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Cover photograph: A student of the Czech Institute of Egyptology documenting a decorated limestone stela in the eastern wall of the tomb of Nyankhseshat (AS 104) at Abusir South (photo M. Odler, © Czech Institute of Egyptology)

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A second unpublished version of the so-called Joseph Laporte's notebook on the French Expedition in Egypt and Syria. Preliminary study and remarks

Renaud Pietri¹

Abstract

In 2007 the facsimile edition of an original manuscript written by a French soldier of the Bonaparte's Expedition in Egypt was published. Illustrated by naive coloured plates by the hand of the author, this document relates, almost day after day, the French Expedition in Egypt and Syria. It describes the main battles between the French troops and the English and Mameluks forces, but also the discovery of an exotic country and its culture at the end of the 18th century, from a young revolutionary French soldier's point of view. The purpose of this paper is to highlight a second version of this personal *Description de l'Égypte*, probably written shortly after the first one. A preliminary study shows that this variant, still unpublished and mentioned here for the first time, is longer and more detailed. Future researches will have to explain why those two versions were written and now coexist.

Keywords

History of Egyptology; French Expedition in Egypt and Syria; Napoleon Bonaparte; Joseph Laporte

Introduction

The French Expedition in Egypt, whose bicentenary was celebrated two decades ago, has been and still is – the object of numerous studies (see e.g. Bret 1998; Raymond 1998; Brégeon 2006; Cole 2007; Bourdon 2018) and exhibitions (Humbert 2008; Mainterot – Jagot 2013), focusing on various topics such as the military aspects, scientific legacy, or French-Egyptian relationships during the campaign.

Together with the disastrous 1812's military campaign in Russia, the Expedition is likely one of among the most narrated and described events of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars by contemporary witnesses. These witnesses were usually important army officers, writing after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire, and often belonging to the most prestigious social and military elite from their time. They include some of the most well known names of the French Emperor's reign (for a recent list including most of the French Expedition in Egypt memoirs, see especially Bourdon 2018, 300–5). Contemporary Arabic sources – the most famous being the A. el-R. Al-Jabarti's journal (Al-Jabarti 1979) – provide a different vision of the French occupation, as lived by the local inhabitants. English officers fighting against French also wrote their own testimonials (e.g. Walsh 1823).

The French Expedition was also a scientific expedition, and was wanted as such by Bonaparte himself and the French government. The Expedition gave birth to scientific books written by the scholars who accompanied the army, notably D. Vivant-Denon's *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte pendant les campagnes du général Bonaparte* (Vivant-Denon 1802) and the so-called *Description de l'Égypte*, whose edition took years after the return of the French expeditionary force. This huge amount of knowledge about ancient and modern Egypt, collected during the French Expedition and published with hundreds of high quality illustrations, is still an endless source for Egyptologists. To this time also belongs the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, a key find for J. F. Champollion's breakthrough the secret of hieroglyphics, years after. Scholars who took part in the Expedition and survived often became great names in their own scientific fields after their returns to France. They also sometimes wrote personal diaries describing their Egyptian experience (see, for example, Villiers du Terrage 2003).

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Most of the testimonials we have about the French Expedition were written by well-educated officers such as L.-A. Berthier (1827) and J. L. E. Reynier (1827) and A.-D. Bélliard (1842). However, among the dozens of stories about the French Expedition, some are also written by soldiers of a lesser status. Back to France after the capitulation of the French expeditionary army defeated by the Turkish-English alliance in 1801, it was common for these soldiers to continue fighting for their country in the Napoleonic Wars. Inside the army, they were called 'Egyptians' and considered as experienced veterans, especially since they had often fought together with the general Bonaparte in Italy before going into Egypt. Years after the fall of Napoleon in 1815, they were demobilized by the newly restored king Louis XVIII, who thought they were dangerous and favourable to another unexpected comeback of the Emperor. They began to write and, sometimes, publish their memoirs using the notes they took during their time in Egypt – or elsewhere. Many testimonials were edited in the middle and the second half of the 19th century, others were published by their heirs or scholars over the last two centuries. The C. François' diary is a particularly famous testimonial from the French Expedition to Egypt (François 2003). Charles François is also known as the 'dromadaire François', due to his role in the camel-riders cavalry established by Bonaparte during the campaign.

An unpublished notebook: physical description and content

Unpublished notebooks and soldiers personal diaries narrating the events from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era, are still waiting in family archives for someone to rediscover them. I made such a discovery myself. In the summer 2014, I was asked by the owner of such a notebook to have a look on what is, according to him, a legacy from his step family.

The notebook is about 25.6 cm high, 17.6 cm wide and 5.5 cm thick (Fig. 1). The notebook's binding is currently half leather and hardback, with marbled black and white covers. Pages were bound together at an unknown time – perhaps by a previous owner during the 1950's or later, as recorded by the family oral tradition – probably to protect the original manuscript. Glued on the notebook's back, a yellow label (8.6 cm high and 4.2 cm wide) is handwritten in black ink with the title of the book: *Campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie par un témoin de l'armée d'ORIENT An VI VII VIII et IX de la République*. This label was likely not written by the author but by a former owner of the notebook. Indeed, the handwriting is not the same and the written title differs slightly from the version found on the frontpage.

The notebook is composed of 709 handwritten pages, including 66 handpainted watercolours captioned and used as illustrations – some watercolours are double-paged. Probably at the time the binding was repaired, each illustration was sheltered by an interposed page of silk paper to protect the colours. Unfortunately this also divides the double-paged illustrations, sometimes preventing an easy overview of the drawings (Fig. 2).

The notebook suffered from moisture. Many pages are slightly warped, few are stained – sometimes with red wax – but overall the paper is remarkably well preserved, and so is the black ink used to write the text although it has turned red in part. The ink is darker at the end of the notebook, especially in the appendices. These final and added parts to the notebook were written by the author at a second stage to fill in the remaining free space after he finished his story of the Expedition. The colour of the ink can thus be used as a clue to determine when, during the redaction, independent elements were written. For instance, the darker colour ink visible for some references or footnotes show that these were added by the author at the end, to complete and annotate a text which had been written for some time.

