned, when Napoleon embarked on his Mid-Eastern expedition, the Directory issued an apologia. The government argued the invasion was necessary to end the oppression of the Mamelukes. This condemnation of the enemy was echoed in the historical preface of the Description. Fourier accused the Mamelukes of bringing about the demise of Egyptian culture: “This country, which has transmitted its knowledge to so many nations, is now plunged into barbarism.”

Fourier explained that the aim of Bonaparte’s campaign was not only to abolish tyrannical rule, but to also revive Egypt by exposing the population to an advanced European culture. This mission to civilize is an essential component of Edward Said’s description of Orientalism as a means of dominating the Orient “by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.”

Napoleon’s objective to bestow the benefits of Western culture onto the conquered civilians was to be achieved through the scholarly studies conducted by the Institut d’Égypte. Several of the Description plates, however, indicate the indigenous population was indifferent to this enlightenment. While French scholars productively analyze the ancient monuments, Egyptian locals are shown as impassive observers engaged in idle activities such as smoking (figure 20). The portrayal of a disinterested populace imparted responsibility for the dilapidated state of the country onto its inhabitants, implying they were as much to blame for the decline in their culture as the

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78 Fourier, iii.
79 Ibid, v-vi.
80 Said, 3.
81 Fourier, vi.
82 Godlewska, 18.
Mamelukes. This accusatory depiction recalls images of the sophisticated French army pitted against the uncivilized enemy in the previously discussed paintings. It is an aspect of the Description that further diminishes the objectivity of the scholarly work.

A final correlation between the works of art commemorating the Egyptian campaign and the Description de l’Égypte may be seen in renderings of ancient monuments. Like the paintings Revolt of Cairo and Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa, images presented in the Description were manufactured. During the expedition a majority of the structures were covered in sand. Many of the architectural components had been worn away by time. Description scholars had to provide reconstructed views of the ancient ruins, adding a highly subjective quality to the plates. Accompanying each image of a dilapidated structure is an artistic fabrication, as evidenced in the before and after renderings of the Colossi of Memnon (figures 21a and 21b). The unaltered view of these massive statues shows significant damage. The upper portions, in particular, have crumbled away leaving faceless remains. Despite not having access to the original designs, the scholars, used artistic license to fully restore the Colossi. They sketched missing facial features and incorporated detailed musculature in the torso and legs of the seated figures. Further repairs were done to the pedestals of the statues, with designers having reconstructed damaged hieroglyphics. By resurrecting the ancient monuments, the scholars fulfilled the promise of renewal mentioned in Fourier’s

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83 In her 1989 article “The Imaginary Orient”, Linda Nochlin termed this correlation between architectural ruins and Eastern idleness in Orientalist paintings as “architecture moralisée”. See Nochlin, 39.

historical preface.\textsuperscript{85} In doing so they presented Napoleon as heir to the grandeur of the Pharaonic past. This association was reinforced in Fourier’s closing remarks to the preface, where, in referencing Bonaparte, he proclaimed: “Egypt was the theater of his glory”.\textsuperscript{86}

As demonstrated in this chapter, the artists of Napoleon Bonaparte’s regime incorporated several propaganda devices in portrayals of the Egyptian expedition. In light of the failed military endeavor, it was essential for painters to depict Napoleon’s presence in Egypt and Syria as a success. Artists maintained the pretense of triumph by falsely rendering events of the campaigns, masking horrible truths that were damaging to Bonaparte’s image. Furthering the propaganda agenda of the tableaus were depictions of a superior French army pitted against an uncivilized adversary, juxtapositions that played upon Western stereotypes of the East. In an attempt to validate these highly propagandized works of art, painters incorporated realistic elements in their canvases to persuade the viewer that they were looking upon an eyewitness rendering. This pseudo-documentary quality was similar to illustrations in the \textit{Description de l’Égypte}, a publication dedicated to the scholarly component of the Egyptian expedition. The propaganda devices employed in the paintings of the campaign were likewise incorporated in images from this scholarly work, further presenting Napoleon’s military endeavor in Egypt as a success. The promotion of the Egyptian campaign exhibited in the paintings of Bonaparte’s regime was also prevalent in the administration’s

\textsuperscript{85} According to Said, this revival of Egypt’s past grandeur was an aspect of Orientalism exhibited in the \textit{Description de l’Égypte}. See Said, 86.

\textsuperscript{86} Fourier, xcii.
architecture and interior décor. The impact of the expedition in both of these artistic realms will be among the topics explored in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3

THE EMPIRE STYLE: EGYPTIAN AND IMPERIAL THEMES IN ARCHITECTURE, INTERIORS, AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS

The celebration of the Egyptian campaign was not limited to Salon walls. In this chapter, I explore the promotion of the military endeavor in the architecture and interiors of Bonaparte’s reign. An examination of Egyptian and imperial themes is presented to demonstrate their use in glorifying Napoleon. In plans to renovate the landscape of Paris, Bonaparte’s administration commissioned monuments honoring his military exploits. The majority of these memorials were based on the architecture of imperial Rome, an appropriation that coincided with Napoleon’s title as Emperor of France. In addition to imperial structures, the regime commissioned monuments resembling those of ancient Egypt—architectural works which commemorated the Egyptian campaign.

