

Orientalists in uniform?
British military encounters and
experiences in Egypt, c1798-1801

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of British soldiers and sailors during Britain's military intervention in Egypt between 1798 and 1801. The operations which took place in these years have been examined in the literature from strategic and geopolitical perspectives, but they have not been appreciated in the context of travel writing or orientalism. This thesis considers whether the British armed forces were contributors to orientalism. Although military personnel were not ordinary travel writers or orientalists, they were undoubtedly influenced by popular travel and orientalist literature. Their different experiences produced accounts that showed a distinctive blend of military narrative, travelogue and orientalist analysis, which has not received the attention deserved.

Chapter one emphasizes the diversity of British military views about the Egyptian landscape and climate, and highlights the distinctiveness of these views in comparison to civilian travellers. Chapter two examines the variety of military responses to objects and structures of antiquity in Egypt. It argues that the pursuit of antiquarianism was not at odds with the military occupation, and highlights the motivations behind the military collection of antiquities. Chapter three explores the ways in which British servicemen perceived their identity and a sense of difference from Near Eastern culture as they described encounters with the local peoples. It argues that military writing in Egypt reflects the confused and ever-changing understandings of different races and societies in this period. Chapters four and five consider the British response to the military bodies encountered in Egypt - the Ottomans and the Mamluks - whose lack of western characteristics was central to the British appraisal of them. This resulted in contradictory views amongst the British, who admired their exoticism but condemned the seemingly corrupt and backward state of their society.

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

We were now upon Scripture ground; we had come from a distant island of the sea to the country of the proud Pharaohs to carry on war where Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great, Caesar, and other great warriors had put armies in motion.¹

Written by Daniel Nicol, a sergeant in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, as he described Egypt's Mediterranean coast near Alexandria, this passage encapsulates many elements of the British soldier's experience in the Egyptian campaign in 1801. Nicol was acutely aware of Egypt's biblical importance, and he expressed excitement at his proximity to the grand civilizations and great figures of antiquity. His experiences were framed by comparisons to his own nation, "a distant island of the sea". Britain's military performance in Egypt was to be compared with the achievements of those from antiquity. Nicol's view of the history and religion of Egypt had a martial inflection, but his discussion of such topics was inspired by, and draws parallels with, the writings of civilian travellers and orientalists.

Nicol's quotation highlights that there was much more to soldiering in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars than the experience of battle, but these experiences have, until recently, tended to be neglected by military and social histories of Britain in this period. As Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack note in a recent article published for the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo, military history can often seem depersonalized, as it concentrates on grand strategy and battlefield tactics, or the importance of institutions and technology for the war effort. Although military history has at times engaged with the perspective of the common soldier, it has been primarily concerned with group psychology and morale and ascertaining the combat effectiveness of the men, rather than assessing their individual experiences.² This is

¹ Daniel Nicol, *Sergeant Nicol: The Experiences of a Gordon Highlander During the Napoleonic Wars in Egypt, the Peninsula and France* (Milton Keynes: Lenaur, 2007, repr.), 45.

² Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, 'Wellington's Men: The British Soldier of the Napoleonic Wars', *History Compass* 13, no.6, (2015): 288-296.

certainly the case for the British campaign in Egypt. The two most detailed works on the campaign, Edward Ingram's series of four articles titled 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt' and Piers Mackesy's *British Victory in Egypt*, address the geopolitical history and operational history of the campaign respectively.³ In the first of his four articles, Ingram argues that the Egyptian campaign in 1801 was the outcome of a cabinet crisis in September and October 1800. It was the climax of an ongoing debate that began in June 1798 when Napoleon landed at Alexandria at the head of 40,000 men. Ingram describes the frustrating stalemate between two parties in cabinet: those who supported a continuation of military efforts against France on the European continent, and those who thought Britain's limited manpower should be dedicated to the defence of India.⁴

The initial alarmed reaction at the threat of the French occupation to India quickly dissipated when on 1 August 1798, a British naval squadron under Horatio Nelson annihilated the French fleet that had escorted Napoleon to Egypt at the Battle of the Nile. Napoleon and his army were left stranded. On hearing the news, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, wrote of his certainty that the French garrison would rot away through disease and homesickness.⁵ Subsequent events reinforced this view. In the spring of 1799, Napoleon's advance into Israel (then Syria) was halted at the walls of Acre, and forced into retreat. By August 1799, Napoleon had abandoned his army and returned to France. Contrary to expectations however, the French garrison in Egypt did not disintegrate, and after the collapse of the Second Coalition which made

³ Edward Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the first British expedition to Egypt – I: the cabinet crisis of September 1800', *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no.3 (1994): 435-460; Edward Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the first British expedition to Egypt – II: The Mediterranean Campaign, 1800-1', *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no.4 (1994): 699-723; Edward Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – III: The Red Sea Campaign, 1800-1', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.1 (1995): 146-169; Edward Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV: Occupation and Withdrawal, 1801-3', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.2 (1995): 317-346; Piers Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt, The End of Napoleon's Conquest* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks repr., 2010).

⁴ Ingram, 'Geopolitics – cabinet crisis', 435-460.

⁵ Grenville to Rufus King, 4 October 1798, *The Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, esq., Preserved at Dropmore*, ed. John Fortescue (London: The Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1892-1910), vol. 4, 334-335.

peace negotiations inevitable, Britain was increasingly concerned with their removal. Henry Dundas, the secretary for war, had repeatedly attempted to persuade the cabinet to send an expeditionary force to Egypt. Finally, on 3 October 1800 he got his way. The British could not leave India permanently endangered by the French control of Egypt. Ingram argues the episode revealed much about British war aims: when defeat seemed imminent in Europe, the defence of the Indian empire took precedence over continental commitments.⁶

In his second and third articles, Ingram outlines the progress of the expedition itself. He portrays the campaign as a race against time as the British sought to defeat the French before the cabinet at home agreed to less favourable peace terms. Orders were dispatched for two separate armies to converge on Egypt and force a French surrender. In March 1801, just over 17,000 men landed at Aboukir Bay under the command of General Ralph Abercromby. A second force of 8,000 men under General David Baird sailed from Bombay in January 1801 and arrived at Kossier, on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea, in May. From there, they marched across the desert to the Nile, and then sailed downstream to Cairo. The two forces were to coordinate their advance with an Ottoman army advancing on Cairo from Jaffa. Ingram highlights the ridiculousness of this ambitious pincer movement, citing the impossibility of separate armies synchronizing their movements hundreds if not thousands of miles apart from one another. The timetable was laid down precisely and made no allowance for delays.⁷

Piers Mackesy approaches the campaign from a different perspective. His detailed operational narrative describes the British victory as one against the odds, and a critical moment for the British army. Outnumbered, ill-equipped and led by the aging general Abercromby, who possessed a dubious military record and even worse eyesight, the British army decisively defeated Napoleon's veterans for the first time in the Revolutionary wars. Although the victory was a small one, not to be compared with the major battles on the European continent, nor won quickly enough to influence peace negotiations, it did appear to ensure the safety of the British Empire, and proved

⁶ Ingram, 'Geopolitics – cabinet crisis', 435.

⁷ See: Ingram, 'Geopolitics - Mediterranean Campaign, 1800-1', 699-723; Ingram, 'Geopolitics -Red Sea Campaign, 1800-1', 146-169.

a turning point in the reputation of the British army. Since the Seven Years War, the army had known nothing but failure. Expelled from the American colonies after the War of Independence, driven out of the Low Countries by the Revolutionary armies in 1793-4, British forces had been obliterated by yellow fever and malaria during an inconclusive campaign in the West Indies. The 24 months prior to the Egyptian expedition added to these disappointments. In autumn 1799, a second campaign in Holland ended in failure. In 1800, three separate amphibious assaults were aborted at the last minute, at Belle Ile in June, the Spanish naval base at Ferrol in August, and at Cadiz in October. By 1801, the reputation of the British army had plummeted to arguably its lowest ever depth. It had become, said Lord Cornwallis, “the scorn and laughing stock of friends and foes.”⁸ Lady Holland’s fashionable sneer “How harmless an English military force is against an enemy in battle array” validated Cornwallis’ statement.⁹ The Egyptian campaign provided the model for the victorious army of the Peninsular War, which, by 1815, was envied throughout Europe. Much of the success Mackesy attributes to Abercromby. Although not the greatest battlefield commander, he prepared his men thoroughly for the campaign through rigorous planning and training. This preparation paid dividends in the landing on the Aboukir peninsula on 8 March, and in the victory at the battle of Alexandria on 21 March. Abercromby died from wounds he received a week after the battle, but he had struck the decisive blow against French morale.¹⁰ After their defeat at Alexandria, the homesick French were unable to mount a vigorous defence. Cairo surrendered to Anglo-Ottoman forces in July, followed by Alexandria in September.

This focus on the military history of the British campaign in Egypt has left other historical approaches neglected. This has not been the case for the French campaign. Juan Cole for instance, examines French encounters with Egyptian culture, its ancient antiquities and the climate of the country. He frames these experiences as the first modern attempt to invade the Arab world, which invented and crystallized the rhetoric

⁸ Lord Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, (London: 1859), vol.3, 300, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 3.

⁹ Elizabeth Lady Holland, *Journal of Elizabeth, Lady Holland (1791-1811)* (London: 1908), vol.2, 62, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 3.

¹⁰ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*.

of liberal imperialism.¹¹ Others have studied the team of 167 hand-picked ‘savants’ who accompanied the French forces, and their role in catalysing the ‘Egyptomania’ which took hold in France, and to some extent in Britain, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.¹² By contrast, the British campaign has often been dismissed as a footnote to the French occupation. It has been assumed that the significance of the operation lay solely in bringing about an ignominious end to Napoleon’s ambitions in the Middle East. Perhaps one reason for this is that the British campaign lacked the romantic charm of the French occupation. They brought no ‘savants’ with them and possessed a single primary objective: to expel the French from Egypt. Added to this, the political and strategic consequences for Britain were mostly short term. The campaign played a significant role during the ongoing peace negotiations, yet historians have assumed its repercussions went no further once hostilities between Britain and France resumed in 1803. The campaign itself was also very short: begun in March 1801, the British secured a French capitulation by the end of September. However, by British standards of the time, the campaign was a major operation: 22,000 troops landed in Egypt. It was rare for such large numbers of military personnel from a wide range of nations – England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Corsica, Menorca, India, Ceylon and even France – to serve together in the same army in a foreign country.¹³ Certainly, in the eyes of Britons at home, the campaign was an important victory. In a review of Lt.-Col. Sir Robert Thomas Wilson’s *History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, the *Annual Register* declared:

There is no subject in the annals of English history
which more deserves the attention of a British reader,

¹¹ Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

¹² See: Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, ‘The Greatest Glory’* (London: Vintage, 2008); Diego Saglia, ‘Consuming Egypt: Appropriation and the Cultural Modalities of Romantic Luxury’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24, no.3 (2002): 317-332; Rashad Rushdy, *The Lure of Egypt for English Travel Writers during the Nineteenth Century* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1953); Nina Burleigh, *Mirage, Napoleon’s Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

¹³ Paul Fox & Fergus Robson, *British and French Soldiers in Egypt and in the Levant, 1798—1918. Introductory Text to the Exhibition of www.mwme.eu* (2015),
URL: <http://www.mwme.eu/essays/index.html>.

than this ever memorable expedition, which completely defeated the boldest project of ambition Bonaparte had ever conceived, and at the same time recovered and supported the ancient character of the British army, which had perhaps been somewhat clouded in the course of the last war by ill success on the continent.¹⁴

Similar views were expressed elsewhere. The *Monthly Review* stated that “Though the tale of glory respecting the Egyptian expedition has been so frequently repeated, we still dwell on it without satiety...”¹⁵

Orientalism and identities

Most significantly, the British and French campaigns in Egypt have been often overlooked by scholars of orientalism. One of the most significant works to date on the relationship between the military and orientalism has been written by Patrick Porter, who examines the ‘western’ practice of comparing ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ militaries. Porter emphasizes that war is a potent site of orientalism, and tracks ‘western’ visions of ‘eastern’ warfare from antiquity to the present.¹⁶ He highlights the distinctiveness of military views of the ‘east’, and argues that war was a crucial medium through which the calibre of one’s own and other civilizations was judged. In battle, cultural differences tended to dissolve and soldiers developed affinities with one another, irrespective of their background. Although Porter addresses a broad period, he considers military orientalism a modern phenomenon, and tailors his conclusions towards how ‘eastern’ warriors have shaped ‘western’ armies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is little comment on how the image of ‘eastern’ warriors had an impact on ‘western’ forces in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

¹⁴ *Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature. For the Year 1803. review of History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, by Robert Thomas Wilson. 44 (1805): 855.

¹⁵ *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal. review of Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt...*, by Thomas Walsh. 41 (May – August 1803): 127. See also: *Annual Review and History of Literature. review of History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, by Robert Thomas Wilson. 1 (1803): 311-320.

¹⁶ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 2-3, 33-34.

Aside from Porter's admirable contribution, work on this subject is scarce because, despite the recent popularity of studies of orientalism, little work has been done on the relationship between orientalism and the military. The vast body of scholarship relating to orientalism produced in the past forty years, has relegated war largely to the periphery. According to historian Douglas Peers, there are several reasons for this, including what he describes as the anti-intellectual traditions of military history and the anti-military traditions of intellectual history.¹⁷ One could argue that the current state of orientalist scholarship has been defined largely by Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. First published in 1978, Said's book is 40 years old, yet it remains difficult to discuss the subject of orientalism without reference to it. Said argued, controversially, that orientalism is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies that produced it, which makes much orientalist work inherently political and servile to power. This argument bitterly divided oriental scholars. Since 1978, traditional orientalists such as Albert Hourani, Robert Irwin and Bernard Lewis, have all focused primarily on an intellectual history of orientalism to oppose Said's views.¹⁸

For Said, the starting point for orientalism was the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. He argues that it stimulated the growing interest in the whole field of scholarship in the 'east'. Travellers, soldiers, administrators, artists and poets began to collaborate, consciously or not, in a vast undertaking of geopolitical espionage. This argument has attracted great criticism, yet it is difficult to find fault with one fundamental point made by Said – that the French invasion brought about the birth of

¹⁷ Douglas M. Peers, 'Colonial Knowledge and the Military in India 1780-1860', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, no.2 (2005): 162, 166-169.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978, repr. 1995), 42, 80-89; Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin Books, 2006); Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 99-118. For an overview of the impact of Edward Said's *Orientalism* on orientalist literature, see: John Mackenzie, *Orientalism History, theory and the arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); A. L. Macfie, 'Introduction', in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. A. L. Macfie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1-10.

modern orientalism.¹⁹ Certainly there are grounds to justify this assertion: the British and French campaigns enabled the work of prominent orientalists and travellers who visited Egypt to reach a wider audience in Britain than ever before.²⁰ Yet the importance of this statement has often gone unnoticed amidst the fierce debates surrounding Said's work, and the British campaign has yet to be examined with regard to its role in the development of modern orientalist scholarship.²¹

Although Said remains an influential figure in this field of literature, there have been other important contributions published in more recent decades. Aslı Çırakman provides one of the best examples, in her research on European attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. She argues that once evidence of Ottoman decline emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, European attitudes towards the Ottomans drastically changed. Western admiration and fear that had accompanied Ottoman expansion into Eastern Europe from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, was replaced by the concept of oriental despotism. This term implied a static and slavish society, and a backward and corrupt government with arbitrary and ferocious rulers, who governed servile and timid subjects. Çırakman emphasizes the importance of Baron de Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, published in 1748, in formulating this eighteenth century definition of oriental despotism. Montesquieu argued that despotism was an exclusively oriental form of regime. His thesis was intended to provide a pretext for a critique and proposed reform of the French regime under which he lived, but his interpretation of oriental despotism became the landmark verdict on the nature of 'Eastern' societies, for generations of travel authors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to Çırakman, it was common practice for later observers to filter all their experiences and observations through theories and abstractions that had been inspired by Montesquieu.²² As a result, popular travel authors such as William Eton, François

¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 42, 80-89.