As indicated in the title, the notebook is telling the story of the French Expedition in Egypt and Syria, during year VI, VII, VIII, IX of the French Republic, that is between years 1798 and 1802 of the Gregorian calendar. The names and identity of the author remain an issue and will be discussed further.



Figure 1. The notebook (courtesy of M. Méta y, photo R. Pietri).

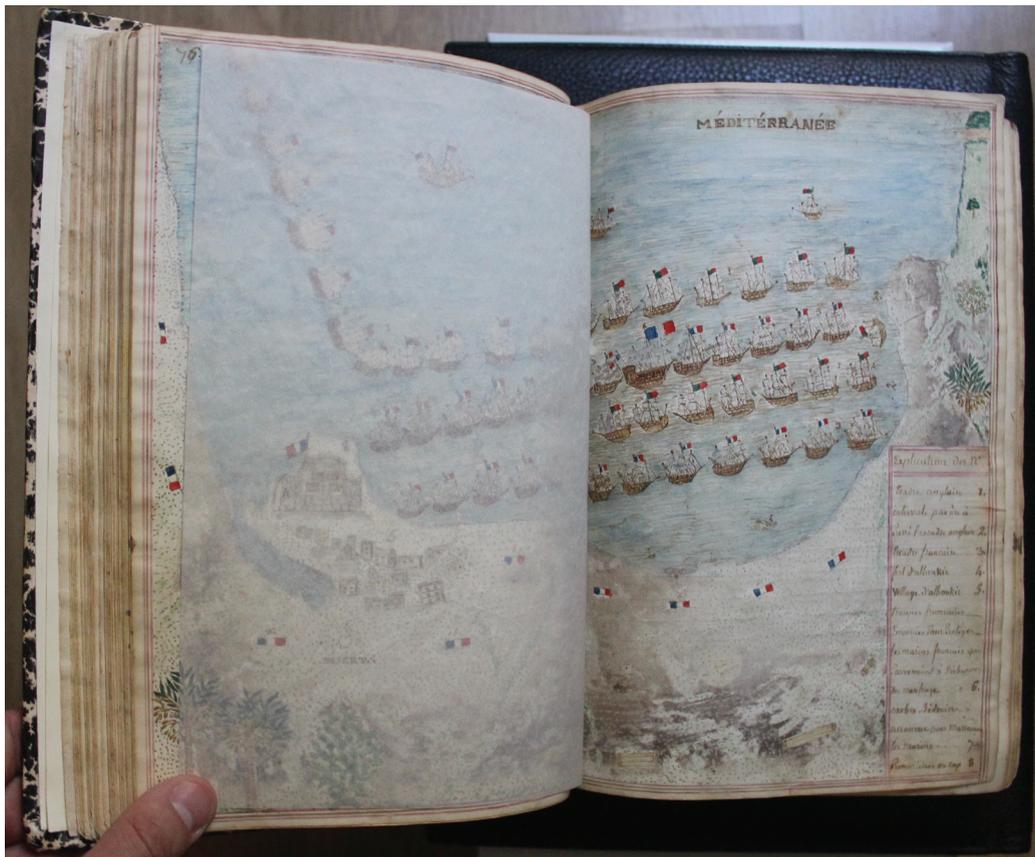


Figure 2. Example of a double-paged illustration with silk paper protection (First Battle of Aboukir) (courtesy of M. Méta y, photo R. Pietri).

Following a short historical note on the victory of Bonaparte's army in Italy – illustrated with a watercolour depicting the famous general – the author addresses the reader and recalls the main historical events that happened since Louis XVI's death. He also provides few personal details and anecdotes about his life. He did not study for long as schools were closed during the Revolution and, when he was only 13 years old, he decided to join the army. He left home without informing his parents in April 1793, and joined in May of the same year as a musician in the so-called '10ème Régiment de Neustrie', based in Grenoble in Southern France. He took part in the siege of Lyon and Toulon – where a young officer named Bonaparte completed his first military achievement against the English army – then continued in the first Italian campaign and followed Bonaparte in Egypt and Syria. He describes the Expedition to Egypt and Syria as 'the main topic of this manuscript'. Exhausted by the war and its misfortunes, the author left the army few months after his return from Egypt, on '15 Floréal an X' (= 5th May 1802) in the southern city of Nice. He was only 22 years old.

In this introduction, the author indicates that he wrote a diary during the Italian campaign but lost it when he was captured near Mantua by Hungarian soldiers fighting for the Austrian Empire. He was later released but we do not know what happened to his first notebook. As the author suggests in the first few pages, his notebook is a kind of diary of the Expedition but retroactively written, years after he came back from Egypt to France, using notes taken in the field.

The core of the notebook consists of the narrative about the Expedition. It begins with the French government taking the decision to gather boats and troops to invade a distant country – the name of which was only known to Bonaparte and his closest officers. It ends with the French defeat against England and the Ottoman Empire, after which the author came back to France with his decimated semi-