This blend of imperial themes and motifs inspired by the Egyptian expedition comprised the Empire style, a decorative trend that originated in the work of the administration’s lead architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine. The Empire style was prevalent in the architects’ renovations of Napoleon’s residences, as well as in the furnishings they designed for patrons throughout Europe. Contributing to this impact was Percier and Fontaine’s publication Recueil de décorations intérieures, which contained examples of their designs for others to emulate.¹ The architects’ Egyptian-style pieces, in particular, influenced the work of fellow craftsmen who collaborated with the designers. A further source for such motifs in Empire furnishings was the

¹ The full title of their publication is Recueil de décorations intérieures comprenant tout ce qui a rapport à l’ameublement [Collection of interior decorations including everything that relates to furnishings]. The plates illustrated in Recueil de décorations intérieures were published from 1801-1812.
Description de l’Égypte. The plates depicted within the publication inspired the creation of impressive decorative pieces that celebrated Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign.

Prior to the coup that established him as First Consul of France in 1799, Bonaparte expressed a desire to rebuild the city of Paris, claiming: “If I were the master of France, I would want to make Paris not only the most beautiful city that has existed, the most beautiful city which does exist, but also the most beautiful city which would ever exist.” Following his rise to power, Napoleon and his administration set out to realize this dream by having several monuments built in honor of his reign. Among the homages to his rule was the Madeleine, a partially constructed eighteenth-century church (figure 22). In 1806, the unfinished building site was appropriated by Bonaparte, who commissioned architect Pierre Vignon to erect a Temple of Glory in celebration of his Grande Armée. Vignon was not the original choice for architect; he had partaken in a competition in which his proposal for the monument was awarded third place. However, Napoleon, in a demonstration of his ruling power, vetoed the winning design in favor of Vignon’s. Like dictators before him, Bonaparte used military monuments as symbols of power to legitimize his right to rule. Such authority is conveyed in the Madeleine’s design, consisting of a colossal Imperial temple that imbues the structure with a dominating presence.

In order to achieve the monument’s impressive scale, Vignon turned for

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inspiration to the ancient Roman temple of Mars Ultor, and especially, to the Maison Carrée in Nîmes.\(^5\) By relying on these antique precedents for his design, the architect linked the glory of Bonaparte’s Empire with that of imperial Rome. Both temples were built during the reign of Augustus, whom Napoleon sought to emulate by becoming the first Emperor of France. Literature written at the time reinforced this association, likening his military exploits to those of the Roman emperor. As demonstrated in chapter two, this analogy was also central to the historical preface of the *Description de l’Égypte*, in which Joseph Fourier compared Bonaparte’s campaign to the conquest of Egypt by Greco-Roman rulers.

Napoleon’s administration maintained this imperial image by basing the majority of its plans for civic renovation on the architectural landscape of ancient Rome. In the same year Bonaparte commissioned his Temple of Glory, work began on the Vendôme Column, another memorial dedicated to the French army (figure 23). Supervising the project was the regime’s lead artistic adviser Dominique Vivant Denon, who, along with architects Jacques Gondoin and Jean-Baptiste Lepère, created a monument honoring Napoleon’s 1805 campaign against Austrian and Russian forces.\(^6\) The memorial they designed celebrates Bonaparte’s victory at the Battle of Austerlitz. Cannons captured by the French army during the encounter were melted down for the structure’s bronze reliefs.\(^7\) Like the Madeleine, the Vendôme Column was inspired by imperial architecture, specifically Trajan’s Column. The monument strongly resembles its imperial predecessor. Decorating the column is a similar spiraling frieze of bas-relief by

\(^5\) Loyer, 36-37.

\(^6\) Marrinan, 115-116.

\(^7\) Boime, 12.
the painter Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret. Cast within each band is a narrative of French military glory—reliefs that recall triumphal battle scenes adorning Trajan’s Column. The parallel between Napoleon’s regime and imperial Rome was more apparent in this monument, crowned by a statue of Bonaparte as a Roman emperor. Sculptor Antoine-Denis Chaudet depicted Bonaparte in a toga, rendering him as the next Caesar. Napoleon reigned from his perch on top of the column, with a miniature globe and winged victory in hand.

Perhaps the most impressive imperial architecture appropriated by Napoleon’s administration was the triumphal arch. In 1806, construction began on the Arc de Triomphe de l’Étoile, another memorial dedicated to the Grande Armée (figure 24). The use of triumphal arches for commemorative purposes was made popular by the Roman Emperor Augustus, who had several of the celebratory structures built throughout his empire. Louis XIV had earlier adopted this type of architecture, most prominently at the Porte Saint-Denis, where an arch was built in honor of the king’s military victories.

In commissioning the Arc de Triomphe, Bonaparte endeavored to surpass the monuments of his predecessors. The design by architect Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin was massive, with the structure measuring approximately 162 feet high by 150 feet wide. These proportions rivaled the scale of other arches such as the much smaller

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8 Marrinan, 116.

9 Boime, 12. The original sculpture by Chaudet was removed during the Bourbon Restoration. For a history of subsequent statues placed on the Vendôme Column see Marrinan, 117-121.