²⁰ Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, 'Romantic Attitudes toward Oriental Despotism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 85, no. 2 (2013): 288.

²¹ See for example of recent of recent orientalist scholarship which has overlooked the importance of the Egyptian campaign: Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

²² Aslı Çırakman, 'From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the

Baron de Tott and the Comte de Volney, all shared Montesquieu's core beliefs concerning 'eastern' despotism and decadence.²³ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the trend of denouncing 'oriental' societies had become the norm among travel writers. Those who differed from this norm were noticeably less popular. William George Browne, who published a more sympathetic travel book in 1799, is one such example. He admired many aspects of eastern life, comparing it favourably with the west, which aroused some controversy, and his work was poorly received.²⁴

The concept of despotism has fascinated scholars who have debated the nature of its influence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Much of the current literature on the use of oriental despotism draws from the writing of travellers to the east, along with the occasional diplomat, but they rarely consider the writing of military personnel. Joan-Pau Rubiés for example, discusses whether the concept was pure fantasy, one that was developed to legitimize imperialism. Although much of what was written about the despotism of 'oriental' powers was ill-informed, Rubiés contends that Europeans were often genuinely concerned with understanding the 'east', and developed empirical methods for studying the 'orient'. As a consequence, she argues, oriental despotism was not a mental scheme that blinded Europeans to the perception of the true orient, but rather, a compelling tool for interpreting the information gathered about the orient.²⁵ Michael Curtis considers the use of oriental despotism in less forgiving terms. He believes the concept was useful to European authors in three ways: firstly, as a mode for a straightforward denunciation of an eastern society; secondly, as a tool for supporting arguments for imperial control over

Turks', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no.1, (2001): 55-59; Ashlı Çırakman, "From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe" European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 1-24; 106.

²³ William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* (London: 1798); Francois Baron de Tott, *Memoirs of Baron de Tott: Containing the State of the Turkish Empire and the Crimea during the late war with Russia*, 2 vols (London: 1786); Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785*, 2 vols (London: 1787).

²⁴ Richard Garnett, 'Browne, William George (1768–1813)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 10 August 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3710>.

²⁵ Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu', *London School of Economics and Political Science* 9, no.1-2 (2005): 109, 113.

eastern regimes; and thirdly, as an implicit criticism of the writer's own society.²⁶ In his article discussing the use of oriental despotism among romantic writers, Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi argues that almost every European Romantic author speaking of oriental despotism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, was also thinking about Europe, and many of them were thinking primarily about Europe.²⁷

In many ways, one can argue that military writings on foreign lands could be markedly similar to civilian travel literature, and that these texts should be included in the discussion about oriental despotism, and orientalism more generally. Soldiers and sailors in Egypt were undoubtedly influenced by civilian literature, and the prevailing cultural values and fashions in Britain. Although literacy rates among some naval crews and regiments could be as low as forty per cent, there were ways in which the ideas and arguments of popular travel books could be widely circulated in military circles. Excerpts of bestsellers were printed in the form of broadsides and pamphlets²⁸, newspapers often plundered travel accounts for information, publishing passages from such texts,²⁹ and Paul Kaufmann suggests that the borrowing of travel books

²⁶ Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45-49, 58.

²⁷ Tzoref-Ashkenazi, 'Romantic Attitudes toward Oriental Despotism', 280. For other literature on the nature and impact of Montesquieu's work, see: Franco Venturi, 'Oriental Despotism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no.1 (1963): 133-142; David Young, 'Montesquieu's View of Despotism and His Use of Travel Literature', *The Review of Politics* 40, no.3 (1978): 392-405; Shraon Krause, 'Despotism in *The Spirit of Laws*', in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on The Spirit of Laws*, ed. David W. Carrithers, Michael Al Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 231-271; Thomas Kaiser, 'The Evil Empire? The Debate on Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture', *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no.1 (2000): 6-34; Melvin Richter, 'The Concept of Despotism and l'abus des mots', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 3, no.1 (2007): 5-22.

²⁸ Volney's *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires* was printed in the form of broadsides and pamphlets from late 1792 onwards. The full English text was also widely available in pocket-sized undated editions. See: App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 442.

²⁹ Extracts from Vivant Denon's hugely sought after *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* (1802), were published in this way. See, for example: "Account of Kaira", *Derby Mercury*, Sept 23, 1802, 3. Excerpts from Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels through Arabia, and other countries in the East*, were published in the *Ipswich Journal*. See: "Wednesday's Post", *Ipswich Journal*, Oct 31 1801, 4. Extracts from soldiers' memoirs were also published in newspapers. A passage from the narrative of "an Officer in the 79th

from public libraries was also popular.³⁰ Combined with the common practice of individuals reading newspapers and other literature aloud to their peers, one can safely assume that many soldiers and sailors were consumers of travel literature. Levant-based travel books were certainly in fashion during this period – the half century between 1775 and 1825 witnessed the publication of an almost uninterrupted flow of travels, described as a torrent “reaching flood-tide proportions” by P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams.³¹ According to Charles Batten, the reading public developed an insatiable appetite for these travels, which became one of the most widely read forms of literature, second only to novels and romances.³² An indication of soldiers’ interest in travel narratives can be found in their own writing. A number of military memoirs were directed towards audiences who had an interest in the exploits of gentlemanly travellers. They imitated the writing style of travel narratives and deliberately positioned their writing within the genre of travel literature. The basic structure of travel writing – departure, arrival, journey through foreign lands, and the return home – helped soldiers frame their own journeys, from home to the war zone and back again. Some even omitted military matters in favour of a more traditional travel narrative.³³

In spite of this, military servicemen lived in different circumstances and were subject to different pressures from civilians. During the British campaign in Egypt in 1801, a

regiment”, was published in the *Caledonian Mercury*. See: “Egypt”, *Caledonian Mercury*, Dec 24, 1801, 3. An “extract from an Officer in a man of war” stationed at Alexandria, was published in *The Times*. See: *The Times*. “Egypt. – Extract of a Letter from an Officer in a man of war, dated Aboukir, July 2”. Sep 26, 1801, 3.

³⁰ Paul Kaufmann, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773-1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960), 121, quoted in Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840: ‘From an Antique Land’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12-13.

³¹ Wallace Cable Brown, ‘The Popularity of English Travel Books About the Near East, 1775-1825’, *Philological Quarterly*, 15 (1936): 73; P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Dent, 1982), 45.

³² Charles L. Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth Century Travel Literature* (London: University of California Press, 1978), 1; Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 11.

³³ Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 10.

militaristic form of thinking can be discerned in British servicemen's writing about various topics, such as landscape, climate, disease, the collection of antiquities, and in their views of the 'eastern' inhabitants. For instance, soldiers looked at the landscape around them with a strategic eye, something that civilian travellers rarely addressed. Soldiers' emotional responses to foreign lands could also be significantly different from their civilian contemporaries. On campaign, soldiers underwent a more intense and demanding physical and psychological experience than any civilian traveller. However, when not marching or fighting, soldiers spent a good deal of their time exploring the foreign environment. Many were aware of Egypt's rich history, and were keen to visit the remains of ancient civilizations. Their interest in ancient antiquity was often expressed through collecting. Soldiers had always taken mementoes from campaigns, a process encouraged by civilian cultures of collecting.³⁴ Despite this, military servicemen in Egypt also developed a distinctive military appreciation for collecting: the objects they acquired were not only souvenirs but trophies of their victory in Egypt.

When military servicemen described the people they encountered in Egypt, their views were heavily influenced by civilian travel literature. One might even argue that military views were, to some extent, pre-programmed by civilian travel authors, as many soldiers and sailors expressed opinions on 'eastern' people that were markedly similar to those of Montesquieu. However, the way in which British servicemen arrived at this judgement was different from civilian travellers. Due to the nature of their circumstances, many of the people that British servicemen encountered in Egypt had some military role. Therefore, martial ability and performance in combat were vital elements in British servicemen's appraisals, and could even supplant popular stereotypes. This is most apparent in British attitudes towards the Mamluks, the former rulers of Egypt. They were seen as oriental despots by civilian travellers, and initially by many of the soldiers on campaign in Egypt. Yet some soldiers began to accept Mamluk culture when they realized the strategic value of Mamluk cavalry. The

³⁴ Daly, 'Plunder on the Peninsula: British Soldiers and Local Civilians during the Peninsula War, 1808-1813', in *Civilians and War in Europe 1618-1815*, ed. Erica Charters, Eve Rosenhaft and Hannah Smith (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 220.

visual appearance of the Mamluks was also admired by the British, who came to regard them as culturally predisposed to war.

The accounts of soldiers and sailors during the Egyptian campaign constitute a distinctive mix of military narrative, travelogue and orientalist analysis and have not received the attention they deserve. Over the past decade, a range of histories have been published on the British soldier during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars that have shed some light on the travel experience of military personnel. The focus of these historians has concentrated primarily on soldiers either in Britain or on campaign in the Peninsular wars. Gavin Daly has been one of the most active historians in this field. He explores how soldiers in the Iberian Peninsula interacted with the local environment, its culture, and the Spanish and Portuguese inhabitants. He emphasizes that soldiers spent very little of their time in a theatre of war actually fighting, and many were as concerned with what happened off the battlefield as on it. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, which involved tens of thousands of young British men being sent abroad to fight, can be understood as an unprecedented experience of mass collective travel. Daly highlights the varied and distinctive ways in which soldiers responded to the landscape, the climate, their living conditions, the local civilization and the role of women in the Peninsula. Although Daly concedes that much of the soldiers' character was forged by their battlefield experiences, they were much more than just fighting men whose interests and identities were solely bound to their military uniforms.³⁵ Edward Coss' book *All for the King's Shilling* similarly focuses on the Peninsula. He studies the day-to-day campaigning experience of the British army during the Peninsular War. His impressive study of the diet, living conditions and the social environment of the soldiers, provides an insight into their daily lives and the strategies they developed to cope with the stress of war. Poorly fed, often ill-equipped and neglected, the soldiers survived by supporting and fighting

³⁵ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 9, 34; Gavin Daly, 'A Dirty, Indolent, Priest-Ridden City: British Soldiers in Lisbon during the Peninsular War, 1808-13' *History*, 94, no. 4 (2009): 461-482; Gavin Daly, 'Liberators and Tourists: British Soldiers in Madrid during the Peninsular War', in *Soldiering in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850 Men of Arms*, ed. Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 117-135; Gavin Daly, 'Plunder on the Peninsula', 209-224.

for one another.³⁶ Jennine Hurl-Eamon considers soldiers' sex lives, both at home and on campaign. She scrutinizes marriage in the British army, and how soldiers perceived their duties, which took them overseas and far from their sweethearts. When on campaign, many of these men continued to remember and identify with their domestic ties. In a recent article, Hurl-Eamon has examined officers' accounts of Portuguese nuns and convents in Peninsular war memoirs. She suggests that descriptions of convents shed light on the authors' ideas on masculinity, and revealed the influence of gothic, erotic, romantic and travel literature on military life writing.³⁷

Other works, such as Neil Ramsey's *Military Memoirs*, offer an overview of the glut of military autobiographies published in the years following the Napoleonic wars. He situates these works in the context of Romantic literary culture, as they were infused with the language of sensibility and detailed the horrors of war in a way that could be threatening to the establishment. Ramsey convincingly argues that military autobiographies profoundly shaped nineteenth-century Britain's understanding of war as Romantic adventure, establishing images of the nation's middle-class soldier heroes that would be of enduring significance through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁸ Catriona Kennedy, in her broad survey of the writings of British combatants throughout the wars, is one of the few who has considered the campaign in Egypt, albeit briefly. She argues that the officers' experience of Egypt was shaped by their knowledge of classical history and a scholarly interest in the monuments of Ancient Egypt. By contrast, the experience of the common ranks was shaped primarily by the Bible. The more devout ranks were excited by the prospect of seeing the lands described in the Old Testament, and for some of these men, the expedition became a means of testing the authority of the biblical account. However, due to the broad focus

³⁶ See: Edward J. Coss, *All for the King's Shilling The British Soldier under Wellington, 1808-1814* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

³⁷ Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century: 'The Girl I left Behind Me'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'Habits of Seduction: Accounts of Portuguese Nuns in British Officers' Peninsular War Memoirs', *The Historical Journal*, 58, no.3 (2015): 733-756.

³⁸ Neil Ramsey, *The Military Memoir and Romantic Literary Culture, 1780-1835* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

of Kennedy's work, the number of pages devoted to the experiences of soldiers in Egypt is limited.³⁹

One can see from this literature a strong focus on the experiences of soldiers in the Peninsular war. Britain's involvement in the Iberian Peninsula was undoubtedly the army's longest and most significant campaign during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, yet the Spanish and Portuguese inhabitants were far from the only foreign people British forces encountered throughout this conflict. To attain a more rounded picture of the British army's attitude to foreign peoples, one must look beyond the Iberian Peninsula, beyond Europe. Other operations deserve further investigation. This thesis argues that the most deserving of these is Britain's military intervention in Egypt between 1798 and 1801, which peaked during the 1801 Egyptian campaign. The primary objective of this thesis is to emphasize the distinctiveness of accounts by British soldiers and sailors in Egypt during this campaign, and to consider whether they constitute a distinctive form of military orientalism.

At present, the most detailed study of the British army's encounters and attitudes towards Egypt can be found in the essays produced by the collaborative research project "Making War, Mapping Europe: Militarized Cultural Encounters, 1792-1920", which concluded in September 2016. Through a series of interlocking case-studies focusing on encounters between Western European armies and the peoples and cultures of Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East, the project explores the distinctive characteristics of militarized cultural encounters and how they have shaped European identity and perceptions of 'self'. Several of the essays discuss the British and French campaigns in Egypt: Catriona Kennedy considers the British understanding, experience and representation of Egypt's iconic topography during the campaign. She argues that the absence of reliable geographical knowledge of Egypt

³⁹ See: Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland*. (London: Palgrave, 2013), 94, 106. See also: Catriona Kennedy, '“True Brittons and Real Irish”: Irish Catholics in the British Army during the Revolutionary Napoleonic Wars', in *Soldiering in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850 Men of Arms*, ed. Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 37-56.

forced the soldiers to draw from a broad range of military, historical and religious knowledge in an attempt to make the unfamiliar land intelligible.⁴⁰ In other essays, Fergus Robson examines French soldiers' encounters with Egyptian architecture, their perceptions of Egyptian hygiene, and how they interacted with Egyptian women.⁴¹ While these essays provide a good overview which spotlights the distinctiveness of militarized cultural encounters, they lack the depth of an extended analysis.

Historians who have referred to the British campaign in Egypt have done so primarily when examining broader cultures of collecting. Maya Jasanoff, for example, has delved into the stories behind artefact collection on imperial frontiers. Her study of European collectors in India and Egypt reveals collecting to be a highly complex process, motivated by a combination of factors, such as imperial rivalry, a genuine interest in antiquity, the prospect of great financial reward, and the opportunity for the collector to refashion their self-image and social status. She argues cogently that the ill-tutored mania of collectors on imperial frontiers often resembled the formation of the British Empire itself. This was not the planned seizure of distant lands or the merciless exploitation of capital, but the piecemeal and disorganized acquisition of territory that only developed the features of a distinct imperial pattern with the benefit of hindsight. Jasanoff's revisionist history is far removed from the imperial triumphalism of Niall Ferguson; she provides a more nuanced explanation of colonial development, uncovering the distorted growth of empire brought about by the conflict between Britain and France. The central part of her book concerns Anglo-French

⁴⁰ Catriona Kennedy, 'Military topographies: the British army on the Egyptian coast, 1801', Text for the Exhibition of www.mwme.eu (2015), Accessed 13 April 2017, URL: <http://www.mwme.eu/essays/index.html>.