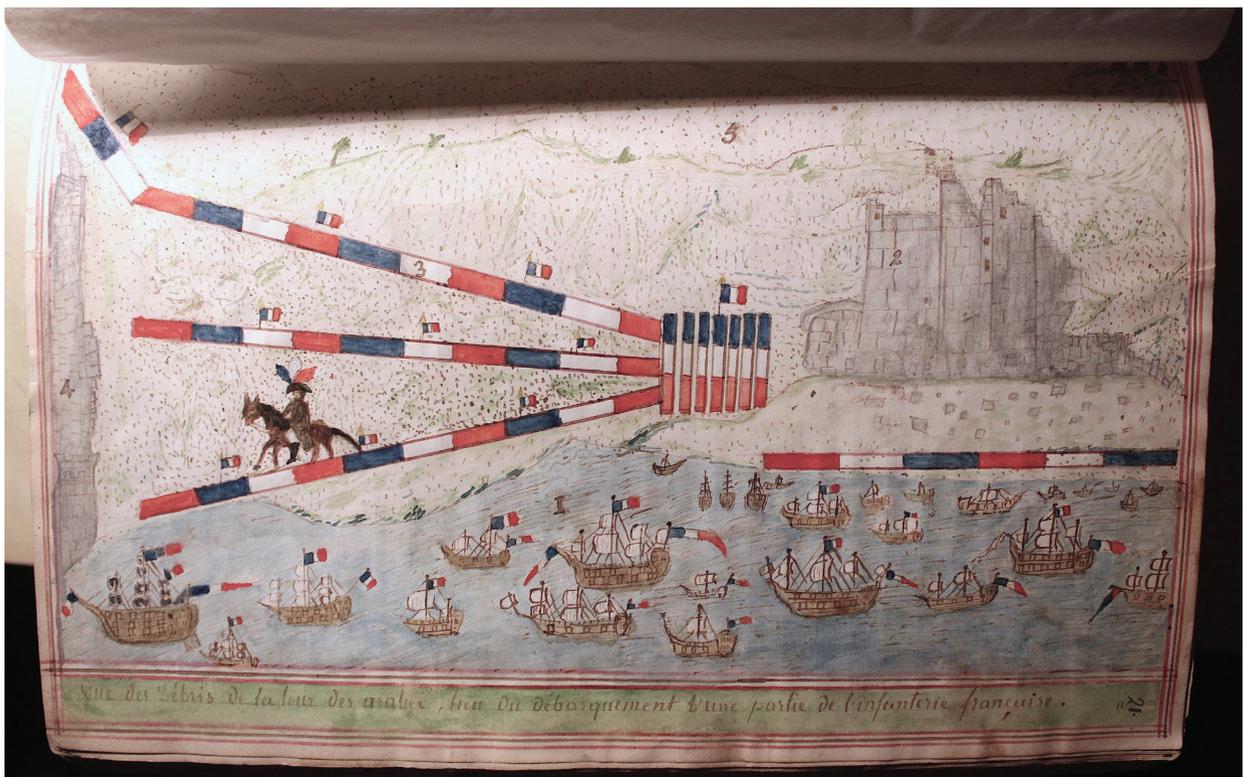


Figure 3. Example of a battle map with flags indicating the French army's lines (Attack on Alexandria) (courtesy of M. Méta, photo R. Pietri).

brigade. As the notebook was not fully filled, the author added some further thoughts about topics such as religion, the Napoleonic Empire, contemporary songs, 'VIP lists', historical anecdotes, and a very useful concluding chapter about his own life, detailing what happened to him after his return from Egypt. These all seem to have been added later, as indicated by the darker colour and better preservation of the ink.

The core of the book is written from a soldier's perspective and is expectedly dedicated to military considerations about the Expedition. It includes very long and detailed descriptions of the battles, but also summaries of daily events, sometimes focusing on the author's regiment or personal behaviour in the field, including not so glorious ones such as the plundering of dead corpses or the raping of women after the fight – the latter being implied through not so subtle allusions. Every battle, from the conquest of Alexandria to the capitulation, is described in great details and is usually illustrated with a type of military map that shows the positions of the armies – symbolised by their flags – and the battlefields' topography, along with explanatory captions (Fig. 3).



Figure 4. A Cairo mosque (courtesy of M. Métay, photo R. Pietri).

The author belonged to the 69th semi-brigade. Although he expectedly emphasises the achievements or difficulties of the latter, he never forgets to speak about the other divisions of the army and describes precisely the role of each one. Along with the 69th semi-brigade and a major part of the French army, he took part in the Battle of the Pyramids, went into Syria, and besieged el-Arich, Jaffa and Saint Jean d'Acre, where Bonaparte was forced to stop. He was also involved in various 'law enforcement' operations in several villages of the Nile Delta and fought during the second battle of Abukir. He never went into Upper Egypt as he was not among the soldiers accompanying Desaix to chase Murad Bey and his Mameluks, however he dedicated few pages to Desaix's expedition in the south, based on military reports he was able to gather and read when he was in garrison in Cairo.

The notebook was written by a 18th/19th century soldier and some of its stories may shock the modern reader. Indeed, murdering, plundering or even raping were quite usual behaviours among soldiers at that time. The author does not provide great details about his personal behaviour, but crudely describes some of his spoils such as the plundering of dead corpses in Alexandria and Syria, a common practice for fighters searching for money or valuables to sell to improve their daily life.

French soldiers' daily life in Egypt is well described in the notebook. The difficulties of a life in a foreign and exotic country encountered by young people who never left Europe before, including language issues and cultural misunderstanding, is omnipresent in the whole narrative. Soldiers suffered from heat, thirst, and hunger as they walked through the desert without any preparation. The supply system was not really efficient, and soldiers were forced to supply for themselves, robbing or trading with locals. However, life in garrison in Cairo was not totally devoid of pleasures. The author developed good relations with local inhabitants, enjoyed drinks and dinners with friends and, although not explicitly stated, had relationships with women. Prostitution was a common thing in occupied Cairo, and so was slavery despite its abolishment in France thanks to the Revolution.

Another main topic of the narrative is the naive discovery of modern Egypt by young French people born shortly before the beginning of the Revolution. Each battle and moment of peace becomes an opportunity for the author to take notes or draw sketches to try and understand the exotic and different civilisation that is Egypt. As a result, the author provides many details about the daily life in Cairo and in Arab tribes. As an atheist and child of the French Revolution, he seems especially fascinated by Islam and its related manners and customs. He draws one of Cairo mosques (Fig. 4), gives a Latin transcription of the *chahada*, the Islamic profession of faith, and comments on various Turkish and Arabic traditions such as Islamic justice or dances, or describes local diseases and coins.

Several coloured plates show the costumes and clothes traditionally worn by local populations, that is Turkish, Arabs, Turkish women, Coptics. As an evidence of the author's curiosity, a list of 'how to count in Arabic from 1 to 100' in Latin alphabet appears in the notebook. Interestingly the same list is also translated in Italian and in German, indicating that the author's curiosity is not limited to his experience in Egypt and Syria, but also extends to the countries he visited many years before as a young soldier taking part in the Italian Campaign. The author also dedicates a whole chapter to the Nile and its central role in Egypt, illustrated with watercoloured maps representing the country during the four seasons.