11 Marrinan, 46.

12 Sutcliffe, 70.
Porte Saint-Denis. The colossal size was meant to impress Europe with the magnitude of Napoleon’s ruling power. This message was made clear during the Emperor’s 1810 marriage to Marie Louise of Austria. Although only the foundations had been laid at the time, the arch was a prominent fixture in the wedding ceremony and conveyed the grandeur of the occasion. Chalgrin erected a full-scale wood and canvas replica of the unfinished monument, through which Bonaparte and his bride entered the city of Paris in a glorious procession, much as Louis XIV had done in 1660.\textsuperscript{13} Adding to the prestige of the Arc de Triomphe was the strategic placement of the memorial along the city’s royal east-west axis—a grand perspective of major monuments and thoroughfares associated with Louis XIV and Louis XV, which extends westward from the Louvre.

Parallel to that royal axis and leading directly to the cross axis terminated to the north by the Madeleine is the Rue de Rivoli, its name commemorating Napoleon’s military victory over Austria in 1797 (figure 25). In 1801, the architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine submitted a proposal for this series of three-story apartment buildings placed above a continuous ground floor arcade and surmounted by a mansard roof. Percier and Fontaine designed it as a triumphal way for Bonaparte. Accenting this impressive but austere façade are continuous balconies that were no doubt intended for viewing the grand processions of Napoleon and his military.\textsuperscript{14} In order to maintain the prestige of the Rue de Rivoli restrictions were placed on the type of shops established in the area. Any business associated with common trade was prohibited, as was the use of

\textsuperscript{13} Marrinan, 46. In 1660, Louis XIV and his new bride Maria Theresa of Spain, entered Paris through a temporary triumphal arch at the Place du Trône.

\textsuperscript{14} Sutcliffe, 71.
signage that would diminish the appearance of Napoleon’s ceremonial backdrop.\textsuperscript{15}

Roman imperial monuments were not the only inspiration for the structures erected during Napoleon’s reign. His administration also incorporated the architecture of ancient Egypt, a former province of the Roman Empire, in the remodeling of the Parisian landscape. In 1809, Bonaparte signed a decree commissioning an obelisk to be built on Pont Neuf. The structure was to be another war memorial, this time celebrating Napoleon’s military exploits in Prussia and Poland.\textsuperscript{16} The obelisk was an ideal monument, evoking not only the prosperity and might of ancient Egypt, but also that of the Roman Empire. The obelisk had been revered by Augustus. Following his invasion of Egypt, he transported several of the structures back to Rome.\textsuperscript{17}

By appropriating the obelisk for his architectural program, Bonaparte followed in the footsteps of his Roman predecessor. Although the Pont Neuf memorial was intended to celebrate Bonaparte’s military endeavors in Europe, it may also be perceived as paying homage to his own Egyptian campaign. Unlike Augustus, Napoleon failed his attempted conquest. Falling short of this goal prevented Napoleon from extracting Egyptian artifacts.\textsuperscript{18} His regime, therefore, had to manufacture spoils of war such as the Pont Neuf obelisk to portray the expedition as a success. The designs for the project may have been influenced by sketches from campaign publications such as the \textit{Description de l’Égypte},

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] Marrinan, 76.
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Jean-Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler, \textit{Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930} (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada; Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 216-219. In his decree Napoleon expressed the desire to have the memorial honor the French army’s successes during the Jena and Vistula campaigns.
\item[\textsuperscript{17}] Porterfield, 25.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] Any artifacts that had been collected by the scholars on the campaign were confiscated by British forces upon the French army’s surrender in 1801.
\end{itemize}
which debuted the same year as the commission for the memorial. The proposals by artists Benjamin Zix and Louis-Pierre Baltard, in particular, recall traditional renderings of obelisks exhibited in the Description—such as those from the Temple of Luxor (figures 26a, 26b and 27). Although the images of the Luxor obelisks are from a later volume of the Description, preliminary sketches of plates from the scholarly work were available prior to publication. It is, therefore, plausible that the artists working on the Pont Neuf monument had access to such drawings.

In addition to constructing memorials, Napoleon’s administration established a public works program with the intent of revitalizing Paris after damage sustained during the Revolution. Included among the civic projects were fifteen fountains Bonaparte commissioned in 1806, to supply water throughout the city and improve sanitation. By incorporating water infrastructure in his architectural renovations, Napoleon once again adopted an imperial precedent. In ancient Rome numerous structures including aqueducts and baths were built to create an elaborate system for water distribution. Bonaparte, furthermore, co-opted a propaganda strategy employed by the popes. Sixtus V, commissioned the building of the Acqua Felice and the Fontana Felice, a Roman

19 In his publication on Egyptomania, James Stevens Curl discusses the Description de l’Égypte and the emergence of Egyptian influences in architectural works such as the Pont Neuf monument. See James Stevens Curl, Egyptomania the Egyptian Revival: A Recurring Theme in the History of Taste (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 132.

20 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 252.

21 Louis-Pierre Baltard was among the artists who would have been exposed to preliminary images from the Description. His name appears on several of the engravings in the publication.

aqueduct and terminal fountain which revived the water supply in Rome. He also had obelisks erected at strategic locations in Rome, serving as emblems of the church’s power.