⁴¹ Fergus Robson, 'French Soldiers encounter European and Arabic Architecture', Text for the Exhibition of www.mwme.eu, (2015), Accessed 13 April 2017, URL: <http://www.mwme.eu/essays/index.html>; Fergus Robson, 'Hygiene and Pollution: French soldiers gaze upon dirt, dust and disease', Text for the Exhibition of www.mwme.eu (2015), Accessed 13 April 2017, URL: <http://www.mwme.eu/essays/index.html>; Fergus Robson, 'French Soldiers' Gaze upon Italian and Egyptian Women: Gender, Masculinity and Sexuality in Militarised Cultural Encounters', Text for the Exhibition of www.mwme.eu (2015), Accessed 13 April 2017, URL: <http://www.mwme.eu/essays/index.html>.

clashes on imperial frontiers in the 1790s, and she argues that they introduced an era of territorial collecting that endowed Britain with a heightened sense of imperial purpose.⁴² The relationship between collecting and imperialism has been closely studied more recently by Holger Hoock. He demonstrates how Britons appropriated objects from ancient cultures in the Mediterranean, the Near East, and India, as tools with which to fight international wars of culture and prestige.⁴³

Generally, historians have tended to focus on the antiquarian interests of British officials in Egypt in the decades that followed the Egyptian campaign, rather than during it. Their work has focused on prominent archaeologists and Egyptologists of this era, such as Giovanni Belzoni, Bernardino Drovetti and Henry Salt.⁴⁴ This neglect is surprising as the items that the British seized from the French after the latter's capitulation at Alexandria, constituted one of the largest hauls of eastern artefacts ever seen, and soon filled the British Museum. When not fighting or marching in Egypt, soldiers often undertook recreational tours to famous Ancient Egyptian sites, such as the Pyramid complex at Giza, Pompey's Pillar at Alexandria, or the massive temple at Dendera. In the months the British forces spent in the vicinity of Alexandria, they marched, slept and fought surrounded by ruins and fragments of ancient structures and objects, at times even using them to create breastworks and redoubts. This experience provoked an antiquarian enthusiasm among some of the soldiers. Colonel Hilgrove Tomkyns Turner is one of the best examples of this. He remained in Egypt at his own expense long after his regiment had left the country, to serve in an

⁴² See: Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire, Conquest and Collecting in the East 1750-1850* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006).

⁴³ See: Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination, Politics, War and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850* (London, Profile Books, 2010).

⁴⁴ See, for example: Saglia, 'Consuming Egypt'; Rushdy, *Lure of Egypt*; Stanley Mayes, *The Great Belzoni, The Circus Strongman who Discovered Egypt's Ancient Treasures* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003); Ronald T. Ridley, *Napoleon's Proconsul in Egypt: The Life and Times of Bernardino Drovetti* (London: The Rubicon Press, 1998); Deborah Manley and Peter Rée, *Henry Salt: Artist, Traveller, Diplomat, Egyptologist* (London: Libri Publications, 2001).

antiquarian capacity. After his return to Britain, he attempted to become a trustee of the British Museum.⁴⁵

Although historians have referred to soldiers in Egypt in the context of collecting, they have rarely done so with regard to orientalism. Marching through what they considered a foreign, 'eastern' landscape, it is clear that British servicemen in Egypt were producers of orientalist 'knowledge', just like civilian travellers. A second objective of this thesis, is to discuss whether British military servicemen perceived the people they encountered in Egypt in terms of a homogenised view of the 'East'. Certainly one can discern similar patterns in the attitudes of the British military servicemen towards the people they encountered in Egypt, and those they encountered in British India. In particular, it was common in both theatres for soldiers to write about the organization and performance of the native military bodies. Douglas Peers has examined perceptions of military performance in India, and claims it became one of the key characteristics used to distinguish between Britons, Muslims and Hindus. A recurring theme, he argues, was the juxtaposition of British military order against Indian disorder. Such views encouraged hegemonic orientalist pretensions. Peers' argument can be applied to Egypt, as British soldiers and sailors repeatedly emphasized the contrast between the order and discipline of the British military system, and the chaotic disorderliness of the allied Ottoman forces.⁴⁶ Although the British military were generally disdainful towards large portions of the Indian and Egyptian population, they admired a small minority who were thought to possess martial traits. Punjabi Sikhs and Nepalese Ghurkhas in India, and the Mamluks in Egypt, were praised in similar terms by the British. Each of these groups were thought of as a race of brave, fearsome warriors, bred for war. By examining British intervention in Egypt in this way, and comparing it with colonial India, one can see that certain trends and concepts in British imperialism were being applied not only in India, but more generally towards non-European peoples.

⁴⁵ Arthur F. Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner 1764-1843 Soldier and Courtier under the Georges* (London: The Alkham Press, 1964), 47.

⁴⁶ Peers, 'Colonial Knowledge and the Military in India', 162, 166-169.

For most British military personnel, their service in Egypt was brief and this fact provides an opportunity for further analysis. A third objective of this thesis is to determine how far Britain's mental approach to, and representation of, this short campaign paralleled that of longer term colonial projects in British India and the West Indies. Similarities can be discerned in a variety of fields. Picturesque tourism was a popular pastime among officer circles, and the formulaic approach to picturesque painting and literary description meant that representations of Egypt could resemble those of other imperial regions or even Britain.⁴⁷ By highlighting sameness rather than difference, Egyptian landscapes were represented as desirable for British habitation. In the medical sphere, physicians in both Egypt and India sought ways to curb the losses occasioned by disease. Their research correlated with ongoing efforts throughout this period to create medical topographies that would indicate which areas were the healthiest for European soldiers. For this reason, both India and Egypt were places where young physicians could make a name for themselves. In her recent article, Catherine Kelly investigates how British and French medical officers were affected by their encounters with disease during the Egyptian campaign. Ambitious medical practitioners treated such ailments by trial and error with experimental cures, an approach which draws comparison with medical practice in India.⁴⁸ Finally, the ways in which the British military approached Egyptian antiquities bears comparison with French colonial enterprises in Algeria. As Michael Greenhalgh notes in his article about the French military's use of ancient structures in the early nineteenth century, scholarly interest in these buildings was valuable as it provided essential information on the still-usable Roman infrastructure during the French takeover of Algeria.⁴⁹ This appropriation of ancient structures for military purposes can be seen

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Auerbach, 'The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire', *The British Art Journal*, 5 no.1 (2004): 47-54.

⁴⁸ Catherine Kelly, 'Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign: The Development of the Military Medical Officer during the Napoleonic Wars c.1798-1801', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 27, no.2 (2010): 321-342. See also: Martin R. Howard, *Wellington's Doctors: The British Army Medical Services in the Napoleonic Wars* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2002); Martin R. Howard, *Napoleon's Doctors: The Medical Services of the Grande Armée* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006), 88-90.

⁴⁹ Michael Greenhalgh, 'French Military Reconnaissance in the Ottoman Empire during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries as a Source for Our Knowledge of Ancient Monuments', *The Journal of Military History* 66, no.2 (2002): 359-360; 386-387.

during the British campaign in Egypt; soldiers appraised ruined buildings and forts in terms of their utility to an occupation force, should the military remain in the country for the long term.

The central theme of this thesis concerns the distinctiveness of military writings in Egypt, which transcends the boundaries of military, travel and orientalist genres of literature. This is reflected in the discussion throughout the chapters. Chapter 1 emphasizes the diversity of soldiers' and sailors' responses to the Egyptian landscape and climate, and highlights the distinctiveness of these views in comparison to civilian travellers. It also explores the efforts made by medical practitioners to construct a medical topography of the country. Chapter 2 examines the variety of military responses to objects and structures of antiquity in Egypt. It argues that the pursuit of antiquarianism was not at odds with the military occupation, and highlights the combination of factors which motivated the armed forces to collect antiquities. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which British servicemen in Egypt conceived of their identity and a sense of their difference from Near Eastern culture as they described encounters with Egyptian and Ottoman peoples. It argues that British writing in Egypt reflects the confused and ever-changing understandings of different races and societies in this period. Chapters 4 and 5 consider the British response to the military bodies encountered in Egypt: the Ottomans and the Mamluks. They show that military considerations were vital in British servicemen's appraisal of these two groups. Chapter 4 outlines how the lack of 'western' features within the Ottoman military drove a divide between British and Ottoman soldiers. This cultural divide drew the British to identify more closely with their French enemy in Egypt. Chapter 5 discusses the contradiction in British views towards the Mamluks. On the one hand, the Mamluks were admired as exotic and formidable warriors. On the other, they were condemned for their seemingly depraved and backward society.

Methodology

Having outlined the objectives, it is important to highlight what has not been considered in this thesis. One of the most significant omissions is the Alexandria expedition in 1807. Little is known about this peculiar operation, other than what can be learned from a small number of documents found in the war office. After the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia and allied itself with France in late 1806, a

British force of 5,000 men was sent to Egypt under Major-General Alexander Mackenzie Fraser. Their objective was to remove Ottoman presence from the country and establish a base of operations in the eastern Mediterranean. Fraser landed in Egypt on 21 March 1807, and occupied Alexandria with ease. However, two offensives against Rosetta were bloodily repulsed with the loss of 1,400 men. Having lost the initiative, bickering ensued between the officers who exchanged accusations of blame. Fraser had little choice but to withdraw from Alexandria in September.⁵⁰ The campaign had been a costly disaster, and had achieved nothing. Perhaps for this reason, there seems to have been an element of amnesia regarding this operation. There is precious little written material on this campaign, and much of it was written second hand, by those who were not there. Unfortunately, the war office records for the campaign are incomplete. The official dispatches range from January to August, but many documents written in the remainder of 1807 are missing. At present, these records consist primarily of a series of increasingly angry letters by General Fraser and Major Ernest Missett, a British agent posted in Egypt from 1802 to monitor French activity. Both of these men blamed one another for the setbacks encountered.⁵¹ Therefore, the focus of this thesis will primarily be on the three years between 1798 and 1801. In this period, British intervention in Egypt reached its peak. From the battle of the Nile in August 1798 until the conclusion of the British campaign in October 1801, there was an almost uninterrupted British military presence either in, or stationed off the coast of, Egypt. From October 1801 to spring 1803, a small

⁵⁰ For a short account of this campaign, see: Robert Harvey, *The War of Wars the epic struggle between Britain and France 1789-1815* (London: Constable, 2007), 531-532.

⁵¹ See: Major Ernest Missett to William Windham, 6 February, 23 March, 27 March, 12 April, 26 April, 1807, War Office (WO), 1/348, pp.33-36, 37-44, 53-58, 105-109, 137-144, 145-151, The National Archives. General Alexander Mackenzie Fraser to Missett, 21 April 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.153-159; Fraser to Windham, 1 May 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.217-221; Missett to Alexander John Ball, 5 May 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.255-260; Fraser to General Henry Edward Fox, 14 May 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.271-273; Missett to Lord Castlereagh, 18 May 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.289-298; Fraser to Windham 16 June 1801, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.349-352; Fraser to Fox, 9 July 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.421-422; Embarkation Return 23 September 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, p.479; Missett to Castlereagh, 21 October 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348, pp.487-492.

occupation force remained in Alexandria. Some of the material included in this thesis will relate to regiments who remained in Egypt until 1803.

This thesis draws from a range of documents. Where relevant, I have included records and dispatches from the war office. However, as this thesis is a study of encounters and experiences among individuals, these documents do not feature heavily throughout all chapters. Instead the focus is primarily, though not exclusively, on published and unpublished personal accounts written by 52 men in the army and navy who were present in Egypt at some point in the period 1798-1803. These documents are supplemented by contemporary reviews in magazines and periodicals, by newspapers which contain dispatches and by non-military contemporary accounts of Egypt or the Near-East, which place the military writings within a broader context of the literature about Egypt published in this period. Of the 52 men who wrote from a personal perspective about Egypt, 39 were in the army: 30 were officers and 9 were in the ordinary ranks. 13 were in the navy: 10 officers and 3 ordinary seamen. From these figures, there is clearly a strong focus on the army, rather than the navy. Despite the significance of naval accounts to Britain's war experience, they feature less prominently in the chapters. A range of warships were involved in military operations in the Levant during this period, but their duties usually kept sailors on board their ships. As a result, naval accounts of foreign landscapes and peoples are generally not as rich, varied or as numerous as those written by soldiers. I have, however, endeavoured to include naval material whenever possible.

These 52 individuals produced a total of 60 documents of varying types, which can be divided into three categories: 10 are letters, or collections of letters; 19 are manuscript diaries, journals or narratives, and 31 are published memoirs or narratives. Most of the soldier's publications originated from letters or diaries. Letters were relatively immediate and spontaneous, produced within hours or days of the events they write about, although some were written after weeks of reflection. This immediacy is also true for diaries and journals, but they tend to be more contemplative. They were written for the author himself and to be kept for family and future generations. There was no censorship of these documents, and sensitive information could be easily transmitted, much to the annoyance of the commanding officers. Many of the letters were not intended for publication, they were a personal

form of correspondence written for family and friends back home. Writers may have been aware, however, that the contents of their letters might have been used as community newsletters, and the composition of a letter was often done in the presence of their peers, whilst in bivouacs or billets for the night. All the authors discussed in this thesis were free to edit their letters, diaries and memoirs at leisure, removing any undesirable passages while embellishing or inventing others. For example, one can assume that authors glossed over their own or their comrades' reprehensible behaviour in their letters and memoirs, especially if these documents were intended for a public audience.

It is important to differentiate memoirs from other material because they were usually written long after the events they describe, perhaps even after the author's military service had ended. Memoirs were written in hindsight, and marked by the passage of time; those published after the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars are more likely to reflect the later cultural climate in which they were written. These sources tend to be less factually reliable than documents created during the war.⁵² This is most noticeable among the lower ranks. Before 1800, it was rare for common soldiers to write autobiographical narratives apart from in a spiritual context.⁵³ The first publication of an Egyptian campaign memoir by a lower-ranked soldier was George Billanie's anonymously published *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment of Foot*, in 1819. By contrast, most of the officers had published their accounts by 1805. In a review of one officer's memoir in 1803, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* observed that "The public has been so inundated with journals, accounts &c. of Egypt, since our glorious campaign in that country, that there hardly seemed room for any future observations on the subject."⁵⁴ The 1820s and 30s were marked by the

⁵² Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 6-8; Yuval Noah Harari, 'Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the Late Modern Era', *War in History* 14, no.3 (2007): 290; 303-305; Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, 8.

⁵³ Linch and McCormack, 'Wellington's Men', 291-292.

⁵⁴ *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine. review of A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army*, by Anon. 15 (May to August 1803): 259. In that same year, the *Critical Review* condemned the lack of novelty in Thomas Walsh's *Journal*, given the number of memoirs already published on the Egyptian campaign: "This tale has been so often told, that, without novelty of event or of language, it must disgust." See: *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of*

publication of narratives by lower ranks, which may partly have been the result of evangelical groups, who encouraged literacy rates among the ranks, but also persuaded soldiers to write their narratives in such a way to promote conversion to Methodism. Several memoirs published during this time promised exciting tales of war, but were in fact rather thin on military action and instead concentrated on religious preaching.⁵⁵ Neil Ramsey provides another explanation. He argues that the 1819 publication of the first memoir of an ordinary soldier, *Journal of a soldier of the Seventy First*, was a pivotal moment in the development of military memoirs, helping to redefine the work around the experiences of the common soldier. It sold more than 3,000 copies and was highly influential on the subsequent development of autobiographical stories of soldiering in the period, and helped frame the soldier's tale within the generic conventions of the story of the suffering traveller.⁵⁶ This development can be attributed to the rise of public interest in and the reputation of the common soldier. With an improved education, soldiers were more willing to write narratives and found more willing audiences and publishers.

The soldier as traveller and memoirist

In terms of travel writing and encounters with extra-European peoples, one of the values of personal campaign narratives such as those in Egypt is that they document the perceptions of a much broader cross-section of society than those groups from whom the typical travel writer or explorer were drawn. One of the central concerns of this thesis is to investigate the different ways in which officers and men perceived and narrated their encounters with Egypt. An account of the social composition and characteristics of the different ranks is therefore required. Just over 17,000 men landed at Aboukir in March 1801, under the command of Sir Ralph Abercromby, and they were generally a cross-section of British society. This expeditionary force was a

Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt..., by Thomas Walsh 37 (February - April 1803): 361.