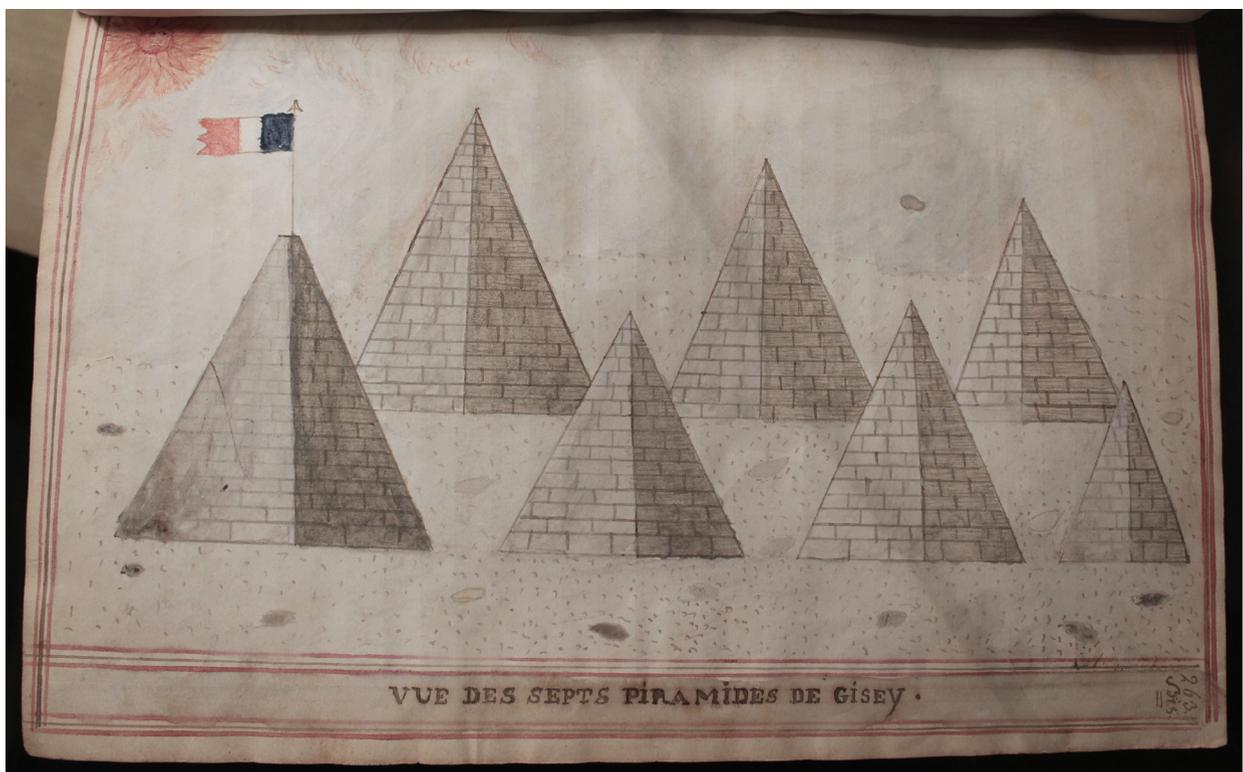


Figure 5. The Giza Pyramids (courtesy of M. Métaf, photo R. Pietri).



Figure 6. The Giza Sphinx (courtesy of M. Méta, photo R. Pietri).

Ancient Egypt is mentioned only few times in the notebook, notably with the author's visit to Giza with other soldiers, protected from the Arabs tribes by the French army. Two watercolours show respectively the Giza pyramids (Fig. 5) – with a French flag proudly floating over what is very likely to be Kheop's pyramid – and the Giza Sphinx (Fig. 6), drawn in a very naive style. The French flag is also depicted planted over the Pompey's Pillar in Alexandria. The description of the Pyramids and the Sphinx is directly inspired by contemporary books about ancient Egypt, based themselves on classical authors such as Herodotus and Diodorus of Sicily. As the author did not took part in the Upper Egypt Expedition with the general Desaix, he only dedicated few lines to the southern antiquities, just quickly mentioning the most important temples in the Theban region.

Beside his ethnographical fascination for modern Egypt, the author seems to have also a true passion for more or less exotic animals. On the pretext of a visit at the Cairo menagerie, which was controlled by the French scholars and scientists of the Expedition, the author dedicates not less than 52 pages including 27 plates only to animal depictions (Fig. 7). A total of one hundred and ten different animals are then depicted and described in what we can call a true 'paper zoo'. Each animal is related to a few lines caption, and numbered to facilitate the reader's understanding.

As far as I know, the Institute of Egypt's Cairo menagerie was never studied as such, but is mentioned in the Expedition's scholars letters or diaries. Even if, according to Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1902, 81, 92-3), the Cairo menagerie was full of exotic animals and comparable to the Paris' one. It seems obvious, in my opinion, that the author exaggerated and did not limit himself to such a zoo. Indeed, if a lot of animals are representatives of the Egyptian fauna, like the crocodile, the ibis, the hyena or the jackal, some of them seem a bit amazing for a 18th century Cairo zoo. Among others, we can find a bison, a yak, a lama, a racoon or a bird of paradise, and even a polar bear (Fig. 8). For this one at least, the related caption reveals how the poor beast came in Egypt from Russia and unfortunately died because of the climate, therefore we can be sure there were such exotic animals in the Cairo menagerie.



Figure 7. Example of captioned animal plate (courtesy of M. Méty, photo R. Pietri).