Although the fountains commissioned by Bonaparte were for the “practical” benefit of the French populace, they primarily served a symbolic purpose. The Fontaine du Fellah on the Rue de Sèvres, for example, is another architectural tribute to the Egyptian expedition (figure 28). This design by François-Jean Bralle, also resembles depictions of structures from the campaign. The backdrop to the fountain recalls illustrations of Egyptian temple doors from the Description de l’Égypte (figure 29). Placed within this pylon-shaped naos is an Egyptian statue carrying pitchers from which water flows into a basin below. This figure sculpted by Pierre-Nicolas Beauvallet was based on a statue of Antinous from the Louvre, a spoil of war from Napoleon’s Italian campaign. Crowning the water bearer is a nemes, a headdress similar to those worn by the ancient pharaohs. This decorative detail was perhaps intended as a reference to Bonaparte himself, who was bringing clean water to the people of Paris. The promotion of the ruler’s image is further apparent in the Egyptian-styled pylon. Carved within the cornice is an eagle with outstretched wings, a symbol appropriated from ancient Rome that further linked the French emperor to the imperial past. Bralle’s inclusion of this insignia, along with the statue’s royal regalia, portrayed Napoleon as a successful

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24 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 268-269.

25 The backdrop to the fountain has been described as resembling both a naos and an Egyptian temple door. See Ibid.

26 Ibid.
conqueror and contributed to the myth of a triumphal Egyptian campaign.

Napoleon’s plans to embellish Paris with architectural emblems of his own glory were not fully realized. The constant warfare brought on by efforts to expand the French Empire depleted funds, leaving larger building projects such as the Madeleine and the Arc de Triomphe unfinished.\textsuperscript{27} Much of the regime’s architectural program, therefore, focused on establishing imperial residences for the emperor of France. Many of these dwellings were the \textit{maisons royales} of the Bourbon dynasty, which had fallen into disrepair in the aftermath of the Revolution. They were restored to surpass their former grandeur by Napoleon’s lead architects Percier and Fontaine. The furnishings they designed drew upon Roman imperial sources similar to those presented in the administration’s public architectural program. The architects blended military themes with décor inspired by a triumphal Roman past to present a glorified image of the emperor. This eclectic décor, known as the Empire style, appeared in the furniture and ornamental pieces of the imperial palaces. Designs for these interiors were displayed in Percier and Fontaine’s publication \textit{Recueil de décorations intérieures}. Included among the plates were furnishings the architects designed for Bonaparte’s residence at Malmaison, where the Empire style was first established.

While Napoleon was still a revolutionary general amassing military victories for the French Directory, he expressed interest in procuring the country château at Malmaison. Shortly before his return from the Egyptian campaign in 1799, Bonaparte’s first wife, Josephine, had purchased the property. At the time of acquisition, the building was in a dilapidated state, requiring the work of Percier and Fontaine. The pair was employed by Josephine following their renovations at a neighboring hôtel. Although

\textsuperscript{27} Marrinan, 75.
Malmaison was primarily Josephine’s residence, much of the restoration done by the architects was for the benefit of her husband, who stayed there often throughout his reign as First Consul. The château located near Paris provided Napoleon with a reprieve from the city, serving as a place where he could carry out state affairs in private. One of the rooms in the house employed for this purpose was the library, which was installed by the architects in the months following Napoleon’s overthow of the French Directory.28

In the execution of the library’s design, Percier and Fontaine incorporated sources from the architectural training they received prior to Bonaparte’s patronage. As winners of the Grand Prix, the pair traveled to Rome in 1787, where they engaged in an extensive study of ancient monuments. The decoration of the library, depicted among the plates in their Recueil de décorations intérieures, contains elements of classicizing architecture, with a grouping of mahogany Doric columns predominantly featured in the design (figures 30a and 30b). During their training in Rome, Percier and Fontaine examined not only ancient structures but Renaissance architecture as well.29 They used a Palladian motif extensively to organize the space of the library at Malmaison. Imperial associations were embodied, in a delicate manner, in the laurel leaves painted on the library’s vaulted ceiling. These decorative accents served as emblems of Napoleon’s military victory. Bonaparte’s image was further celebrated in the remainder of the architects’ work at the château.

At the same time the commission was placed for the study, Percier and Fontaine

28 Gérard Hubert and Nicole Hubert, Musée national des châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois Préau (Paris: Ministère de la culture et de la communication, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1986), 12-13 and 60.

were instructed to set up a council room for Napoleon’s weekly meetings with members of his ministry. In order to create an environment conducive to transacting official business, the architects modeled their design after an army encampment, covering the ceiling and walls with striped fabric in a manner resembling the interior of a tent (figure 31). This warlike décor was clearly intended to celebrate Bonaparte’s military career. Enhancing the combat atmosphere of the room were weapons and battle trophies that paid homage to warring nations of the past. These decorative accolades recalled the victories Napoleon experienced on the battlefront, portraying him as a strong and capable ruler.

This military-inspired décor remained a prominent theme throughout the château, appearing in the work of other designers. During her stay at the residence, Josephine commissioned numerous renovations, including that of her bedchamber, which she had remodeled by architect Louis Berthault in 1812. Berthault appears to have been inspired by Percier and Fontaine’s work on the council room incorporating a similar tent-like motif in his design (figure 32). Enveloping the walls of the chamber are crimson drapery folds that form the inside of a canopy, a decorative feature repeated in the silk awning suspended above the bed. The impression of a tented interior is furthered by the trompe l’oeil ceiling depicting an open oculus, with an illusionistic view of the sky. The canopy-like furnishings at Malmaison may have been inspired by renderings of similar

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30 Hubert and Hubert, 60. Bonaparte commissioned renovations for the library and council room at Malmaison on July 9, 1800.