⁵⁵ See, for example of memoirs by converted soldiers: James Downing, *A Narrative of the Life of James Downing, a Blind Man, Late a Private in His majesty's 20th Regiment of Foot*, 3rd edition (London, 1815); Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820).

⁵⁶ Ramsey, *Military Memoir*, 43; Linch and McCormack, 'Wellington's Men', 292. See also: Thomas Pococke, *Journal of a soldier of the Seventy-First, or Glasgow Regiment, Highland Light Infantry, from 1806 to 1815*, ed. John Howell (Edinburgh: 1819).

combination of upper, middle and lower class representatives from all of Britain's constituent nationalities. The national composition of the army during the wars is difficult to state precisely because many of the regimental returns are incomplete, particularly for the army overseas. However, John Cookson has presented some tentative findings using the inspection returns for 1806, 1811 and 1813. These returns reveal that the army was about one half English, one-sixth Scottish and one-third Irish. Based on these estimates, approximately a quarter of the army was Irish Catholic.⁵⁷ The concentration of Scottish and Irish soldiers into a few distinctively Scottish or Irish regiments became a feature of the army. The 92nd Gordon Highlanders and 79th Cameron Highlanders both served in Egypt, and were predominantly filled with Scots. From the 1813 returns, seventy per cent of Scots serving in the line infantry were found in just ten regiments.⁵⁸ Irish soldiers were spread more evenly, the higher number of Irishmen in the service resulted in a greater dispersion throughout the army, but there were perhaps fifteen regiments with a high proportion of Irish.⁵⁹ One such regiment was the 23rd Royal Welch Fusiliers, a regiment with a high reputation which had lost 265 men in a shipwreck returning from Holland in 1799, and had been made up with Irish Militiamen. These replacements were of a poor quality and they earned Abercromby's displeasure during the campaign.⁶⁰ The high proportion of Scottish and Irish can be seen in the officers who served in Egypt. The commander in chief – Ralph Abercromby – was a Scottish native of Clackmannanshire; Sir John Moore, who commanded the reserve was Glaswegian, and Sir David Baird, who led the Indian expedition from Bombay, originated from East Lothian. Abercromby's second-in-command, Sir John Hely-Hutchinson, was Irish, as was Captain Thomas Walsh. Captain Peter Jennings appears to have been one of the few memoirists who was an Irish Catholic.

⁵⁷ John E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 126-128, 175. Welsh servicemen were listed as English, thus the Welsh composition of the army remains unknown.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Five of those regiments, 42nd (Black Watch) 78th, 79th, 92nd and 93rd were over eighty per cent Scottish in the rank and file, the other five: 26th, 71st, 72nd, 91st and 94th – were over sixty per cent.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

⁶⁰ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 33; Piers Mackesy, *War without Victory: The Downfall of Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 165.

A significant number of regiments in Egypt did not originate in Britain; the grave shortage of troops on the outbreak of the French Revolutionary war persuaded the Government to authorize the recruitment of foreign regiments. Between 1793 and 1802, nearly 80 foreign units of horse, foot and artillery were raised, predominantly by French émigrés and German princelings. Some of these regiments were short lived and all varied greatly in quality. The Corsican Rangers was formed as a light infantry corps in Minorca in 1799 from Corsicans who had fled their native island. They fought with John Moore's Reserve and were sufficiently well trained and disciplined to be entrusted with outpost duties. In Egypt, General John Stuart's Foreign Brigade contained three regiments: the first was formed mainly of soldiers of the Swiss Guards of the Bourbons; the second was made up of French émigrés and some Italians, and the third consisted of German and Swiss prisoners of war taken from Minorca. All three performed well in Egypt. In the cavalry brigade there was a detachment of Hompesch's Mounted Rifles, raised by Baron Charles de Hompesch, a Prussian hussar colonel. Its men were mostly Germans with some French émigrés among the officers. They acquired an excellent reputation during the Irish Rebellion in 1798, which continued in Egypt, until three men deserted, an offence for which the whole detachment was deprived of its horses and put into garrison at Aboukir.⁶¹ In a different category from all these foreign regiments, were the three battalions of Sepoys from the East India Company forces, which formed the bulk of General Baird's contingent of 8,000 men.

The social composition of the Royal Navy was similarly diverse. Nelson's squadron that defeated the French at the Battle of the Nile on 1 August 1798 were hand-picked to a limited extent, in that Earl St Vincent had given Nelson the best ships available to him; but in most respects, they were quite ordinary, a cross-section of the navy at that time.⁶² All kinds of seamen - fishermen, smugglers, foreign recruits and raw novices conscripted by the press gang - served in the Royal Navy. The maintenance

⁶¹ Michael Barthrop, *Napoleon's Egyptian Campaigns 1798-1801* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 22-23. Among the reinforcements sent to Egypt in mid-1801 was a second foreign brigade, formed from Swiss troops, Hapsburg Jägers and French émigrés.

⁶² Brian Lavery, *Nelson and the Nile, the Naval War against Bonaparte, 1798* (London: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 121.

of a ship of war required a variety of craftsmen with various skills, and as a result they were filled with men from a range of backgrounds and nationalities.⁶³ In 1803, the fourteen-year-old Scottish volunteer Robert Hay was amazed by the different nationalities and social backgrounds of sailors on board his first ship:

To the eye were presented complexions of every hue, and features of every cast, from the jetty face, flat nose, thick lips and frizzled hair of the African, to the more slender frame and milder features of the Asiatic. The rosy complexion of the English swain and the sallow features of the sun-burnt Portuguese. People of every profession and of the most contrasted manners, from the brawny ploughman to the delicate fop. The decayed author and bankrupt merchant who had eluded their creditors. The apprentice who had eloped from servitude. The improvident and impoverished father who had abandoned his family, and the smuggler and the swindler who had escaped by flight the vengeance of the laws.⁶⁴

Hay was also astonished by the number of languages spoken on board the ship: “To the ear was addressed a hubbub little short of that which occurred at Babel. Irish, Welsh, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Swedish, Italian and all the provincial dialects between Landsend and John O’Groats joined their discordant notes.”⁶⁵

Although not as ethnically diverse as the rank-and-file, officers in the army were drawn from a much wider cross-section of British society than is commonly thought. Wealth, property, influence and traditions of military service ensured that most

⁶³ Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary Seamen in Nelson’s Navy* (London: Abacus, 2008), xxx, 3-4. See also: Philip Haythornthwaite, *Nelson’s Navy* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1993), 10.

⁶⁴ Robert Hay, *Landsman Hay: The Memoirs of Robert Hay 1789-1847*, ed. M.D. Hay (London: Hart-Davis, 1953), 43-44, quoted in *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, 11-12.

officers came from landed families. The traditional pathway into the officer corps remained the purchase of a commission.⁶⁶ However, the exigencies of the war opened up opportunities for entry into the officer's ranks for those without the means to purchase a commission. They ensured that the officer corps was not monopolized by the landed elites.⁶⁷ About a quarter of regimental officers were drawn from the aristocracy and the greater gentry, with two per cent coming from the peerage. The majority of regimental officers were from the lesser gentry, the professional and commercial classes, and families of comfortable means with traditions of military service.⁶⁸ This diversity can be discerned among the officers of the British expedition. A portion were from the greater gentry: General Hutchinson was the second son of the Irish Earl of Donoughmore, and Colonel Hilgrove Turner, a courtier to the Prince of Wales, was born into a wealthy family based in Shepherd's Bush. Like many acquaintances of royalty, he studied at Eton College.⁶⁹ The Irish-born Eyre Coote, who commanded the besieging forces at Alexandria for much of the duration of the Egyptian campaign, was the son of the Dean of Kilfenora. He was educated at Eton and enrolled at Trinity College Dublin, but was commissioned as a lieutenant in the

⁶⁶ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 25-26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-27; Michael Glover, *Wellington's Army in the Peninsula, 1808-1814* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1977), 38-9, 44. That said, the purchase of commissions did hamper the progress of promising young officers without the appropriate funds. A commission as an ensign in the infantry cost around £400, and £550 as lieutenant. Commissions in the cavalry were more expensive. An aspiring cavalry ensign required £735, and almost £1000 to acquire a lieutenancy. See: Philip Haythornthwaite, *British Cavalryman 1792-1815* (Oxford, 1994), 7. Some officers volunteered to serve in the ranks, hoping to earn a promotion - they accounted for approximately five per cent of new commissions. A small minority of enlisted men, about five per cent of officers, were promoted from the ranks based on performance and service record.

⁶⁸ J. A. Houlding, *Fit For Service The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 104-105.

⁶⁹ P. J. Jupp, 'Hutchinson, John Hely-, second earl of Donoughmore (1757-1832)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 28 September 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12883>; R. H. Vetch, 'Turner, Sir (Tomkyns) Hilgrove (1764-1843)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27873>.

37th regiment before he began his studies.⁷⁰ Robert Thomas Wilson, the third son of the celebrated portrait painter Benjamin Wilson, obtained a commission in the 15th King's Light Dragoons at the personal recommendation of George III.⁷¹ Others originated from the lesser gentry and professional classes: Abercromby was the son of a wealthy lawyer, who possessed the means to have his children educated privately at home. John Moore was the son of a physician and writer. When his father accompanied the Duke of Hamilton as a tutor and doctor on a grand tour, John was able to accompany them, and visited France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy.⁷² The military surgeon James McGrigor, who served as superintendent surgeon to Baird's Indian expeditionary force, was born to a merchant family in Aberdeen. His family evidently had money, as they funded his studies in medicine at Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and he began his career in the army by purchasing the post of surgeon to the 88th Connaught Rangers.⁷³

While officers of the regular army were drawn from a wide social spectrum, East India Company officers were generally men who lacked either the connections or the money to enter the King's service. Company officers did require some connections or money, as their initial appointment would be at the behest of a Company director, but thereafter, promotion was strictly determined by seniority within the service as a whole, rather than a combination of purchase, patronage and merit, as in the regular army.⁷⁴ David Baird, who commanded the expeditionary force from India, was certainly from a less privileged background than most of the officers in the regular

⁷⁰ Stanley D. M. Carpenter, 'Coote, Eyre (*bap.* 1759, *d.* 1823)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 28 Sept 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6244>.

⁷¹ R. H. Vetch, 'Wilson, Sir Robert Thomas (1777–1849)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 5 October 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29686>.

⁷² John Sweetman, 'Moore, Sir John (1761–1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 5 October 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19132>.

⁷³ H. M. Chichester, 'McGrigor, Sir James, first baronet (1771–1858)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 28 September 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17525>.

⁷⁴ Stuart Reid, *Armies of the East India Company 1750-1850* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 10.

army. He was born to an Edinburgh merchant family, which experienced significant financial difficulty after his father died when David was nine years of age. The commission he obtained as an ensign in the 2nd regiment of foot had been purchased by his mother for an older, more promising brother who had died suddenly. After five years of garrison duty at Gibraltar, he obtained a captaincy in the newly raised 73rd Highlanders, and was sent to India.⁷⁵

To some extent, advancement in the navy was based more on merit than money. Before an officer could obtain a commission, he had to pass a seamanship examination, which could not be taken until the candidate had spent six years at sea, with at least two in the rank of midshipman or master's mate. Aspiring lieutenants from rich, landed classes required at least some talent in order to progress, but patronage remained a dominant feature in the navy. Captains had complete control over which young midshipman to take to sea, and such boys were usually the sons of friends and relatives. Promising officers could remain unpromoted if they had no patron to help them. Unemployment was high among naval officers, as there was always a large surplus of them. Before the war less than a quarter were fully employed, and even with the wartime expansion of the service large numbers remained in retirement.⁷⁶

Although socially diverse, officers were largely united in what it meant to be gentlemen. Aristocratic martial traditions and honour codes were crucial to how officers behaved in war, shaping ideals of leadership, courage, paternalism, the treatment of the enemy and personal honour. There were also important civil dimensions to the officers' gentlemanly identity and behaviour. Traditional activities of hunting, gambling and drinking remained integral to many officers' leisure time, but their interests were guided to some extent by ideals of gentlemanly accomplishment and polite society. Refined manners and sensibilities were thought

⁷⁵ Brendan Carnduff, 'Baird, Sir David, first baronet (1757–1829)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, Accessed 28 September 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1098>.

⁷⁶ Haythornthwaite, *Nelson's Navy*, 4, 7-8. Charles Marshall, a lieutenant from 1759, held that rank for 45 years, "with a most unblemished character for courage and professional skill," but retired after "the daily mortification of seeing his juniors promoted over him".

to produce a more complete soldier. For this reason, there was a growing culture of professional education and diverse reading interests. Reading and knowledge were deemed important to a gentleman's refinement, accomplishment, taste and improvement. Some understanding of history, geography, religion, philosophy, science, literature, travel, art, landscape and architecture were important ingredients in fashioning a cultivated mind.⁷⁷

The military as a profession also began to encourage reading. Prior to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, there had been no institutionalized education in the military. Divisions that required a greater technical ability, such as the Royal Engineers and artillery officers, were trained at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, founded in 1741. These men were generally of a different calibre to those from the regular army: their commission and promotion depended upon merit and seniority, rather than on purchase. For the general army officer however, there was no established training. This began to change when the Royal Military College was established in 1801, which began the formal institutionalized military education of regular British officers. Nevertheless, almost all officers entered the British army during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars with no training.⁷⁸ Education was encouraged to a greater degree in the navy, particularly among midshipmen aspiring to become lieutenants. Occasionally a schoolmaster was appointed on board ships for the purpose of teaching these young gentlemen.⁷⁹ Reflecting on the intellectual and literary currents of the time, Gavin Daly thinks it safe to assume that officers read across a wide spectrum of genres, from newspapers and periodicals, to books on enlightened history and philosophy, poetry, sentimental novels and travel literature.⁸⁰ Despite this, British officers were considered poorly educated in wider contemporary thought. Few attended public school or university, and there was no formal training or education required for entry into the officer corps. There was an expectation that

⁷⁷ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 12, 27. See also: Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, 1660-1800* (London: Routledge, 2014), 75.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27; Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: the reform of the British Army, 1795-1809* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 187-210; Barthrop, *Napoleon's Egyptian Campaigns*, 21.

⁷⁹ Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar*, 20-22.

⁸⁰ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 28.

officers should learn on the job, calling on their gentlemanly qualities of leadership, gallantry and moral fortitude when the time required.⁸¹

Officers may have received an education and read widely, but what of the common ranks? The conventional view of the redcoat has largely been defined by Wellington's famous phrase, labelling the British soldier as the "scum of the earth", written as he struggled to restrain the plundering behaviour of his troops after the Battle of Vitoria in July 1813.⁸² Wellington's phrase fits with the leading military image at the time, which depicted the common soldier as a brutal creature, completely devoid of thought, initiative and the finer qualities of mind.⁸³ The poor reputation was largely due to the squalid living conditions and poor pay. Most enlistments were for 21 years, and very few survived their term for service in unhealthy climates like India. As a result, there was a widespread belief that self-respecting men never signed up. Only the most despicable individuals were thought to join the military, whose crimes and failings of character meant the army was the only occupation left open to them.⁸⁴ The ranks in the East India Company battalions possessed the poorest reputation; the Company was permitted to recruit soldiers in Britain, but for the most part, those willing to enlist found the regular army a more attractive prospect. Consequently, Company recruiters

⁸¹ Glen A. Steppler, 'The British Army on the Eve of War' in *The Road to Waterloo: The British Army and the Struggle Against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, 1793-1815*, ed. A.J. Guy, (London: Alan Sutton, 1990), 13.

⁸² Quoted in Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 30.