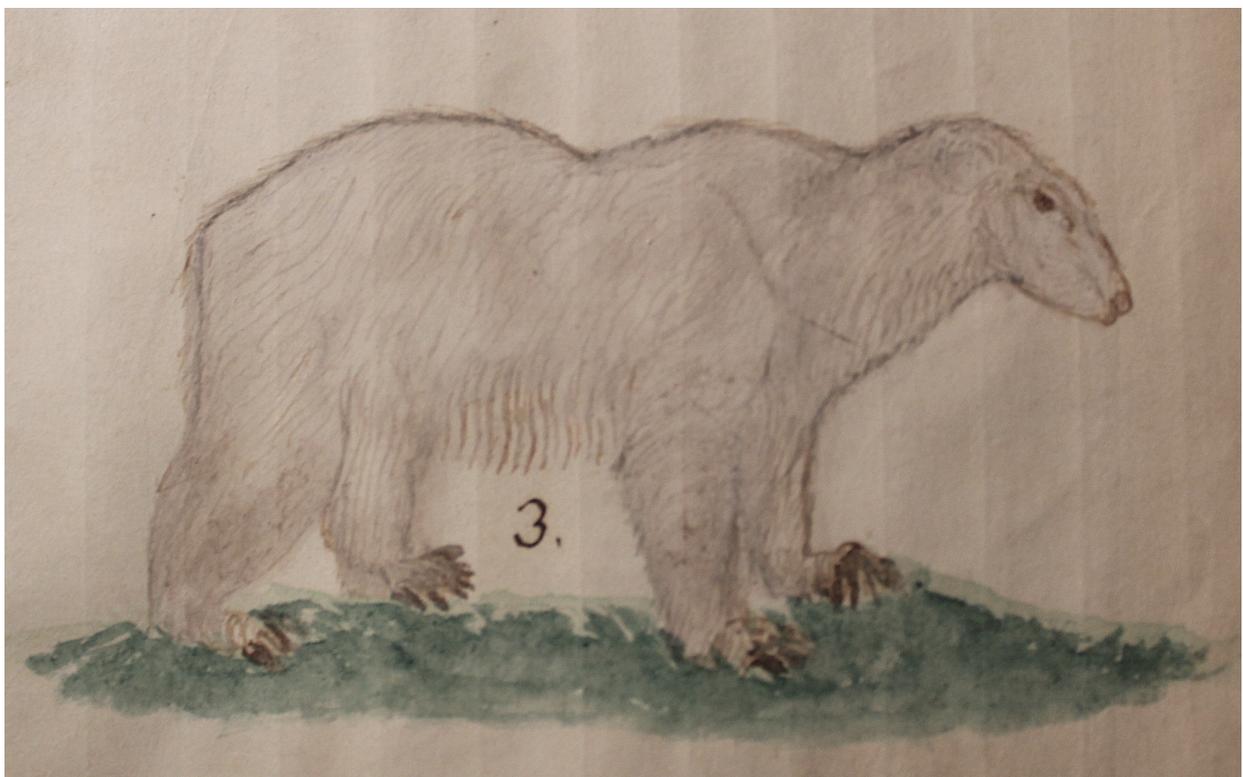


Figure 8. The polar bear (detail) (courtesy of M. Méty, photo R. Pietri).

But for dozens of animals especially including various bird and monkey species coming from Asia or South America, it is necessary to stay cautious about their possible presence in Cairo at that time, especially all together, and even considering the well known and very old Cairo's reputation as a place for exotic beasts, going back to the Medieval Times (Buquet 2013a, 2013b and 2014). Most of the descriptions given in the notebook are more or less copied or adapted from contemporary zoological works, especially the famous L. G.-L. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (Buffon 1749–1804), a reference book for zoology in the eighteenth century, or among other sources, the work of a french zoologist and ornithologist, R. P. Lesson (1836), which is quoted in a footnote.

The last 150 pages of the notebook are dedicated to various topics, in order to 'fulfill the manuscript', as the author says himself. This second part contains among other things some name lists, the most significative one being the 'list of the senators who voted the fall of Napoleon in 1815', which illuminates the author's opinion about his Emperor. Like most of Napoleon soldiers, the author was still faithful to his former general-in-chief, and despite the fact that in the appendices, a chapter is entitled 'the main mistakes of Napoleon'. A list detailing all the French governments which succeeded after the Empire is also given, which ends in 1851 with the 2nd December 1851 *coup* and then the election of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew and future new Emperor known as Napoleon III. A few pages are reserved for a short biography of Napoleon, followed by a collection of epitaphs inscribed by visitors in the Saint Helena Island registerbook kept next to the Emperor's tomb. Those epitaphs were likely copied from a non quoted contemporary book, published by E. le Guillou (1843, 336–8), who gives exactly the same texts but went himself to Saint Helena Island, and did the pilgrimage to Napoleon's tomb. This is not the only example where the author uses a contemporary source without reporting it: many historical anecdotes about Napoleon were directly adapted from the Duchess of Abrantès memoirs, published in the 1830's (Abrantès 1831–1835). To finish this quick panorama of the second part contents, one can mention a song, obviously entitled 'If Napoleon returned', a comparative study between the two Napoleon's wives and empresses, Joséphine and Marie-Louise – with a clear inclination for the first one, but also remarks about Arab tribes habits in Egypt, historical considerations on religions, from Islam to Hinduism and including Christianity and Judaism, a complete list of the numerous location the author visited during his military career, from France to Italy, and then to Egypt and Syria, and even a humorous chapter about French soldiers adventures in Italy, which this time is inspired by personal experiences. The concluding chapter is dedicated to the post-military life of the author, from 1802 when he left the army to 1846 and the following years when he retired in Grenoble.

At the end, the whole notebook is a kind of personal *Description de l'Égypte*, with many details, observations and remarks about everything the author saw himself or tried to document about, in Egypt and Syria, or after his return in France. He clearly wanted to be read and may have had the project to publish it, as he adresses the reader and use many editorial devices, such as footnotes, quotes, captions, page numbers and even a final table of contents. Last but not least, this notebook is probably based on a first one, about which it seems he was not satisfied enough.

A 'first version' published in 2007

In 2007 the so-called notebook of Joseph Laporte on the French Expedition in Egypt and Syria, in a facsimile edition of the original manuscript augmented with a preface by J. Tulard (Laporte 2007). In the preface, J. Tulard gave a light introduction about the historical interest of the document, underlining the low social status of its author, compared with other similar memoirs, and the watercolour illustrations using a naive and touching style. Flipping through the notebook, one

can quickly understand, if he knows the other one, that both notebooks were written by the same author: the hand is very close, for both writing and drawing, and topics are the same, for the narrative itself as for the illustrations. In the published notebook also, one can find the Giza Pyramids and Sphinx views, ethnographical plates depicting Arabic or Turkish clothes, flags plates, and so on.