32 Marrinan, 142.
structures represented in the *Description de l’Égypte.* Josephine’s bedchamber, in particular, resembles depictions of Mameluke tents from the publication. The lush silk accoutrements evoke the exotic ambiance of “the Orient” (figure 33). These lavish furnishings also possess an imperial quality that was prevalent in the décor of Napoleon’s other residences.

Although Percier and Fontaine were apparently not responsible for the remodeling of Josephine’s bedchamber, as scholars including Robin Middleton had believed, the ostentatious nature of the room’s décor reflects their work on the former royal palaces occupied by Bonaparte. Having been pleased with the renovations at Malmaison, Napoleon named Percier and Fontaine his official architects, bestowing them with the prestigious title of *Architectes des Palais du Premier et Deuxième Consuls.* Under his continued patronage, the pair restored some of the *maisons royales* that formerly belonged to the Bourbon Monarchy, which had been stripped of lavish furnishings by the Revolutionaries. While remodeling these residences, the architects further developed their Empire style. Their designs of luxurious settings promoted Bonaparte’s elevated position as Emperor of France. Percier and Fontaine’s renovations on these interiors, like their work at Malmaison, were documented in the publication *Recueil de décorations intérieures.* Perhaps the most important commission represented in their design book was for the Tuileries palace, which served as the epicenter for Napoleon’s rule throughout the Consulate and Empire periods of his reign.

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33 Middleton and Watkin, 210, fig. 351.
34 Ibid, 211.
36 Marrinan, 45.
Napoleon formed a new aristocracy that regularly congregated at the Tuileries palace. The return of a court necessitated an extravagant renovation by Percier and Fontaine, one that would impress Bonaparte’s authority upon those assembling there. A theatrical display of power was apparent in areas such as the throne room. There the architects installed an imaginatively conceived throne, with a delicately carved and gilded framework, upholstered in blue velvet accented by extensive gold embroidery (figure 34a). Enveloping the ornate throne at that time was lush crimson drapery that hung from a golden crown of laurel leaves surmounted by a helmet and plumes (figure 34b).

The grandeur of these furnishings recalled the opulence of the Roman Empire and conveyed the imperial mood of Bonaparte’s reign. Embedded within the throne were emblems promoting the French emperor, among which was an embroidered eagle reminiscent of the one carved on the cornice of the Fontaine du Fellah (see figure 28). This decorative motif, which also appeared on the supports for the draped awning, was a symbol of Roman emperors eagerly adopted by Napoleon. The emblem was appropriated at about the time of Bonaparte’s coronation, when his administration created a coat of arms highlighting the imperial bird (figure 35). This official seal enabled Napoleon to exercise his authority as Emperor and was, therefore, recognized as a representation of his power wherever it was present. Along with this ancient insignia, other symbols celebrating his rule were incorporated in the throne’s design. The most

37 Marrinan, 18.
38 Percier and Fontaine, 76.
obvious reference to his reign were the Napoleonic “N’s” adorning the throne chair and back wall, which resembled miniature crests surmounted by crowns framed within laurel wreaths. They also recalled Louis XIV’s extensive use of his first initial as a decorative device.

Percier and Fontaine’s work was not limited to commissions for the Emperor of France; they also designed furnishings for clients throughout Europe. When Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor, royal titles were bestowed upon members of his family who maintained positions of power in the countries comprising his empire. As a result of their presence in these occupied regions, furnishings promoting the French Emperor’s reign were prevalent. Such pieces were represented in Percier and Fontaine’s *Recueil*, and it was in these works that another decorative aspect of the Empire style emerged.

Among the architects’ designs for patrons in these satellite kingdoms was a bookcase and pendulum clock, both of which contain Egyptian motifs (figures 36 and 37). Precedents for these objects may be found in the work of eighteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Known primarily for his prints of Roman architecture, Piranesi also promoted the Egyptian style through fireplaces illustrated in his 1769 work *Diverse maniere*. At the time of publication, the prevailing opinion among scholars was that ancient Greece was superior in all the arts. In *Diverse maniere*, Piranesi challenged this belief by encouraging fellow designers to seek influence from the art and architecture of ancient Egypt: “Must the genius of our artists be so basely

40 Wilson-Smith, 202-203.

41 The pieces were designed for patrons in Spain and Amsterdam, regions controlled by Joseph and Louis Bonaparte, who were brothers of the Emperor.

42 The full title of this work is *Diverse maniere d’adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizi* [Divers Manners of Ornamenting Chimneys and All Other Parts of Houses].
enslaved to the Grecian manners, as not to dare to take what is beautiful elsewhere, if it be not of Grecian origin? But let us at last shake off this shameful yoke, and if the Egyptians,… present to us, in their monuments, beauty, grace, and elegance, let us borrow from their stock,…”

Although Piranesi was a promoter of Egyptian art, he did not replicate Egyptian monuments in his designs. He freely combined aspects of Egyptian art in new compositions (figure 38). Piranesi stressed the importance of one’s creativity, further stating in his publication: “…an artist, who would do himself honour, and acquire a name, must not content himself with copying faithfully the ancients, but studying their works he ought to show himself of an inventive…” This ingenuity was exhibited in Piranesi’s bizarre chimneypieces, structures which were not indigenous to the ancient world.