⁸³ Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 160. Wellington's remark has often been repeated by subsequent generations of historians. Richard Glover considered the ranks as "appalling thugs", and Scott Myerly wrote that "privates were recruited from the lowest, most despised levels of society," including "outcasts, tramps, petty criminals" as well as "bumpkins" and "fools". See: Glover, *Peninsular Preparation*, 174-175; Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle, From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3-4.

⁸⁴ Coss, *All for the King's Shilling*, 50-85, 252-256; Kevin Linch, *Britain and Wellington's Army: Recruitment, Society and Tradition, 1807-15* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 90. The ranks were paid one shilling a day, - 7s 6d per week from 1806 - compared with 12s that an agricultural labourer could earn, 22s 6d that a bricklayer received, and 28s that a labourer in His Majesty's Dockyards took home. No provisions were made for a soldier's dependants, who were abandoned when the army shipped out, and there was often no system for forwarding the soldier's pay to his family home.

took whomever they could get.⁸⁵ The contemporary image of the ordinary sailor was far better, perhaps because they remained Britain's main defence against France, and there was a certain pride at the growing superiority of the Royal Navy. Much like the army however, the navy was not an attractive occupation, and was poorly paid. Seamen could also be seen as ruffians, just like soldiers, and this view was especially strong after the great mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797.⁸⁶

Recent research by Edward J. Coss, Kevin Linch and Nick Mansfield has discredited this popular perception of Britain's armed forces. Enlisted men certainly came from the lower orders with humble backgrounds, but most were "respectable" working-class men.⁸⁷ They were primarily semi-skilled labourers, artisans and tradesmen such as shoemakers, tailors, and weavers. The key drive for recruitment was financial stability. Economic slumps were in abundance in Britain over the course of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Skilled artisans and tradesmen fell on hard times and the army was a regularly paid job.⁸⁸ Most of those who joined willingly did so because they had few alternative means to feed and clothe themselves. The military also appealed to many young men irrespective of the low pay. The spectacle, romance and power of a military uniform and the lure of travel and adventure to exotic locations, proved irresistible for many adventurous youngsters.⁸⁹ This was certainly the primary motivation behind James Downing's enlistment. Born in Truro, Cornwall, he was sent to school at an early age, before being apprenticed to a shoemaker. After

⁸⁵ Reid, *Armies of the East India Company*, 13.

⁸⁶ Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar*, 170-171; Lavery, *Nelson and the Nile*, 113. From 1797, a landsman, the lowest rank of common sailor, earned £1 1s 6d for a month of 28 days, while an able seamen received £1 9s 6d and a sailmaker's mate £1 13s 6d. By comparison, an agricultural labourer received £2 8s per month, and a bricklayer £4 10s.

⁸⁷ Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth-Century Military* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 26-69, 210-211.

⁸⁸ Linch, *Britain and Wellington's Army*, 90, 104; Coss, *All for the King's Shilling*, 50-85, 252-256, see esp. 74.

⁸⁹ Harari, *Ultimate Experience*, 161; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 34. See also: Houlding, *Fit for Service*, 117-119; H.C.B. Rogers, *British Army of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977), 59-63; Richard Holmes, *Redcoat, The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: Harper Collins 2002), 34, 75, 144-149.

five years of increasing boredom, he joined the army for the excitement.⁹⁰ The Edinburgh-born sailor John Nicol, who saw action at the Battle of the Nile, cited a similar motivation behind enlistment. From reading Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* many times over, he longed to be at sea. When his apprenticeship as a cooper ended, he volunteered for the Royal Navy.⁹¹

At the other end of the spectrum, many were forced into the army or navy against their will, as recruiting parties pressed men into military service. These unfortunates had no intention of signing up, but were coerced into doing so after being kidnapped or tricked by false promises and liquor. All this meant that although the majority of enlisted men did have humble origins, they were not the thoughtless criminals the upper classes thought them to be.⁹² The same can be said for the ranks of the East India Company. Some of the best recruits in the Company service were British regulars discharged when their regiments were ordered home. They had enlisted with the Company either because they had contracted local marriages during their service in India, or simply because they had become accustomed to colonial life. For the rank-and-file, India provided a warmer climate and a higher standard of living than they could expect in Britain.⁹³

That said, the number of rankers who were able to compose a narrative was in a minority. Gavin Daly estimates that no more than half of the rank and file were signature literate, and even fewer were capable of writing a letter or a diary.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, there were readers and writers amongst the ranks, and common soldiers

⁹⁰ Downing, *Narrative*, 1-3.

⁹¹ Henry Baynham, 'Nicol, John (1755–1825)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Accessed 29 September 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64874>.

⁹² Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 31. For details on army recruitment see: Glover, *Peninsular Preparation*, 214-233; Houlding, *Fit for Service*, 117-125; Glover, *Wellington's Army*, 24-35; Linch, *Britain and Wellington's Army*, 90-104.

⁹³ Reid, *Armies of the East India Company*, 13.

⁹⁴ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 31. See also: John E. Cookson, 'Regimental Worlds: Interpreting the Experience of British Soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars,' in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 26.

around 1800 were generally more literate than their predecessors. Literacy rates amongst the ranks gradually increased throughout this period as a result of expanding reading cultures and changes in recruitment policies and military and civilian education. Literacy skills were also encouraged by enlightened ideals of self-improvement and by evangelicals.⁹⁵ By the latter quarter of the eighteenth century, it was expected that every sergeant and most corporals in the British army should be able to read and write. Although these men often had no access to formal education, many exploited the opportunity to acquire literacy through their local church. The artilleryman Benjamin Miller provides one such example. He learnt to read and write while he was a page boy and was well drilled in a knowledge of the Scriptures.⁹⁶ George Billanie, a Glaswegian private in the 92nd Highlanders who published an evangelical-minded narrative anonymously, outlined a similar education in his memoir:

I pretty early learned to read; and as I grew older I became increasingly fond of it... I read whatever came in my way; but the Psalms of David in metre, in use by the Church of Scotland and the Bible, being the first books in which I learned to read, and having the benefit of godly instruction and example at home, religious knowledge was that with which I was most acquainted.⁹⁷

Those who wrote an account of their experiences in Egypt were literate, but in a minority of cases, illiterate men were able to dictate their experiences to others who could write them down.⁹⁸ James Downing provides one such example of this.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 31-32; Harari, *Ultimate Experience*, 192.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Miller, *The Adventures of Serjeant Benjamin Miller whilst serving in the 4th Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Artillery. 1796-1815* (Darlington, Heathfield: The Naval and Military Press, 1999), 2-3, 10-11.

⁹⁷ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 1-2.

⁹⁸ Harari, *Ultimate Experience*, 192; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 32.

Although he received an education, he was blinded during the Egyptian campaign, and dictated his narrative to his friends.⁹⁹

Similar to the army, there is evidence that the majority of sailors were illiterate, although this varied from ship to ship. Evidence suggests that there could be a high demand for literate individuals to read their shipmates' letters and write their response.¹⁰⁰ Reading seems to have been a common leisure activity among naval officers and educated seamen. Some commanders, including Nelson, distributed among their crews Bibles and prayer books, provided by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. In a few ships, other books might be provided, as Joseph Bates wrote: "To improve our mental faculties, when we had a few leisure moments from ship duty and naval tactics, we were furnished with a library of two choice books for every ten men..."¹⁰¹

Evidently, British military personnel derived from different backgrounds and social standing, and these differences are most apparent when comparing the writing of ordinary ranks with that of officers. John Cookson has emphasized that an unbridgeable class difference between officers and rankers remained a characteristic of the British military during this era. Officers adopted a paternalistic attitude which was rooted in the moral and intellectual superiority they felt towards the lower ranks.¹⁰² Officers' enjoyed greater levels of comfort than the men they commanded, and their accounts were generally more grounded in the conventions and styles of travel writing.¹⁰³ When circumstances permitted, officers had a greater freedom to explore the environment around them. They could journey further afield to visit sites of historical interest, and had greater access to the upper echelons of foreign societies. As we shall see, the different backgrounds of these men helped to define how they interpreted their experiences of Egypt and the people it contained.

⁹⁹ See: Downing, *Narrative*.

¹⁰⁰ Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar*, 345.

¹⁰¹ J. Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates; embracing a long life on ship-board* (Battle Creek, Michigan, 1868), 41, quoted in *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁰² Cookson, 'Regimental Worlds', 26.

¹⁰³ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 11.

1.

“An almost uninhabitable country”: military representations of the Egyptian landscape and climate

Writing about the campaign in Egypt, British soldiers and sailors paid a great deal of attention to the natural environment they occupied. The number of pages containing detailed descriptions of the environment was similar to those devoted to accounts of foreign peoples. These accounts were varied: on the one hand, they demonstrated the unique circumstances of campaigning, and on the other, they reflected broader British attitudes towards imperial landscapes. In the past decade, scholars have increasingly recognized that western views of non-Western, colonial landscapes were not monolithic or one-dimensional. John McAleer, in *Representing Africa*, posits that representations of landscapes were very much subjective responses; those who recorded the landscape possessed a diverse range of interests, impulses and professional priorities. The way in which the reality of the environment was presented depended on the differing circumstances of each individual and their intended audience. McAleer postulates that these representations of landscape became tools for expressing an individual reaction to particular circumstances.¹ For Gavin Daly, the diverse ways in which British soldiers interacted with the landscape during the Peninsular War mirrored the pleasures and pains of the war experience itself: the enjoyment of Romantic Mediterranean environments; the awe of sublime landscapes, the boredom and frustration of bleak wildernesses and flat spaces; the suffering and death that came with extreme weather conditions; the sorrow and trauma of terrain marked by battle, and finally, the soft, picturesque spaces and valleys that brought comfort and solitude from the war.² Much like their contemporaries in Southern

¹ John McAleer, *Representing Africa Landscape, Exploration and Empire in Southern Africa, 1780-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 4-6.

² Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-*

Africa and the Spanish Peninsular, the soldiers in Egypt employed diverse portrayals of landscapes to help convey their reaction to their experience of campaigning. The first objective of this chapter is to emphasize this diversity.

As Gavin Daly, Robin Gerster and Peter Pierce have argued, going to war on the tour of duty was itself a form of travel experience, and soldiers' narratives "look" like travel books, as they follow the basic conventions and structure of the travel narrative. The combination of the idioms and attitudes of tourism with the stresses and horrors of the battlefield produced mixed feelings of contempt and admiration among soldiers for the places they visited.³ One can see this blend of militarism and tourism in soldiers' narratives of Egypt. Soldiers may have written their accounts in a similar style to civilian travellers, but they were subject to different pressures and circumstances. The second objective of this chapter is to highlight the distinctiveness of these military views. In order to do this, the diverse responses of military servicemen towards the Egyptian environment have been roughly arranged into four categories, which shall be analyzed in turn.

The first of these categories considers responses that have been defined primarily by strategic considerations. This was a subject that civilian authors rarely addressed. In the century prior to the Egyptian campaign, European warfare had gradually evolved from static attack and defence of cities, into a more mobile form that took place over greater expanses of territory.⁴ As a result, greater attention was being paid to the formation and tactical manoeuvres of military bodies, particularly infantry. Soldiers in Egypt were sensitive to the strategic features of the environment in which they fought and marched. They discussed how cities might be attacked or defended, and how military operations might have been executed differently with the benefit of

1814 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 90.

³ Ibid., 9-10; Robin Gerster and Peter Pierce, 'Australians 'Over There'' in *On the War-path: An Anthology of Australian Military Travel*, ed. Robin Gerster and Peter Pierce (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 1-2. See also: Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 213-241.

⁴ Anders Engberg-Petersen, *Empires of Chance. The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University press, 2015), 43-44.

hindsight and a fuller knowledge of the local terrain. For military memoirists, this information was communicated to their readers through verbal description and through maps.

A second group of responses to the Egyptian environment can be described as ‘emotional’. In the late eighteenth century, more sentimental and subjective forms of travel writing emerged, concerned with the individual’s emotional and sensory response to foreign places and peoples. Previously, memoirists and travel writers only described what they did and saw. By the end of the eighteenth century, sentimental literature took great care to explain the emotional impact of events and the environment on the individual, employing a rich and diverse language for that purpose. A significant number of travellers sought to differentiate themselves from ordinary picturesque tourists or gentlemen on a Grand Tour, by dramatizing their travels. To do this, they rather perversely sought out suffering, discomfort and adversity. Carl Thompson, among others, label these writers as “suffering travellers”. Such authors developed a conviction that bad or difficult experiences had greater worth or existential validity. Thus, in their travels they were often the victims of shipwreck, oppression or robbery. By relating these events to their readers, suffering travellers hoped to evoke a sympathetic response.⁵ The soldiers and sailors who journeyed to Egypt were receptive to this literary trend. Similar to their civilian counterparts, they often stressed their emotional response to the extreme experience of combat, in an attempt to establish themselves among reading audiences as sentimental heroes, who endured the misfortunes and rigours of war to defend the country.⁶ Soldiers could be very effective at appealing for sympathy from their audiences, and they often used accounts of the climate and landscape to convey the extreme physical and psychological ordeal of campaigning to their readers.

Although the environment caused much of the suffering endured by the soldiers on campaign, they saw parts of Egypt as visually or commercially desirable. A third

⁵ Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-23.

⁶ Harari, *Ultimate Experience*, 138-144, 191-192; Neil Ramsey, *The Military Memoir and Romantic Literary Culture, 1780-1835* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 3, 6, 10, 31-34; 59.

group of responses comprises of the ways in which soldiers conveyed this desirability in their writing. For military memoirists, the picturesque was one of the primary methods through which the visual beauty of Egypt's topography was transmitted to their readers. Picturesque tourism was a popular pastime amongst officers, and offered a temporary escape from the campaign. The formulaic approach to picturesque painting and literary description of landscapes meant that representations of Egypt resembled those of other imperial regions and even Britain.⁷ By highlighting sameness rather than difference, a process described by David Cannadine as "the domestication of the exotic", Egyptian landscapes were represented as desirable for British habitation.⁸ These areas also had considerable commercial potential. The high productivity of the landscape in the Nile delta, combined with the poor standard of Egypt's agricultural industry, led several soldiers to speculate on the benefits for both Britain and the Egyptian inhabitants should Egypt be properly cultivated under British instruction.

These desires for greater British involvement in Egypt were juxtaposed with concerns over the diseases contained within the country. This anxiety expressed by soldiers in Egypt comprises the final group of responses. British soldiers developed an unfounded fear of the Egyptian climate. They regarded it in a similar manner to the deadly tropical climates of India and the West Indies, despite the much lower mortality rates. The objective of this final section is to explore why this was the case. At this time, disease was generally attributed to climatic and geographic factors, hence the apprehension expressed in Egypt reflected the geographic position of the country on the boundary between the orient and the occident.

Strategic perspectives of the landscape

Marching and fighting in the Egyptian landscape, it seems natural that the soldiers looked at the landscape around them with a strategic eye. This was one of the primary ways in which military writings differed from those of civilians. Tactical appraisals

⁷ Jeffrey Auerbach, 'The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire', *The British Art Journal*, 5 no.1 (2004): 47-54.

⁸ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), xix.

of the terrain were simply not present in civilian literature. Soldiers who devoted their prose to a strategic evaluation of the environment did so primarily when discussing the initial phases of the campaign on the Aboukir peninsula in mid-March, or when viewing the major Egyptian cities. Robert Wilson provides one of the best examples, as he speculated, with the benefit of hindsight, that a better use of the terrain in the first week of the campaign may have brought about a quick victory. After the battle of Mandara on 13 March, the French retreated to the heights on the outskirts of Alexandria. It seemed impossible to force the French from this position, as it was “rendered formidable by nature”.⁹ The heights occupy the point at which the Aboukir peninsula connects to the mainland. For the British, with the sea to their right and marshy ground to their left, a costly frontal assault appeared the only route from the peninsula into the mainland. They were unable to support any attack with artillery, as it required lifting by hand through the loose sand. At this point, the British centre suffered heavy losses, exposed to the French cannon on the heights. The British remained on this ground until 21 March, when they repulsed a large French attack and subsequently broke out from the peninsula. Inspecting this ground after the French capitulation in September, Wilson lamented the decisions the British made. Had the swampy ground to their left been closely examined, it would have been discovered to only appear marshy: “the nitrous salt upon the surface, and partial sappiness” of the terrain, were “deemed evident proofs of its total marshy nature.... but the eye was then unacquainted with the phenomena, and the deception was natural”. Wilson speculated on the British movements had this fact been exposed earlier. It “would have opened the weak part of the [French] position”; detachments of the army would have been marched to the left, and the French on the heights would have been attacked on two sides. Wilson concluded that “no doubt can now exist of it being easily carried, and most probably the towns of Alexandria, Old and New.”¹⁰

Strategic evaluations of the environment were perhaps most common when the British came in sight of the major urban centres in Egypt: Alexandria, Rosetta and Cairo.