Furthermore, a synoptic view of the introduction confirms that the author of both notebooks is the same:

Joseph Laporte's notebook published in 2007 (‘short/first version’)

Lecteur, l'auteur du récit abrégé des campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, se recommande à votre indulgence, il la mérite eu égard à sa jeunesse et au peu de temps qu'il avait consacré à son éducation, assez bien commencée mais que la révolution le força d'interrompre, les collèges ayant été fermés au commencement de 93, époque où il était en cinquième et ayant à peine quelques connaissances de l'histoire de France, de la géographie, du dessin et de la musique, étant dans sa treizième année lorsque après la mort de Louis XVI, la Patrie fut déclarée en danger, attaquée, envahie de toutes parts.

Les nombreux bataillons de volontaires qui s'étaient déjà formés et qui se formaient encore pour voler à la défense des frontières augmentèrent en lui le désir de partir, mais que faire, si jeune encore, il réussit cependant à se faire recevoir à force de prières dans une musique et partir sans rien dire à ses parents ; assista au siège de Lyon, à celui de Toulon, fit les premières campagnes de Piémont, d'Italie, et celle d'Allemagne qui amena la paix de Campo-Formio et successivement celles qui sont l'objet de ce manuscrit, servit neuf ans et demi savoir, quatre ans et demi comme musicien, et cinq ans comme sous-officier, toujours hors de France, et s'il eût eu quelques années de plus lors des premières campagnes il eût pu peut-être obtenir de l'avancement mais son extrême jeunesse fut un obstacle et à l'époque où il était susceptible d'en avoir, deux amalgames eurent lieu en Italie, et l'on fonda les cadres de neuf bataillons pour former une demi-brigade composée de trois ; ce qui amena dans le corps, trois chefs de demi-brigade, sept chefs de bataillons, huit ou neuf officiers et

Unpublished notebook (‘long/second version’)

Lecteur, l'auteur du récit abrégé des campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, se recommande à votre indulgence. Il la mérite eût égard à sa jeunesse et au peu de temps qu'il avait consacré à son éducation assez bien commencé, mais que la révolution le força d'interrompre, les collèges ayant été fermés en l'année 1793, époque où il était en cinquième, ayant à peine quelques connaissances de l'histoire romaine, de France, de la géographie, du dessin et de la musique, étant dans sa treizième année lorsque après la mort de Louis XVI, la Patrie fut déclarée en danger, attaquée et envahie de toutes parts.

Les nombreux bataillons de volontaires qui s'étaient déjà formés et qui se formaient encore dans toute la France augmentèrent en moi le désir de partir, mais que faire si jeune encore, à quoi pouvais-je être bon; à force de démarches de prières et de persévérance je finis cependant par réussir, et fus agréé et enrôlé comme musicien dans le 10^{me} Régiment (Neustrie) qui se trouvait à Grenoble, pour se réorganiser et compléter, soit par des enrôlements volontaires, soit par des réquisitionnaires qui rejoignaient journellement, et partis en avril 1793, sans en prévenir mes parents, assistai au siège de Lyon, à celui de Toulon, fis les premières campagnes en Piémont, celles d'Italie, ainsi que celle d'Allemagne qui amena la Paix de Campo-Formio dont les préliminaires avaient été signés à Léoben, après que l'armée d'Italie eût gagné et battu les ennemis de la France dans quatorze batailles rangées et quatre vingts combats meurtriers, pris cinq cents pièces de canons de campagne, deux mille pièces de gros calibre dans les places fortes, quatre équipages

un nombre extraordinaire de sous-officiers par compagnies ; de sorte qu'il n'y eut pour ainsi aucun avancement dans l'armée jusqu'à ce que tous ces officiers ou sous-officiers eussent été placés en remplacement des tués ou estropiés; à la paix de Campo-Formio il y eut quelques retraites de données et quelques réformes de faites, il resta néanmoins encore beaucoup d'officiers et de sous-officiers surnuméraires qui ne devinrent titulaires que pendant les campagnes d'Égypte au fur et à mesure des extinctions, mais les batailles et combats multipliés que cette petite armée eût à livrer pendant plus de trois années ayant presque moissonné tous les soldats et n'ayant jamais reçu de recrues depuis la dernière amalgame, on fut obligé de doubler les compagnies faute de soldats et dès lors encore moins d'avancement, les seules récompenses étaient pour les actions d'éclats, et on donnait des sabres et des fusils d'honneur ; de retour en France on dédoublait les compagnies à la réception de quinze cents conscrits, et il y eut à cette époque un peu d'avancement ; mais la paix ayant été depuis peu conclue à Amiens et ma santé étant entièrement délabrée je bornai mes desirs à pouvoir obtenir mon congé, ce qui me donna assez de peine attendu que je n'avais pas le temps de service requis, car la loi portait que cette faveur ne serait accordée qu'à ceux qui auraient onze ans de service et il n'y avait dans ce cas là que ceux qui étaient partis en 91 dans les premiers bataillons de volontaires, il me manquait un an et demi, mais la protection dont m'honorait un adjudant major qui m'avait pris en amitié dès le principe et qui m'avait presque servi de père, ainsi que celle du chef de brigade dont j'étais le seul compatriote dans la brigade, furent cause que j'obtins après avoir réitéré mes instances, ce que je désirais; le chef de brigade avait d'autres vues sur moi, et il me l'avait dit souvent en Égypte, je le remerciai de ses bonnes intentions, et me retirai dans le courant de Floréal, de l'an dix, dans mes foyers, n'ayant pas encore vingt-deux ans. J'avais également commencé en Italie un recueil de ces campagnes, mais ayant été fait prisonnier au siège de Mantoue et ayant été entièrement dévalisé je fus contraint de le cesser.