The originality displayed in Piranesi’s work is paralleled in Percier and Fontaine’s Egyptian-inspired designs, suggesting the French architects may have been directly influenced by the Italian artist. As previously mentioned, the pair had traveled to Rome towards the end of the eighteenth century. There they were almost certainly exposed to his work. Like Piranesi, the architects modernized motifs from antiquity by applying them to contemporary structures. This appropriation of antique influences is evident in their renderings of the bookcase and pendulum clock, in which they freely combined Egyptian and modern elements (see figures 36 and 37). Piranesi’s influence is

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44 Quoted and translated by Ibid.

45 Carrott, 23.
particularly apparent in the architects’ sketch of the pendulum clock. The base of the piece recalls a rendering of one of Piranesi’s fireplaces, containing similar seated Egyptian figures (see figure 38).  

The Egyptian plates from Recueil de décorations intérieures inspired the creation of similar designs by Percier and Fontaine’s contemporaries. In their execution of the Empire’s numerous commissions, the architects collaborated with various artistic institutions working alongside regime officials and leading craftsmen. It was through these interactions that Percier and Fontaine’s influence permeated the work of others. One individual known to have associated with them was French chemist Alexandre Brongniart, who was also an administrator of the Sèvres manufactory. Brongniart was appointed to his directorship at the start of Napoleon’s reign, at a time when the establishment was in a precarious state. In the 1790’s, the factory experienced a decline in production, brought about by the disappearance of its clientele during the Revolution. Brongniart faced the daunting task of restoring an institution which suffered from a depleted workforce and an insufficient supply of materials. The administrator had to further contend with competitors such as Wedgewood, Britain’s well-established porcelain firm. Unlike the Sèvres factory, the foreign manufacturer remained in production throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century, thus having a significant

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46 Curl, 119, fig. 66.
47 Boime, 23.
48 Brongniart was appointed director of the factory on May 14, 1800 by then Minister of Interior Lucien Bonaparte.
impact on European ceramics.

The director remedied the establishment’s grievous state by enlisting the help of top designers, whose assistance he credited in an 1801 statement advertising enhancements to the factory’s wares: “Sèvres porcelain … is much improved over the past year in the purity of its forms, the variety of its ground [colors], and the interest of its subjects and compositions, … The greatest possible effort has been made to emulate the antique and keep in step with advancing taste. The advice and work of the most skillful artists in Paris have been turned to account in these different genres.”

Percier and Fontaine were most likely among the “skillful artists” to whom Brongniart referred. Their influence was apparent early on in the factory’s revival when an inkwell was produced in 1802 that incorporated decorative quotations from their Egyptian clock (see figures 37 and 39). Seated figures adorned with similar Egyptian attire consisting of loincloths and nemes headdresses face outward and hold bowls for ink. The winged sphinxes depicted below are clearly reminiscent of those crowning the pendulum clock.

Another known collaborator of Percier and Fontaine was the furniture maker Jacob Desmalter. Like Brongniart, Desmalter belonged to an institution that had been suppressed by the Revolution. His family business, which had catered to the wealthy, had also suffered from the absence of its clientele in the last decade of the eighteenth century.  

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50 Quoted and translated by Préaud, 45. This statement by Brongniart was released to the French press on October 23, 1801.

51 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 290.

52 Ibid.
century. Under Napoleon’s reign, the prestige that had been associated with the furniture maker’s firm was reestablished. During this time, Jacob Desmalter served as the lead manufacturer of furnishings for Bonaparte’s residences. He often worked alongside Percier and Fontaine, executing several of their commissions, including the celebrated throne at the Tuileries palace (see figure 34a).

A further example of this artistic pairing is evident in an Egyptian-style medal cabinet belonging to the regime’s arts administrator Denon (figure 40a). Although this piece by Desmalter is commonly believed to have been inspired by Denon’s own designs, a drawing of the medal cabinet by Charles Percier makes his authorship more likely (figure 40b). The medal cabinet consisting of a pylon structure accented by similar Egyptian ornamentation is a faithful reproduction of the architect’s sketch. Furthering the argument of Percier’s design being consulted in the production of this piece was the inclusion of the architect’s drawing in an album from Martin-Guillaume Biennais’ workshop. Biennais was a renowned goldsmith who supplied the silver ornamentation for the medal cabinet.

Percier did not publish the Egyptian cabinet in the *Recueil de décorations intérieures*. The design differs from the Egyptian themed plates in the illustrated work in that it resembles a structure indigenous to ancient Egypt. The pylon shape could very well have been derived from ancient architecture represented in Egyptian campaign publications such as the *Description de l’Égypte*. It is also likely that Napoleon’s expedition influenced the Egyptian plates in Percier and Fontaine’s *Recueil*. In addition

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53 Grandjean, 41.

54 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 206.

55 Ibid.
to the correlation between these images and Piranesi’s fireplaces, the decorative motifs presented in the architects’ designs were tied to Bonaparte’s rule.