⁹ Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt: Including Descriptions of that Country, and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmorice and Macri* (London: 1803), 88.

¹⁰ Sir Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 22-23.

When the British first came within sight of these cities, they were under the possession of the French. Therefore, it was natural for the British to survey the lay of the land, and assess how they might be attacked or defended. John Moore's diary provides a good example of this. On 3 July, he and General Hope reconnoitred the walls of Cairo, in preparation for laying siege. Viewing the French positions from afar, he wrote "It is so extensive as to require an army to defend it. We should have been able soon to make ourselves masters of their first positions and of the town, but there are works to which the French might have retired which must have been regularly besieged. These it would have required time and labour to capture."¹¹ Fortunately for the British, the French garrison surrendered before the siege was underway. Moore entered Cairo with General Hutchinson on 12 July, and inspected the works around the city and its citadel. "The line of defence round Cairo is about twelve miles, too extensive to be defended by any works. Those erected are in general trifling; they could not, however, have been assaulted." Moore was thankful for the French capitulation. Had an attack been made, against this large city with narrow, intolerably hot streets, "we should have been delayed, and should have lost men both by that and sickness."¹² Moore was fervently dedicated to his profession and it seems that he enjoyed inspecting the mix of ancient and modern redoubts and breastworks that lined Egypt's ancient cities, perhaps almost as much as his visit to other popular sites in Egypt. This is most apparent as he toured the defences of Alexandria, following the capitulation of the French at the beginning of September. "I have visited their works, which are very extensive. The fortified position in our front is strong; the lines are drawn with judgement, and executed with much art. In every part the superiority of their engineers is apparent."¹³ Robert Wilson provided a similar evaluation on Alexandria's defences as he entered the city. "The walls of Old Alexandria ran in the convex arch of a circle behind the position, the centre, the gate of Rosetta not being above one hundred and fifty yards from the citadel of the line". The defences were strewn with field pieces,

¹¹ Sir John Moore, *The Diary of John Moore*, ed. Sir J. F. Maurice (London: E. Arnold, 1904), vol.2, 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol.2, 30-31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol.2, 47.

and “batteries on the ramparts of the wall.”¹⁴ Wilson theorized the outcome of an attack on these defences.

Supposing then the first line carried in front, the troops would have been instantly exposed to grape from the redoubt before the Rosetta gate, and a battery on the wall above, whilst fort Crétin, the redoubt of Cleopatra, and another on the right, would have fired with effect shells and round shot. To have maintained a lodgement under such a cannonade, would have been difficult, yet had the right of the French position been turned by regular approaches, the troops would have been sheltered, and the heights occupied without danger; still the mere possession of them by no means would alone have been sufficient, nor could the batteries have been judiciously constructed on them, since they did not command the principal works of the place. However even from hence, the walls of Old Alexandria could not have resisted an hour’s battering....¹⁵

Captain Charles Hill displayed a similar interest in strategically appraising the environment around him. He commanded a company of sepoy in General Baird’s Indian army. When he arrived at Cairo in July, he found the Egyptian capital had already fallen to the British and Ottoman forces. Nevertheless, Hill ran a strategic eye over the city’s position and its defences. “Grand Cairo is on the side of a hill, quite open, and in many parts unprotected by any fortification whatever, indeed I am convinced it is extremely easy for any active enemy to make himself masters of it whenever he chooses.” The Citadel of Cairo, which “completely commands the city below.... is itself commanded by a hill close at the back of it, where a few pieces of canon properly directed would soon make the Citadel untenable... neither could it be defended against European skill in its present state, having neither ditch nor

¹⁴ Wilson, *History*, 210-211.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

rampart.”¹⁶ Away from combat and the Egyptian cities, there were times when soldiers commented on specific areas of terrain they passed though, which offered substantial strategic advantages. John Budgen, a captain in the 54th Regiment and one of General Baird’s aide-de-camps, wrote during the march from Kossier to Qena, that he passed through “a very narrow winding pass”, which “might be defended by a very small force against a very large army.”¹⁷

Interestingly, strategic surveys of the Egyptian environment were not as common as one might assume. One reason for this, which Huw Davies highlights, could be that the discussion of military operations was generally frowned upon in officers’ circles during recreational periods. Christopher Hely-Hutchinson, the younger brother of the second-in-command John, noted en route to Alexandria in February 1801 that discussions about the forthcoming operation often ended acrimoniously.¹⁸ This social etiquette was not always strictly regulated, and could be relaxed after several months in each other’s company, but it is possible that soldiers felt themselves obliged to maintain this custom in their writing. Another reason for the lack of military topographical description, particularly among military memoirists, may have been that reading audiences seemed to have quickly tired of this subject. After a series of publications on the Egyptian campaign in 1802, including Robert Wilson’s intricately detailed and highly acclaimed *History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, there were signs by 1803 that the readers’ enthusiasm for military details of the Egyptian campaign was fading. The *Monthly Review* commented in a review of Captain Thomas Walsh’s *Journal* in 1803 that “the tale of glory respecting the Egyptian expedition has been so frequently repeated”.¹⁹ In the same year, the *Critical Review*

¹⁶ Diary of Captain C. Fitzmaurice Hill, The British Library, (BL) MSS Eur D108, pp.100-101, 112. See also, pp.113-114, 131.

¹⁷ Military Journal of John Budgen Esq- Captain 54th Regiment, aid du Camp on the Staff of General Sir David Baird, during Service at the Cape, India & Egypt from February 9th 1796- Feb. 14th 1802, The British Library, (BL) Mss Eur A103, p.80.

¹⁸ Huw J. Davies, ‘Networks of Knowledge Exchange: The British Army, military history and geography in the late eighteenth century’, unpublished article, Accessed 16 June 2016, http://www.academia.edu/23419410/Networks_of_Knowledge_Exchange_The_British_Army_military_history_and_geography_in_the_late_eighteenth_century.

¹⁹ *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal. review of Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt...*, by Thomas

made a similar point, put rather more bluntly: “This tale has been so often told, that, without novelty of event or of language, it must disgust.”²⁰ As a consequence, military memoirists disregarded tactical details in order to place their writing within the genre of travel literature, and appeal to audiences interested in the exploits of gentlemanly travellers. The anonymous author of *A Non-Military Journal* summarized this sales tactic in his preface: “As I do not wish to be out of the fashion, I present to you a few observations” but “if you be one of those who live upon war, and rumours of wars, you will be sadly disappointed”.²¹ In his account published in 1816, Major Francis Maule wrote in his preface that he “does not profess to enter into minute details of military movements, as at so distant a period the marches and countermarches of regiments and brigades must be wholly unnecessary and uninteresting.”²²

Perhaps for this reason, several memoirists chose to represent the strategic topography of Egypt primarily through maps. This was a practice with which many who had served in Egypt would be acquainted; map drawing had become common among military writings in the late eighteenth century. The increasing emphasis on tactical manoeuvres within European warfare meant that the mapping of local natural features was becoming vital to military strategy. By the end of the century, maps were not only sources of information about the theatre of operations, but were the increasingly dominant medium of operational planning. Maps were essential in influencing and often defining a commander’s decisions on the composition, arrangement and formation of the army, its route of march, and its line of operations and supplies, as well as enabling him to familiarize himself with the ground on which the army would

Walsh. 41 (May – August 1803): 127.

²⁰ *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt...*, by Thomas Walsh 37 (February - April 1803): 361.

²¹ Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 5.

²² Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), iv. In another example, James McGrigor wrote in his introduction “to some, it may appear that, in the following Sketches, I have given too large a space to the journal; and that I have been too copious in my extracts from letters. Both of these are, no doubt, to many, dry and uninteresting”. See: James McGrigor, *Medical Sketches of the Expedition to Egypt, from India* (London: 1804), xii-xiii.

march and fight. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, the importance of mapping was reflected in military training. Topographical and landscape drawing was present in the curriculum in most military academies. Prominent artists and engravers became drawing masters at military colleges, such as Paul Sanby, who served in this capacity at the military academy in Woolwich.²³ Moreover, topographical works published in Britain were rising in popularity. In 1801, normal topographical or antiquarian publications had print runs usually between 200 and 1,000 copies. This changed when John Britton began publishing his topographical and history series *The Beauties of England and Wales* in 1801, which sold in the thousands.²⁴

Maps were a prominent feature in several military publications on Egypt, and some of the best examples can be found in Thomas Walsh's *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt*. Walsh littered his work with detailed topographical representations of the coastline and islands in the Mediterranean, with more on the interior of Egypt. Precise details can often be seen, from the smallest settlements, to streams, coastal shoals, watchtowers, redoubts, and copses of trees and shrubs. In his maps representing the fighting on the Aboukir peninsula in March 1801, Walsh pinpointed each unit and their movement across the terrain during the separate actions, allowing the viewer to see how the forces navigated across plains, hills and broken ground; he even included individual pickets.²⁵ Detailed topographical maps such as this were highly valued by civilian periodicals, presumably they allowed readers to quickly appraise themselves of the strategic situation without reading dry prose outlining strategy. In a review of Walsh's *Journal*, the *Edinburgh Review* declared "Too much praise cannot be given to the elegance and perspicuity of his topographical charts, and military plans."²⁶ The

²³ Luke Herrmann, 'Sandby, Paul (*bap.* 1731, *d.* 1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 12 December 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24613>.

²⁴ Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 326.

²⁵ See: Figures 1 and 2, Appendices. Walsh, *Journal*, front matter, 4-5, 10-21, 44-45, 80-81, 86-87, 96-97, 122-123, 192-193, 200-201, 210-211. See also: Lieut. Aeneas Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs, in April 1800...* (London: 1802), 184-185; Wilson, *History*, front matter, 82-83.

²⁶ *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal. review of History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, by Robert

Critical Review gave a similar appraisal. "...as a journal, it is, perhaps, still less interesting than Mr. Anderson's, and, as a military history, greatly inferior to sir Robert Wilson's work. Yet in some respects, it rises considerably above both; we mean, on account of its valuable plans and maps."²⁷ The lack of such detail could provoke severe criticism, and it was for this reason that Aeneas Anderson's *Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs*, was poorly received. The *Critical Review* asserted that "The work is handsomely printed, and adorned with numerous plates.... We have, however, seen nothing a style so truly incorrect as these drawings, or so imperfect as these representations."²⁸

One can look at these military maps as ideological works of British imperialism, even though Britain would not formally occupy Egypt until 1882. There is, as Matthew Edney notes, a basic intersection between imperialism and mapmaking. Knowledge of the territory is determined by geographic representations and most especially by the map. To govern territories, one must know them.²⁹ However, these maps were created primarily to illustrate the terrain and circumstances in which soldiers fought and marched. They served an immediate descriptive purpose, hence there is reason to doubt whether such maps came with the baggage of imperialistic imagination.

Interestingly, Huw Davies highlights that the experience of British soldiers in the Egyptian landscape provided an important moment in the development of British light infantry tactics. In the decades prior to the Egyptian campaign, strategic thought in Britain was in flux, and divisions emerged between British tacticians. European

Thomas Wilson; *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt*, by Thomas Walsh; *A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs*, by Lieutenant Aeneas Anderson; and *State of Egypt, after the Battle of Heliopolis; preceded by general observations on the physical observations and political character of the county*, by Jean Louis Ebenezer Reynier, 2 (April – July 1803): 54.

²⁷ *Critical Review; review of Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt...*, by Thomas Walsh, 361. See also: *Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature. For the Year 1803.* review of *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt*, by Thomas Walsh. 45 (1805): 943-948.

²⁸ *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs...*, by Lieutenant Aeneas Anderson. 37 (February - April 1803): 128. See also: *Edinburgh Review*, 2 (April – July 1803): 53-64.

²⁹ Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The geographical construction of British India, 1765-1843* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

warfare had gradually evolved from static attack and defence of cities, into a more mobile form that took place over greater expanses of territory. As a result, greater attention was being paid to the formation and tactical manoeuvres of military bodies, particularly infantry. Britain's global expansion from 1760 forced its army into contact, and often into conflict, with a diverse array of military bodies with alternative fighting styles and approaches to war.³⁰ The various methods can be loosely categorized into two competing schools of thought about how to best utilize military force. In Europe, during a series of wars throughout the mid-eighteenth-century, the success of Frederick the Great's Prussian army exhibited the importance of mass ranks, mechanical discipline and drill regulations. Meanwhile, in America, a very different school of thought emerged. After the experience in the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, some British tacticians began to emphasize the importance of light infantry. Greater autonomy was given to individual soldiers, whose speed and fluidity of movement provided tactical advantages in broken and enclosed country. The principles of these schools of thought were widely transmitted throughout the British military and it was not long before they were in conflict with one another. The crux of the argument came down to the differing nature of the terrain, with the 'European' school arguing that tactics developed in the American wildernesses were irrelevant in Europe, and the 'American' school arguing that the British army might benefit from a combination of regular and irregular tactics on any battlefield.³¹ By 1801, as Britain faced multiple threats from Revolutionary France in the Caribbean, Europe and Egypt, and from the Indian powers of Mysore and the Maratha Confederacy, Davies claims a forced amalgamation of the two schools occurred in Egypt. The army began to realize the importance of adaptability and

³⁰ Huw J. Davies, 'The Evolution of the British Army's Use of its History', unpublished article, Accessed 16 June 2016.

http://www.academia.edu/21432841/The_Evolution_of_the_British_Armys_Use_of_its_History.

³¹ Huw J. Davies, 'Networks of Knowledge Mobility Within Eighteenth Century British Imperial Militarism', unpublished article, Accessed 16 June 2016,

http://www.academia.edu/12359005/Networks_of_Knowledge_Mobility_Within_Eighteenth_Century_British_Imperial_Militarism; J. A. Houlding, *Fit For Service The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 235-241, 251; Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795-1809* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1963), 114-118, 124; Davies, 'Networks of Knowledge Exchange'.

innovation, especially with regard to the terrain. It was not appropriate to impose another nation's military doctrine on Britain's army, because the diversity of Britain's military experience – in North America, the Caribbean, India and Europe - rendered any predetermined doctrine invalid. The experience of warfare in theatres across the globe enabled the British army to develop its tactics in a unique and innovative manner.³²

Davies was quite right to point out a forced combination between the two tactical schools, but this argument could be more nuanced in the context of the Egyptian campaign. The process of amalgamation appears to have begun in January 1800, when 14 line regiments were ordered to send four NCOs and 30 men for rifle training. The chosen detachments assembled for training in March 1800, and were later returned to their units as riflemen, many of whom served in Egypt.³³ This method of light infantry was different from that of some European armies, whose light troops were primarily skirmishers and not much more. In the British army, the light troops were to act closely with regulars. Depending on the circumstances, the light troops were expected to fulfil the role of skirmishers and regular infantry. There were, however, very few fully-fledged light infantry regiments in the British army in 1801. The Baker rifle, used by British light infantry from 1800, was widely known to have greater range and accuracy than the musket, but it required a longer, more complicated loading procedure. For this reason it was not used by regular infantry. At shorter ranges, it was thought that riflemen would be shot to pieces by the faster-firing volleys of muskets, and the shorter barrelled rifle was a great disadvantage in a bayonet fight. Rifle equipped light infantry were distributed in small units throughout the army, to maintain their sharpshooting capacity while being protected by nearby regulars.³⁴ The experience and the performance of the rifle detachments in Egypt threw doubt on these assumptions, and encouraged the extension of light infantry from the single company per battalion into larger units.