de ponts, cent mille prisonniers, et envoyé en France plus de trente millions, ainsi qu'une quantité d'objets précieux adressée au Musée de Paris &a: tous ces faits mémorables furent accomplis depuis les batailles de Montenotte, de Millesimo, de Dégo, de Leva et de Mondovi, qui eurent lieu immédiatement après la nomination et l'arrivée du Général en chef Bonaparte, nommé au commandement de l'armée d'Italie, composée à peine de trente mille hommes, mourants de faim sur leurs montagnes du Piémont et de la Ligurie, sans vêtements ni souliers et presque démoralisés, jusques à la conclusion de la paix de Campo-Formio, dans l'intervalle de moins de trois années; et successivement les brillantes et pénibles campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, qui sont le principal objet de ce manuscrit. Servis dix ans, savoir: quatre ans comme musicien et six ans comme sous officier. Constantement hors de France, et si j'eusse eût, lors de mes premières campagnes, quelques années de plus nul doute que j'aurais obtenu de l'avancement étant assez favorisé par la nature et d'un caractère bien décidé même aventureux, mais mon extrême jeunesse fut un obstacle et à l'époque où j'en aurais été susceptible, deux amalgames eurent lieu à peu d'intervalle, en Piémont, et en Italie, l'on fondit les cadres de neuf bataillons, pour former ceux d'une ½ brigade ou régiment, ce qui amena dans le corps trois chefs de ½ Bde ou colonels, sept chefs de bataillons, huit ou neuf officiers par compagnies et un nombre extraordinaire de sous officier et caporaux, de sorte qu'il n'y eût pour ainsi dire aucune avancement dans l'armée jusques à ce que tous ces officiers supérieurs et autres, ainsi que les sous-officiers, eussent remplacés les tués estropiés ou prisonniers ; à la paix de Campo-Formio il y eût quelques retraites de données et quelques réformes de faites, mais il resta néanmoins encore beaucoup d'officiers et de sous officiers surnuméraires qui ne devinrent titulaires que pendant la guerre en Orient, au fur et à mesure des extinctions, mais les batailles et combats multipliés et trop souvent répétés que cette petite armée eût à livrer

pendant près de quatre années, ayant presque moissonnés officiers et soldats, n'ayant jamais reçue de recrues depuis l'occupation du Piémont, on fut par le manque de soldats, obligé sur la fin de doubler les compagnies, et dès lors encore moins d'avancement, car les seules et rares récompenses étaient réservées pour les grandes actions d'éclat exécutées sous les yeux des Généraux, alors on donnait des sabres, fusils et baguettes d'honneur, et je puis certifier qu'à quelques exceptions près, les hommes gradés sont restés dans leur statu-quo jusques à la réorganisation de l'armée française qui eût lieu après la paix d'Amiens ; de retour en France sur la fin de l'an VIII nos compagnies furent dédoublées la ½ Brigade reçut un bataillon supplémentaire formé en Italie de notre dépôt, renforcé de nos prisonniers rendus et des malades et blessés sortis des hopitaux, plus de quinze cents conscrits, alors la ½ Brigade forte de 3600 après la deuxième amalgame, au moment de l'embarquement n'en comptait plus que 1800+, et à son retour d'Égypte 483 : se trouva ensuite avoir un effectif de 2700 hommes au moment où l'armée expéditionnaire sortit d'Italie et de France sous les ordres de Bonaparte ; sauf l'Angleterre voisine, l'Italie conquise ou organisée était tranquille mais après son départ l'Angleterre gagna l'empereur d'Allemagne et autres souverains et pendant que nous conquerrions l'Égypte, on expulsait les Français de presque toute l'Italie, mais le retour inopiné de Bonaparte, la prise de possession du gouvernement suivie de la mémorable et décisive Bataille de Marengo, amena une seconde paix avec l'empereur d'Autriche, celui de Russie et successivement avec l'Angleterre notre implacable ennemie, et la paix générale fut enfin conclue et signée à Amiens. En 1800, à cette époque on donna beaucoup de congés, ma santé était entièrement délabrée, je bornai mes désirs à obtenir de rentrer dans mes foyers, ce qui me donna assez de peine attendu que je n'avais pas le temps de service requis, car la loi portait que cette faveur n'était accordée qu'aux militaires qui avaient onze ans de service révolus, et il n'y avait dans cette catégorie que ceux qui avaient concourus à la formation des premiers

Bataillons de Volontaires qui avait eû lieu en 1791, où les militaires estropiés où atteints de graves infirmités, et quoi qu'ayant reçu quelques légères blessures été fait prisonnier je ne pus rien obtenir à la Revue de l'inspecteur Général Decaen ; il me manquait plus d'un an, mais la protection dont m'honorait le chef de ½ Brigade Brun, dont j'étais dans son corps le seul compatriote, m'ayant à diverses époques promis son appui quand le moment serait arrivé, et celle d'un adjudant major qui m'avait pris en amitié dès la première campagne sur les montagnes du Piémont, je finis mais non sans peine par obtenir ce que je desirais, ces deux braves officiers avaient d'autres projets sur mon avenir militaire, je les remerciais de leurs bonnes intentions ainsi que d'autres chefs et officiers, et quittai le corps à Nice, le 15 Floréal an 10, en compagnie du citoyen Ravanat, D'Eyben chirurgien au 2me Bon de la ½ Bridage depuis quelques temps, étant dans ma vingt-troisième année. J'avais également tenu en Italie un journal des principaux évènements militaires de ces glorieuses campagnes, avec ordre et fidélité, mais ayant été fait prisonnier à la Bataille de St Georges, devant Mantoue et entièrement dévalisé par des hongrois, je fus forcé de renoncer à sa continuation mais non à celle de réparer les pertes pécuniaires que j'avais éprouvées, l'occasion s'en présenta quinze jours après dès la Bataille de la Favorite également sous Mantoue où toute la division Provera fut obligée de mettre bas les armes après avoir perdu beaucoup de monde, un jeune Cadet de Vienne me remboursa avec usure tout ce qui m'avait été enlevé à St. Georges, tel est le sort des militaires.

As we can see, even if those incipit have a lot in common – especially the content – the unpublished version is a longer, more detailed and complete one. As we will see further, the short, already published version, was probably written some time before the longer, which is thus a kind of 'second edition'. Although both versions are very close, it should be noted that there are some other important differences between them.