This promotion of the Egyptian campaign, which was also displayed in the regime’s commemorative architecture, was akin to its use in the paintings discussed in the previous chapter. Empire furnishings presented an idealized “account” of the failed military endeavor just as these works of art did. One propaganda tactic employed by the administration’s craftsmen was the depiction of masculine Egyptian forms, evident in a pair of sphinx andirons by sculptor Pierre-Philippe Thomire (figure 41). Prior to Napoleon’s reign, sphinxes in interior décor were delicately rendered. By contrast, Thomire exaggerated the musculature of the creatures, bestowing the small decorative pieces with an imposing appearance. The sculptor’s more masculine depiction may be perceived as referencing the military prowess of Bonaparte and his army, whose presence in Egypt, although disastrous, was lauded as a success by the administration.

This decorative motif was common in Empire furniture, appearing in pieces that belonged to members of the imperial family. For example, sphinxes adorn an armchair made by Jacob-Desmalter for the living quarters of Napoleon’s brother Prince Louis, at the emperor’s palace of Fontainebleau (figure 42a). Contrasting with the delicate curved backing and elegant silk upholstery are sphinxlike supports which possess an austere quality reminiscent of the sculpted andirons. Their truncated forms surmounting the front legs of the chair terminate at the ground in lion’s paws, adding a severe aspect furthered by the dark mahogany framework. It is worth noting a similarity between certain parts of the armchair and renderings of furniture pieces represented in the Description de l’Égypte. In one of the plates there are depictions of chairs painted on the walls of a tomb

56 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 282.
belonging to an Egyptian pharaoh (figure 42b). The s-curved backing and lion-like legs once again suggest the Description’s influence on Empire interiors.

The references to Bonaparte’s Egyptian campaign in the above-mentioned furnishings are somewhat understated. The expedition was prominently celebrated in some of the more impressive pieces created under the Empire, such as an Egyptian-style vase from the Tuileries palace (figure 43a). The massive urn was placed in the Salon des Grands Officiers, and like the rest of the décor in the palace, it was opulently adorned. The piece is inundated with gilded depictions of pharaohs and lush Nile vegetation, decorative motifs which evoke the grandeur and prosperity of ancient Egypt. Included among these lavish embellishments were emblems promoting Bonaparte’s rule. Originally adorning the base of the vase were Napoleonic “N’s” and imperial eagles, which reiterated those displayed in the throne room at the residence (see figure 34b). In addition to these insignias, the pedestal contained painted depictions of the Battle of the Pyramids and Bonaparte’s Visit to the Plague Hospital in Jaffa, both of which were celebrated episodes from the Egyptian campaign.57 These scenes on the original base of the vase recall the propaganda infused paintings of the same events by artists Lejeune and Gros (see figs. 13a and 6).

After the fall of Bonaparte’s Empire, these painted homages to his campaign, along with the emblems of his regime, were replaced with Egyptian forms that blended in with the rest of the décor on the vase.58 Although attempts were made to remove all evidence of Napoleon’s reign, vestiges of his rule still remain on the decorative piece.

57 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 277-278.

58 Ibid, 278. These decorative references to Bonaparte’s reign were removed during the Bourbon Restoration and were replaced with generic Egyptian motifs consisting of rosettes, pharaonic crowns, and hieroglyphics.
Amidst the renderings of generic Egyptian motifs are scenes taken from the administration’s celebrated publication *Description de l’Égypte*. Preliminary sketches from the scholarly work were consulted by François Debret, a student of Percier, who had been entrusted with the design of the vase. The publication’s influence is apparent in the band of figures adorning the body of the vase. According to Jean-Pierre Samoyault, the tableau is inspired by a drawing from engineer and campaign archeologist Edme Jomard. Debret’s depiction of the decorative frieze accurately recalls Jomard’s sketch of a royal purification scene, taken during the expedition from a bas-relief on the portico at the Temple of Philae (figures 43b and 43c). The *Description’s* impact on Debret’s work is further evident in the ornamentation on the pedestal. Adorning one of the side panels is a gilded pharaoh holding a staff surmounted by cartouches. This figure closely resembles another sketch by Jomard and fellow campaign scholars Jean-Baptiste Prosper Jollois and Édouard Devilliers du Terrage (figures 43d and 43e).

The most striking manifestation of images from the *Description de l’Égypte* may be found in a porcelain centerpiece created at the Sèvres factory. Under Brongniart’s continued directorship, the establishment prospered and emerged as the lead manufacturer of porcelain for Napoleon’s Empire. Several items produced by the factory were intended for the Emperor himself, while others were given as gifts to foreign leaders. An example of such a diplomatic offering is an Egyptian table service that was

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59 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 278-280.


61 Ibid, 330-331.
presented to Tsar Alexander I.\textsuperscript{62} Production began in 1805 and was supervised by arts administrator Denon. He dictated the content and sources to be used for the commission. The entire service paid tribute to Napoleon’s military endeavor in Egypt, with the pieces comprising the porcelain group based on scholarly publications from the campaign. As a result of Denon’s involvement, the majority of tableware was inspired by his own visual account of the expedition, \textit{Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte}. However, the centerpiece consisting of miniature replicas of ancient monuments was derived from plates represented in the \textit{Description de l’Égypte}.\textsuperscript{63} 

Denon encouraged the use of this publication by entrusting the design to architect Jean-Baptiste Lepère, a veteran of the Egyptian campaign and a \textit{Description} contributor.\textsuperscript{64} His reason for promoting this scholarly work over his own publication was likely attributed to the archeological precision exhibited in the images of the \textit{Description}. When Denon brought the commission to Brongniart, he expressed a desire for an accurate execution of the centerpiece stating: “…Tell me if you could make architecture with some accuracy: tell me if you could maintain the strict lines of columns…If you can assure success with that, we will get a really monumental centrepiece.”\textsuperscript{65} 

The arts administrator was likely pleased with the final product, as the views of the Egyptian monuments represented in the \textit{Description} were faithfully reproduced. The craftsmen working on the centerpiece created a microcosm of the Egyptian landscape,


\textsuperscript{63} Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 220-222.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 222.