³² Davies, 'Networks of Knowledge Exchange'; Davies, 'Networks of Knowledge Mobility'.

³³ Philip Haythornthwaite, *British Rifleman 1797-1815* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 11. The regiments that sent detachments for rifle training were the 1st, 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, 29th, 49th, 55th, 69th, 71st, 72nd, 79th, 85th and 92nd. Of these, the 1st, 23rd, 27th, 79th and 92nd served in Egypt.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-9.

A crucial factor in this development was the severe lack of detailed information on the local terrain during the preparations for the Egyptian campaign. This meant that a predetermined military doctrine of tactics was impractical, and tactical adaptability became increasingly crucial. As the British army commanders planned for the amphibious assault at Aboukir, they had nothing more than a vague idea of the terrain in which they would fight. They were familiar with the famous names of antiquity: Alexandria, Cairo and Giza but did not have any knowledge of strategic use. Only Sidney Smith, the Commodore famous for the crucial role he played in repelling Napoleon's army during the siege of Acre, had been to Aboukir before; he provided Abercromby and his staff with the little he could recall from his reconnaissance a year earlier.³⁵ What was really needed were detailed maps, of which there were none. "It is vain", wrote Col. Robert Anstruther to his brother, "to refer you to maps. There are none but what the French may *now* have that are not the greatest botchpennies possible, and perfectly erroneous."³⁶ To all intents and purposes, practical knowledge about the landscape and topography of Egypt was non-existent in the British army. This was a common feature in this period among British servicemen and bureaucrats, which derived from the empire's emphasis on maritime, rather than land based, military power. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, general topographical surveying was in its infancy; the Ordnance Survey had been founded in Britain in 1791 and it spent the first years of its existence concentrating on the cartography of the southern English counties for the purposes of strategic defence. As late as 1850, John McAleer argues, the state of geographical and topographical knowledge of Britain's colonies was still woefully underdeveloped.³⁷

British attempts to ascertain more topographical information prior to landing were frustrated. Major-General John Moore's conferences in January and February with the Ottoman Grand Vizir at Jaffa yielded little information; the Ottomans had not sent

³⁵ Wilson, *History*, 17.

³⁶ Quoted in Piers Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt, The End of Napoleon's Conquest* (London: Yauris Parke Paperbacks repr. 2010), 86.

³⁷ McAleer, *Representing Africa*, 3-4.

any surveillance parties to Egypt.³⁸ The chief engineer of the British forces, Major McKerras, had made a thorough reconnaissance of Aboukir Bay, but was killed before he delivered his report, and the surviving members of his surveillance party were captured.³⁹ Desperate for information, Abercromby and John Moore rashly set out together in a cutter to personally survey the coastline of Aboukir. Together, they selected a landing point. Their risk paid off, but one may speculate on the outcome of the campaign had they been spotted by one of the French gunboats patrolling the coastline.⁴⁰ Moore offered a few scant words in his diary on what he could see “about a mile and a half from the shore”: “I could observe no works whatever; the ground to the left is very woody and unequal, that upon the right a high sandhill... the ground is favourable to the enemy, as he can be concealed close to the shore.”⁴¹ Although a landing area had been chosen, the British had little idea what terrain lay beyond their line of sight. Deprived of any reliable reconnaissance reports, the British landed in Egypt effectively blind.⁴² This was a severe concern as the strategic importance of mapping and charting cannot be underestimated: making the landscape visible on widely circulated documents provided information that was crucial in attempts to outmanoeuvre and defeat the enemy.⁴³

The lack of topographical information would certainly have impacted morale. Many of the regiments that served in Egypt had also fought in the Dutch campaign. Those who remembered the landing on the Helder, on 27 August 1799, may have feared a repetition of these events, as there were some striking similarities between the two amphibious operations. Both were conducted on a small peninsula of barren sandy terrain, against an enemy who knew they were coming. Conditions on the shore were

³⁸ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 395-397.

³⁹ Colonel Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections of Colonel Landmann, late of the corps of Royal Engineers* (London: 1852), vol.2, 334-336.

⁴⁰ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 401; Abercromby to Dundas, 16 March, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.93, The National Archives.

⁴¹ Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 3.

⁴² Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 11, 35, 50-51.

⁴³ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1989), 74-75.

also similar: the surf at Aboukir and the Helder could often be boisterous.⁴⁴ Although the landing itself was not opposed at the Helder, the French had been waiting for the British, sheltered by the ridge of sand hills “distant only a half musket-shot from the sea.” As soon as the British had formed and moved up the beach they were assailed by heavy fire, and losses were high.⁴⁵ John Moore, who commanded a brigade during the Helder landing, later wrote about conditions on the beach. “Our situation at this moment was unpromising. An enemy was on both our flanks and we were in a position which, however favourably it had been represented by maps, proved extremely bad.”⁴⁶

A similar lack in topographical knowledge beset the Anglo-Indian expeditionary force that sailed from Bombay for Egypt in January 1801 under the command of General David Baird. Their voyage took longer than anticipated, due in part to the inaccuracy of the two charts in their possession of Egypt’s Red Sea coast. Charles Hill pointed out the numerous errors – shoals and even mountains were in the wrong locations.⁴⁷ After disembarking at Kossier in June, the army was forced to wait while Colonel Murray, the quartermaster, reconnoitred the route to Qena with a large escort, to ascertain and establish outposts at the locations of wells and watering points. The shortage of water in the wells meant that the army could not march together. Small divisions of approximately 800 men marched across the desert at intervals, to allow time for the wells to refill. As a result, the Anglo-Indian army took a long time to

⁴⁴ During the landing on the Helder, approximately twenty men were drowned in the surf. At Aboukir on 8 March, 35 men were declared missing after the landing, and were presumed drowned. The landing of the second expedition to Egypt, on 17 March 1807 also encountered difficulties. Alexander Mackenzie Fraser, the commander in chief, could only land one division on the beach before the surf prevented his remaining forces from approaching the shore. The single division was left exposed overnight on the peninsula. See: Anon., *The Campaign in Holland, 1799 by a Subaltern* (London: 1861), 10-13; Sir Henry Bunbury, *Narrative of the Campaign in North Holland 1799* (London: 1849), 2-3; Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820), 35-38; Major-Gen. Alexander Mackenzie Fraser to Visc. Castlereagh, 23 March 1807, War Office (WO) 1/348. This dispatch was also published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, see: ‘Interesting intelligence from the London Gazettes’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 101, no.1 (1807): 468.

⁴⁵ Anon., *Campaign in Holland*, 11; Bunbury, *Narrative*, 2-3.

⁴⁶ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 342.

⁴⁷ Hill Diary, 38-39.

cross the desert. The first division marched from Kossier on 19 June, and the last did not arrive at Qena until 1 August.⁴⁸

With limited reconnaissance of French positions prior to landing, British forces at Aboukir were obligated to improvise their tactics, adapting to the terrain and the circumstances they encountered. In doing so, the rifle detachments proved themselves able to withstand the attack of regular infantry and cavalry on their own, while also acting as skirmishers whenever the opportunity arose. Their dual role as skirmishers and line infantry allowed their commanders to respond more effectively to different circumstances. This is apparent during the opposed amphibious landing on 8 March. The British did not know how far the French lines extended; and as the assault forces approached the shore, it became clear that the light troops forming the reserve, under the command of John Moore, would land facing an unknown number of Frenchmen atop a sand hill. Moore did not hesitate. On jumping ashore, he led the grenadiers and light infantry from the 23rd and 28th regiments, and the light detachments from the 40th, up the hill which overlooked the entire landing.⁴⁹ According to Robert Wilson, they “rushed up the heights with almost preternatural energy, never firing a shot, but charging with the bayonet the two battalions that crowned it breaking them and pursuing till they carried the two Nole hills in the rear”.⁵⁰ To the left of the sand hill, another reserve unit – the Corsican Rangers - found themselves in the thickest fighting of the day. Landing alongside the 43rd and 58th Regiments, the Rangers were “attacked by both infantry and cavalry, both of which they repulsed, and they also followed them into the plain, taking three pieces of artillery.”⁵¹

Upon moving ashore, the British discovered that the terrain of the Aboukir peninsula favoured neither the ‘European’ nor ‘American’ school of tactics. Large open plains of barren sandy terrain surrounded the immediate vicinity, and such open areas allowed large formations of cavalry to move rapidly, making tight, heavily packed

⁴⁸ James J. Auchmuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie and the Anglo-Indian Expedition to Egypt’, *Egyptian Society of Historical Studies* 2, (1952): 72-73, 129.

⁴⁹ Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 3-5.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *History*, 14. See also: Abercromby to Dundas, 16 March, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.94-95; Walsh, *Journal*, 77.

⁵¹ Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 4.

formations of infantry, trained in the ‘European’ school, a necessity. However, these plains could be undulating, and were intersected by numerous ruins and groves of trees and bushes, which enabled infantry to operate in the ‘American’ style.⁵² Therefore, the military effectiveness of the British troops would be determined in part by their ability to combine the two schools of tactics, and how well they could interchange between them.

Two days after the landing, on 10 March, the British light troops demonstrated their tactical flexibility. Moore led the advanced guard of the army which comprised of the Corsican Rangers and occupied a small redoubt on the right flank of the main British force. There, he and his men encountered a “considerable body of cavalry who endeavoured to push us back”. In most circumstances, light infantry was extremely vulnerable to cavalry, their loose formation made individual infantrymen an easy target. In this instance however, the ground Moore and his men occupied was “broken and intersected by brushwood and old ruins”, and he ordered his men to use this to their advantage:

As the ground was favourable to infantry, the Corsican [Rangers] were directed to disperse and post themselves... By this means they forced the advanced guard of the cavalry back; but instead of being satisfied with this... they followed the enemy, who led them close to the main body, and then turned upon them.⁵³

Later, during the battle of Mandara on the 13 March, the 90th light infantry regiment, and the 92nd Highlanders with their rifle detachment, demonstrated their abilities as regular infantry, under the able command of Moore. Leading the detachment in column, Moore wrote:

We advanced rapidly, exposed to a most heavy cannonade from the front and of musketry from hussars

⁵² Davies, ‘Networks of Knowledge Exchange’.

⁵³ Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 5, 7.

and light infantry on the flank. The men, though mowed down by the cannon, never lost their order, and there was no was no period during the action or pursuit that I could not have halted the reserve and instantly wheeled to a flank without interval.⁵⁴

In the first few days of the campaign, the light infantry units had fulfilled various roles, demonstrating their adaptability. They had skirmished with the enemy while dispersed among ruins and bushes, and had attacked in tightly packed columns, in a similar style to regular infantry. Moore concisely summarized their abilities: “Our Light Infantry... are in fact a mixture of the Yager [sic, German skirmisher], and the Grenadier.”⁵⁵

For Piers Mackesy, in his extensive study of the Egyptian campaign, *British Victory in Egypt*, the importance of the Egyptian campaign for British tactics lay in the successful employment of the ‘European’ rather than ‘American’ school. Commenting on the performance of the British infantry, Mackesy, claims “It was the antithesis of the old loose order of the ‘American’ system”. He portrays the victory as “the fruits of a tree nurtured by Abercromby but planted thirteen years earlier by General Dundas when he published his *Principles*”.⁵⁶ Sir David Dundas’ work, *Principles of Military Movements*, was one of the main texts in Britain that adhered to the ‘European’ school; it enjoyed so much success that a revised version had become the regulation drill book of the British army in 1792. It devoted only nine pages out of 458 to light infantry.⁵⁷ In his concluding remarks reflecting on the success of the campaign, Mackesy writes “Dundas must have felt deep satisfaction when he read Abercromby’s posthumous letter confirming the success of his tactical system”.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., vol.2, 8. See also: Abercromby to Dundas, 16 March, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.98.

⁵⁵ *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research* (1952), vol. 30: 70, quoted in Haythornthwaite, *British Rifleman*, 9.

⁵⁶ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 100-101.

⁵⁷ Col. David Dundas, *Principles of Military Movements, Chiefly Applied to Infantry. Illustrated by Manoeuvres of the Prussian Troops, and by An Outline of the British Campaigns in Germany, During the War of 1757...* (London: 1788).

⁵⁸ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 235.

There is some substance to this argument; the comments of British officers as they reflected on the military success highlights their satisfaction and confidence in the ordered ranks of the British regulars, schooled in ‘European’ tactics. Charles Hill proudly remarked on the “order and regularity of the advance” at Mandara.⁵⁹ After communicating to his Indian troops the King’s approval of their conduct, Colonel Auchimuty added that his officers “feel with the fullest force the advantages which may ever result from order, discipline, and military system.”⁶⁰

Yet, as Huw Davies points out, there are considerable grounds to oppose the argument that military experience in Egypt reinforced the ‘European’ school of tactics.⁶¹ Mackesy appears not to have recognized that British commanders employed a mixture of regular and irregular tactics, utilizing light infantry and the terrain to protect the flanks, while using the main body to force the French off balance. At times, the drills prescribed by Dundas’ *Principles* were unsuitable in Egypt, and officers deviated from the regulations as they adapted to the terrain. Amphibious operations, notably the landing of troops on beaches, were not covered in official manuals, hence the landing at Aboukir on 8 March was the result of an entirely improvised plan by Abercromby and his officers.⁶² Perhaps the most common digression was the deployment of lines two ranks deep, rather than the three favoured in *Principles*. Lines of two ranks was the favoured formation of the American system; it allowed every man to use his musket freely, bringing more guns to bear on the enemy at any given time. Regiments in two-rank lines also had a greater frontage than the French, which meant that the front of the enemy could be overlapped. These advantages were tempered by the greater vulnerability to cavalry, especially if the flanks were unprotected. Due to the greater frontage, lines of two ranks lost some of the solidarity that was present in more compact formations, and it took longer for a two-rank line to form squares that bristled with bayonets, into which horses were reluctant to charge.⁶³

⁵⁹ Hill Diary, 117-118.

⁶⁰ Auchimuty, quoted in Hill Diary, 120.

⁶¹ Davies, ‘Networks of Knowledge Exchange’.

⁶² Philip Haythornthwaite, *British Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 41, 55-56.

⁶³ Michael Barthrop, *Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaigns 1798-1801* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 24-5; Haythornthwaite, *British Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 15-16.

On the Aboukir peninsula, the British found that the lines of two ranks worked effectively. The large open plains allowed the British to use a greater frontage, and their flanks were secured by the intersections of broken ground and the sea on either side.

Events in the immediate aftermath of the Egyptian campaign suggest it had been a proving ground for the use of light infantry. Two new and innovative military education and training facilities were established that studied 'American' tactics. Before the end of 1801, Colonel John le Marchant founded the Royal Military College, in essence the first British Staff College at High Wycombe. Its purpose was to instruct young officers in military theories, concepts and tactics that existed not only in the British army, but in those of rival nations.⁶⁴ John Moore, who was instrumental in the training of light infantry regiments prior to the Peninsular war, had been particularly impressed by the performance of light troops in Egypt. On his return to Britain, he advised the Duke of York that some of the best regiments in the service should be trained as marksmen and in light infantry tactics. The Duke approved of this idea, and gave him the means to form his own regiment. In 1803, at Shorncliffe in Kent, Moore took command of the Experimental Rifle Corps, and set about training a unit which valued intellectual as well as physical abilities amongst the ranks.⁶⁵

Emotional responses to the environment

Although the strategic problems posed by the Egyptian environment were an important factor in the development of British infantry tactics, this was not a common topic of discussion in narratives of the Egyptian campaign. Perhaps the most popular means by which military personnel in Egypt engaged with, and described the environment around them, was through emotion and the language of sensation. Writing in this fashion, military memoirists were heavily influenced in form and style

⁶⁴ Davies, 'British Army's Use of its History'; Davies, 'Networks of Knowledge Exchange'.