The short version includes 430 pages and 34 plates, when the long one, as we saw above, is 709 pages and 66 plates. A brief survey of the main narrative about the Expedition shows also more or less minor differences, one of the most interesting being the tendency for the author, in the longer version, to give more personal details about his own behaviour, during and after the fights. But the main difference between the two notebooks are the Cairo menagerie description and the second part with appendices, succinctly described above, which are both missing in the short version. In this latter, one can find some plates depicting animals, but there are quite rare in comparison with the longer version, and there is no related scientific captions. If the second version was probably written to improve the first one, it seems that it also served as a pretext for the author to satisfy his personal taste for zoology.

The author's identity

Neither in this notebook or in the second one is the name of the author given, but as we already saw above, internal clues about the life of the narrator confirm that both writers are the same, as well as the illustrations and the text itself, which is often a sort of 'copy-paste' from a version to another. The writing and drawing hand are also close enough to establish a close link between both versions, as previously noted.

The attribution to a soldier of the 69th semi-brigade named Joseph Laporte to the author of the short version, published in 2007, was suggested by J. Tulard (Laporte 2007). However, in my opinion, there is unfortunately no sufficient clue to be sure that this identification is correct. Indeed, if I was able to find a Joseph Laporte in the 69th semi-brigade register book, some details in his personal data does not match with what we know of the author, according to both notebooks. One can read in the army register book that Joseph Laporte was born in Grenoble, in 1768, and was the son of François and Catherine Gaber. But the notebooks' author was only 13 years old in 1793 when he joined the army, as he precises himself in the text, so he should be born in Grenoble, but in 1780. In the register, Joseph Laporte joined the army on 15th May 1793, so the same month and year than the notebooks' author, but was incorporated in the 6th Regiment of Var, when the author says he joined the '10^{ème} Régiment de Neustrie'. Still according to the register, Laporte left the army on 6th Germinal, year X, after the review of the general inspector Decaen, but in the notebooks, the author leaves the army on 15th Floréal, year X, but explicitly says it was not thanks to Decaen.

As we can see, the identification of the author with Joseph Laporte seems to be unlikely. The identity of the author is therefore still to confirm or to determine, but as the long unpublished version is more complete than the first one, the final chapter, speaking mainly about the author's life during the first part of the 19th century, should allow in the future to identify him by using the national and local archives in France.

Indeed, the last chapter of the long version, totally missing in the short one, is dedicated to the author's civil career. One can learn there many details about his personal life, much more than the few anecdotes mentioned in the main narrative. When he was 25 years old, in 1805, the author, who lived in the Grenoble area since he left the army, went to Lyon in order to study. He stayed in the city of Lyon for 5 months, then going back to Grenoble, and married in September 1805, probably in Grenoble itself, before moving to the neighbouring city of Tullins. In 1806, shortly after he arrived in Tullins, he got a place as 'greffier de la justice de paix du canton', after being recommended because of his military career. He became also 'receveur de l'hospice', and after the Napoleon's defeat in Russia in 1812, was promoted captain in the local National Guard. When Napoleon triumphantly came back from his first exile in Elba Island, he took the lead of a group of his partisans, and because of that, was placed under surveillance during the so-called Second Restoration, under the reign of Louis XVIII. At the end of year 1827, his wife fell sick, and died in shortly after January 1828. When the July Revolution happened in 1830, he was appointed again officer in the National Guard, and became municipal councillor, then 'adjudant major' in the local battalion. Finally tired by the political discussions and plots, and to heal his sciatica, he retired in 1846 and moved to Grenoble again. In 1849, he inherited, and according to him, reached a social rank comparable to that of a colonel.

Writing date of both notebooks

About the writing date of the notebook, it is easier to suggest an hypothesis. Luckily, both notebooks include a list of the various French governments succeeding to the Napoleonic Empire. In the short one, this list ends with the July Monarchy (beginning in 1830), and in a page mentioning important officers

of the Empire (Laporte 2007, 414), we can find an even more recent date, 1842, precisising the death year of Bertrand Clauzel, a noble promoted under Napoleon's reign and Maréchal de France under Louis-Philippe. In the long one, i.e. the unpublished one, the same list ends with the Napoleon III coup in December 1851, and then his election; the following new constitution established in January 1852 is also mentioned. At that time, the author was already 72 years old.

Therefore, the first notebook was not completed before 1842 and the last addition to the second dates back to 1852. Because of those dates and because the unpublished version is longer and more complete than the published one, it should have been written later, after 1842, which is confirmed by footnotes quoting books from the 1840's – such as the R. P. Lesson book or the stories inspired by the Duchess of Abrantès memoirs. It seems likely that it was written mainly from 1842 to 1849, as the last chapter is entitled *Quelques lignes sur ce qui m'est personnel pour terminer mon manuscrit en l'an 1846 ou suivantes*, and the last line of this chapter mentions the year 1849. The major part of the notebook was thus finished in 1846, but the author did later minor additions until 1852, including probably few corrections and footnotes in the main narrative about the Expedition, as shown by the darker ink. There is still to explain why the author wrote two different versions of the same narrative, but it seems that few years after he finished the first one, he decided to make a more complete version, as the second one includes a wider amount of details, especially about the author's personal behaviour, more plates, and includes the Cairo menagerie description part which is totally missing in the first version, as well as extended appendices about various topic.

Conclusion

Many questions are still to be answered: was Joseph Laporte really the author of both notebooks? Is there any other trace of him in the 19th century documentation? If he was not, who was the author? Why did he wrote two different versions and did he want to publish one of them, as it seems to be revealed by many kind of 'editorial indications' that we can find in both versions? How far can we say his notebook is a personal testimony or was also inspired by other contemporary published books about the French Expedition in Egypt?

With a bit of luck, many of those questions should be answered by further researches in the departmental and national French archives, including documents belonging to the current Ministry of Armies and Ministry of Justice, as the author was first a soldier then working as a registrar for local court. Ideally, after a complete study, it would be especially interesting to publish the second version in the same way than the previous one, i.e. in facsimile and with a substantial introduction and commentary, giving details about the author and his purpose when writing both notebooks. To reach this goal, a conservation program will be necessary, in order to restore the bookbinding and the watercoloured illustrations, what will probably imply a fund raising. As the author of this notebook clearly intended to be read, such a publication would be a fair tribute to someone who suffered as much, but came back from Egypt as fascinated as we are, more than two hundred years after the Expedition which paved the way to the birth of Egyptology.

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