\textsuperscript{65} Quoted and translated by Truman, 10n18.
replicating the following structures: a kiosk from the temple at Philae, four obelisks, the temples of Dendera and Edfu, four colonnades, two pylons, four Colossi of Memnon, and two avenues of ram-headed sphinxes from the temple at Karnak (figure 44). By incorporating numerous models in his design for the centerpiece, Lepère conveyed the colossal scale of ancient Egyptian architecture. The porcelain group extends over twenty-two feet in length, bestowing it with a monumental quality.

Lepère also included every architectural aspect in these miniatures, sculpting the smallest of details such as the bas-relief adorning original structures represented in the Description like the Temple of Dendera (figures 45a and 45b).

Although attempts were made to accurately reproduce Egyptian monuments, there are features of the centerpiece that undermine these endeavors. Several of the plates from the Description de l’Égypte were fabrications by campaign scholars, as noted in chapter two. At the time of the expedition, many of the buildings were either buried by the desert sand or were in a state of ruin, forcing the savants to reconstruct what they saw. It is, therefore, likely that the architectural models of the Egyptian service were based on contrived images. The statues of the Colossi of Memnon from the centerpiece illustrate this point. These figures resemble the reconstructed views of their Description counterparts, as opposed to the actual deteriorated state of the structures (see figs. 21a, 21b and 46). Another aspect contradicting the accuracy of the porcelain group is the arrangement of the architectural replicas themselves. These miniatures representing monuments from different regions have been placed together in a single view.

Regardless of these inconsistencies, the Egyptian service was one of the most celebrated

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66 Humbert, Pantazzi, and Ziegler, 220.

67 Truman, 17.
decorative pieces of Napoleon’s Empire. It inspired the creation of a replica that was eventually appropriated by the Bourbon King Louis XVIII, who overthrew the French Emperor. 

In this chapter, I have discussed three very different aspects of the impact of Napoleon’s Egyptian expedition on the arts. First, I addressed the promotion of the campaign in architecture, with Bonaparte’s regime commissioning monuments in celebration of his military career. The majority of these commemorative structures were inspired by ancient Roman architecture, thus paying homage to Napoleon’s imperial image. Other memorials were designed after the monuments of ancient Egypt, serving as tributes to Bonaparte’s famous Egyptian campaign. In the second section of this chapter, I discussed the influences from antiquity on interior furnishings designed by Percier and Fontaine. The architects’ Empire style consisted of a blend of imperial and Egyptian motifs, deployed in their renovations of Napoleon’s residences, and furnishings designed for patrons throughout the French Empire. Furthering Percier and Fontaine’s impact on Empire interiors was their publication *Recueil de décorations intérieures*. The architects’ Egyptian designs from both this book and other sources influenced the work of their contemporaries. The inclusion of Egyptian motifs in the decorative arts comprises the final component of this chapter. In addition to Percier and Fontaine’s designs, plates from the *Description de l’Égypte* were consulted in the production of decorative works, inspiring the creation of impressive Egyptian pieces. The impact of the *Description de l’Égypte* was vast and its images unavoidable, even after Napoleon’s fall.

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68 Truman, 27-28. Louis XVIII gave this second centerpiece to the Duke of Wellington for his assistance in restoring Bourbon rule.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that Napoleon’s government directed artists, architects, and craftsmen to portray the failed conquest of Egypt as a success. In the promotion of the campaign, the regime employed all artistic mediums to convey its military glory. The propaganda devices displayed in the great paintings commissioned by the administration presented the French populace with an idealized account of Bonaparte’s military exploits in Egypt and Syria. These artistic strategies were also exhibited in images in the *Description de l’Égypte*, the scholarly publication which represented the only successful outcome of the Egyptian campaign.

The ruse of military triumph was further maintained in the regime’s architectural works and interior décor. In the realm of architecture, the administration appropriated structures from antiquity including Egyptian-inspired monuments that celebrated Bonaparte’s campaign in Egypt. The expedition was further commemorated in the Empire furnishings designed by architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, which consisted of a blend of Egyptian and imperial motifs similar to those exhibited in the regime’s military monuments. The celebration of Bonaparte’s Egyptian expedition was most apparent in the decorative arts inspired by plates from the campaign publication *Description de l’Égypte*.

Napoleon’s use of propaganda in the service of his reign was impressive. In addition to the arts, the French emperor celebrated his rule through other means such as coin production and the press. Bonaparte’s methods of self-promotion followed a precedent established above all by the most powerful French monarch, Louis XIV.
Louis XIV, he sought images that linked him to Alexander the Great and Augustus. The scale on which Napoleon Bonaparte employed censorship and propaganda was not seen again until the twentieth century with the rise of the Third Reich.
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