⁶⁵ James Carrick Moore, *The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore* (London: 1833), vol.2, 5; Houlding, *Fit for Service*, 251-252; See also: Glover, *Peninsular preparation*, 123-131. The Experimental Rifle Corps would eventually become the 95th Rifles, a regiment which developed a formidable reputation in the Peninsula campaigns.

by broader civilian cultures of writing, especially the ‘suffering traveller’.⁶⁶ As Gavin Daly and Neil Ramsey highlight, the literary approach of the ‘suffering traveller’ enabled soldiers to employ the landscape as a medium through which to convey the arduous nature of their war experiences. Indeed, soldiers were so successful at conveying their hardships throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, that the reading public began to connect the language of suffering primarily with military personnel.⁶⁷

The soldiers’ description of the emotions and sensations experienced on campaign in Egypt, especially suffering, is most apparent in accounts of the climate. Unaccustomed to high temperatures and living on salted provisions, British soldiers struggled with the effects of dehydration throughout the campaign.⁶⁸ After landing at Aboukir Bay, the troops’ only source of water for ten days were the small pools found by digging hollows around date trees with their bayonets. This trivial amount was “of a white clay colour, and brackish”, but the soldiers treated it “as if it were wine.”⁶⁹ During combat in the first days of the campaign, Sergeant Robertson, of the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, wrote of the extreme thirst:

... with the effects of the powder in our mouths in biting off the ends of the cartridges, and the heat of the day, our throats were parched and burning... so thirsty were several of the men, that they adopted the expedient of trying to allay their parched throats with salt water; but

⁶⁶ For accounts of suffering in civilian Near-East travelogues, see: James Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern* (London: 1797), 7; C. S. Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Undertaken by Order of the Old Government of France* (London: 1800), 320; Claude-Étienne Savary, *Letters on Egypt*, vol. 1 (London: 1787), 272. See also: 47-48. For analysis of suffering in travelogues, see: Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 15-16, 24, 61-62, 64.

⁶⁷ Ramsey, *Military Memoir*, 10, 16-17, 31-34, 59; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 82. See also: Harari, *Ultimate Experience*, 138-144, 160, 188-191, 199-206.

⁶⁸ Daniel Nicol, *Sergeant Nicol: The Experiences of a Gordon Highlander During the Napoleonic Wars in Egypt, the Peninsula and France* (Milton Keynes: Lenaur, 2007, repr.), 39.

⁶⁹ Diary of Capt Exham Vincent, 54th and 39th Regiments, 1800-1813, National Army Museum, 06-05-69-1, p.28; Diary of Lt (later Gen) Thomas Evans, 8th Regiment of Foot, 1 May 1799 to 3 Sep 1801, National Army Museum, 95-09-101-1, p.106; Nicol, *Experiences*, 37.

the result may be imagined – instead of benefiting them, it made them infinitely worse.⁷⁰

Fresh water springs were soon found, but the soldiers could never carry enough liquid with them, equipped with only their standard issue canteens. The difficult terrain exacerbated these problems. According to Lieutenant Exham Vincent of the 54th Regiment, the soldiers marched primarily “on sandy soil in which we were ankle deep”.⁷¹ This made the carrying of guns, provisions and ammunition from the fleet tortuously difficult. With severely limited numbers of draught animals, the soldiers had to carry many of their supplies for miles by hand, dragging them off the boats to the supply depots. It is worth considering here the weight of cannon pieces, the most common of which used by the British army were light and medium 6-pounders. One of these cannon pieces weighed approximately 230kg, and combined with its limbers and ammunition carriage, weighed over a tonne.⁷² This had significant strategic consequences, as Thomas Walsh noted during the battle of Mandara. The British advance was “often obliged to halt for the artillery, which, not being drawn by horses, but by men, was dragged with great difficulty and labour through the heavy sands”.⁷³ Daniel Nicol, another sergeant in the 92nd Highlanders, remembered that detachments of infantry “were frequently sent to assist the seamen with the guns....”⁷⁴

It is unsurprising, given the sweltering temperatures and the effort required to move such objects, that Sergeant Robertson reported “a number of the men had died of thirst, and others had gone mad from the effects.”⁷⁵ Several memoirists stressed the indescribable nature of their ordeal. Francis Maule, a major in the Queens’ Regiment, wrote: “An unquenchable burning thirst continually demanded water. Who indeed,

⁷⁰ D. Robertson, *The Journal of Sergeant D. Robertson, Late 92d Foot: Comprising the different Campaigns between the years 1797 and 1818* (Perth: 1842), 7-10.

⁷¹ Vincent Diary, 22.

⁷² Barthrop, *Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaigns*, 21. For the weight of artillery pieces, see: Stephen Summerfield, ‘Comparison of Foot Artillery Weights’, *Smoothbore Ordinance Journal* 7, no.16 (2013): 76-77.

⁷³ Walsh, *Journal*, 87.

⁷⁴ Nicol, *Experiences*, 39, 45, 56-57.

⁷⁵ Robertson, *Journal*, 26.

who has not suffered in such a climate, experienced similar privations, and waded through the sands of Egypt, can form an adequate idea of the pains of extreme thirst?”⁷⁶ Captain Vincent summarized the difficulties: “the men were nearly exhausted before they arrived. Heavily laden, and wading through scorching sand, without a drop of water to allay the thirst it produced, many of them fell down and were unable to proceed.”⁷⁷

Even the troops who had prior experience of hot temperatures in India or the West Indies were shocked by the intense heat. Baird’s 8,000 men, who had sailed from Bombay in January, reached Kossier, on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea on 16 May. From there, the army marched across 120 miles of desert at the height of summer, and reached Cairo on 26 August, only to find the French garrison had already surrendered.⁷⁸ Astonishingly, the army travelling by night achieved this feat with only one casualty, but it was undoubtedly a gruelling experience, even for the Indian regiments accustomed to the heat. While camped in centre of “this horrid desert”, Charles Hill repeatedly emphasized his desire to be away from the heat and the sand. “We are”, he wrote, “heartily sick of it and anxious to get over it, the uncommon fatigue in the long marches exciting most dreadful thirst.... The idea of seeing a green field, a river, or a wood, has the same effect upon the mind as the sights of the white cliffs of Britain would have upon a homeward-bound Briton.” The desert was “unhealthy and even dangerous to the Constitution of an European”.⁷⁹ James McGrigor, the superintendent surgeon to the Indian expeditionary force, opined. He had served in hot, tropical climates before: at Grenada and St Vincent in the West

⁷⁶ Maule, *Memoirs*, 108-109. See also: 97, 127. See also: Report on the Egyptian Campaign by Capt. Alexander Bryce, Royal Engineers, National Army Museum, 03-12-13-1; Nicol, *Experiences*, 59-60, 67, 81, 87-88; Reminiscences of my Military Life from 1795-1818, Lieut-Colonel Charles Steevens, Late XXth Regiment, National Army Museum, 74-12-154-1, pp.15-20; Coote to Gloucester 30 March, 17 May, and n.d. (between 1 and 5 July), Letters and dispatches by Gen Sir Eyre Coote, 1800-1801, National Army Museum, 88-06-28; James Downing, *A Narrative of the Life of James Downing (a Blind Man) Late a Private in His Majesty’s 20th Regiment of Foot. Containing Historical, Naval, Military, Moral, Religious and Entertaining Reflections. Composed by Himself in Easy Verse* (London: 1815), 87-88.

⁷⁷ Vincent Diary, 28.

⁷⁸ Hutchinson to Hobart, 19 August 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.397-400; Baird to Hobart, 4 September 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.401-405.

⁷⁹ Hill Diary, 74, 79-80.

Indies, and later in Bombay and Ceylon.⁸⁰ Despite his experience he found himself unprepared for the heat. “The fatigue on the march”, McGrigor wrote, “has perhaps never been exceeded in any army”; the Egyptian desert was “most inimical to the human race”.⁸¹ The sepoy, he claimed, shared this view: “At Kossier, and in crossing the desert, the degree of heat was very great, and both the officers and men, from Madras, as well as Bengal, complained that it was more insupportable than they had ever felt it in the hottest seasons.”⁸²

One may argue that the shock experienced by British soldiers at the intense heat during the initial stages of the campaign, had an impact on British strategy. A few days after taking command of the army at Aboukir after the death of Abercromby, General John Hutchinson wrote to Henry Dundas, outlining his plans for the campaign. His aim was not to destroy the French garrisons; instead he sought to drive them away from the larger settlements and the Nile Delta, into the desert. There, the heat, lack of supplies, and hostility of the Bedouin would force the French to capitulate. Hutchinson reasoned that this approach would save the lives of British soldiers, by using the Egyptian climate to kill Frenchmen, rather than British muskets. In the event, this tactic was not pursued, the French were too numerous for this outcome to be possible, but it is interesting that Hutchinson entertained the possibility of using the climate as a weapon. He clearly appreciated the dangers of the Egyptian climate to European troops.⁸³

Some of the most intense descriptions of suffering were in the accounts of the local sandstorms – the Khamsin and Simoom. These storms blow great quantities of sand

⁸⁰ H.M. Chichester, ‘McGrigor, ‘Sir James, first baronet (1771–1858)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 16 June 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17525>.

⁸¹ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 2, 6, 10; Catherine Kelly, ‘Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign: The Development of the Military Medical Officer during the Napoleonic Wars c.1798-1801’, *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 27, no.2 (2010): 327-328; Max Mayerhof, ‘A Short History of Ophthalmia during the Egyptian Campaigns of 1798-1807’, *The British Journal of Ophthalmology* 16, no. 3 (1932): 140.

⁸² McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 84-85.

⁸³ Hutchinson to Dundas, 3 April 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.154-155.

and dust at speeds of up to 140 kilometres per hour, which blot out the sun and raise temperatures by as much as 20 degrees within two hours. The storms blow intermittently, most commonly between February and June, lasting from 30 minutes to a few days. In more violent cases, they are capable of harming crops, causing illness to livestock and people, and occasionally damaging buildings.⁸⁴ Heatstroke is one of the most common complaints, as the hot winds bring more heat to the body than can be disposed of by the evaporation of perspiration. To the British soldiers, unaccustomed to the high temperatures of Egypt, the Khamsin and Simoom posed severe hazards.

One of these violent storms descended on 23 May. It engulfed the British army, encamped on the banks of the Nile several miles downstream from Cairo, as well as the hospitals at Rosetta and Aboukir. Although the storm lasted only until the evening, few memoirs of the campaign fail to mention it, not only did it heighten the soldiers' suffering, but it was a foreign and exotic phenomenon. Thomas Evans, a lieutenant in the 8th Regiment of Foot, wrote: "This day will be remembered by every person in camp, was it possible that they could exist for centuries to come."⁸⁵ Lt-Col. Robert Thomas Wilson, commander of a detachment of Hompesch mounted riflemen, described the heat: "the thermometer was at 120 [Fahrenheit] in the shade; the ground was heated like the floor of a furnace; every thing that was metallic, such as arms, buttons, knives... became burning hot." Combined with the masses of sand and dust blowing furiously, respiration became difficult as "the lungs were parched with the fiery particles."⁸⁶ There was little the soldiers could do but endure. They hid in tents and buried themselves under blankets, in a desperate attempt to keep the burning sand out of their eyes and lungs. George Billanie, lying in a hospital bed at Rosetta, wrote: "The air was darkened with mist, which was so thick that it rendered breathing difficult." He and his fellow patients huddled under their bedsheets, drenched in

⁸⁴ 'Climate: observations, projections and impacts, Egypt', Met Office, 5 Dec 2011, Accessed 4 December 2017, see pp.12, 23.

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/mohippo/pdf/4/j/egypt.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Evans Diary, 146.

⁸⁶ Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 113. See also: Nicol, *Experiences*, 70.

sweat, “for although the heat was intense, and the blankets disagreeably warm and heavy... our breathing [was] more tolerable under them”.⁸⁷

One of the most interesting descriptions of the storm was written by Sergeant Robertson. Contrasting it with the most violent weather of the highlands, he wrote that the sand “fell upon us thick as snow-drift” and “formed altogether the opposite extreme of a Highland snow storm,- sand and heat instead of snow and cold.”⁸⁸ Robertson’s comment encapsulates an intriguing aspect of the soldiers’ reaction to the Egyptian climate, and draws comparison with the literary techniques of civilian travellers. According to historians John McAleer and Paul Carter, British tourists’ representations of exotic landscapes often possessed an urge to render the unfamiliar familiar, to make them conform with images of home in order to show that they could be controlled and mastered. Paradoxically there was also a desire to emphasize the exotic, wild and untamed character of these foreign lands, so that the protagonist of the narrative can be seen to be bringing the landscape and its people into the frame of civilization.⁸⁹ By representing the Egyptian landscape and climate as completely opposite from the Highlands, the soldiers were able to communicate a sense of exoticism within a familiar visual vocabulary, thus pre-empting any feeling of disturbance that may have arisen among their readers from imagining foreign landscapes.⁹⁰

Another challenge posed by the Egyptian environment was the multitude of pests and vermin. Swarms of flies and fleas proved an infuriating menace, covering and biting

⁸⁷ Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820), 103-104. See also: Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 52-53; Maule, *Memoirs*, 110-112; Benjamin Miller, *The Adventures of Serjeant Benjamin Miller whilst serving in the 4th Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Artillery. 1796-1815*. (T, Darlington, Heathfield: The Naval and Military Press, 1999), 20; Vincent Diary, 21, 31-32; Downing, *Narrative*, 91-92; Francis Collins, *Voyages to Portugal, Spain, Sicily, Malta, Asia-Minor, Egypt, &c. From 1796 to 1801* (London: 1807), 284-285; Nicol, *Experiences*, 70.

⁸⁸ Robertson, *Journal*, 27.

⁸⁹ John M. Mackenzie, General Editor’s Introduction to McAleer, *Representing Africa*, xii; McAleer, *Representing Africa*, 61-62; Paul Carter, *The road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 236.

⁹⁰ McAleer, *Representing Africa*, 64-65.

exposed skin, living in clothes and swarming over food before there was any chance of eating it. One of General Abercromby's staff officers wrote "flies, fleas, bugs, moschettoes, cockroaches... live upon you... if you opened your mouth you were almost choaked by a swarm that rushed down your throat".⁹¹ Considerable effort was required to deter them, as "it was impossible to eat without hiring persons to stand by every table with feathers, or flappers, to drive them away." Without proper camping equipment, the soldiers slept under the stars for months on end, and no respite could be gained from insect bites: "The utmost attention to cleanliness, by a frequent change of every article of wearing apparel, could not repel the attacks of vermin which seemed to infest even the air of the place."⁹² The bite from these insects "had an inflammatory effect; so much so, that every one for some time after his arrival, resembled a person in the height of measles."⁹³

The soldiers' accounts of Egyptian sandstorms and local pests highlight some of the differences between the experience of military personnel and civilian travellers. Many tourists wrote of the danger of Egyptian sandstorms and the annoyance of flies, fleas and locusts, but they nevertheless found the Egyptian climate bearable. During the twelve years John Antes stayed in Egypt, as an American Moravian missionary who served with the Coptic Church of Cairo, he "felt no other inconveniency from it but a more difficult respiration than usual, and an intolerable dust, exceedingly fine, and penetrating every where."⁹⁴ Claude-Étienne Savary, who spent two years in Egypt

⁹¹ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 51.

⁹² Clarke, *Travels*, vol. 5, 78-80, quoted in Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 126.

⁹³ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 109. Other pests in Egypt included: fleas, lice, centipedes, locusts, rats, snakes and scorpions. Several officers were able to purchase mosquito nets from the locals to protect them while they slept, but the common ranks were not so fortunate. A few were hospitalized having been stung by scorpions whilst sleeping. See: op cit., 103, 122-123; Maule, *Memoirs*, 107; Wilson, *History*, 263; Vincent Diary, 31-32; Diary for 18 August 1800 – 14 August 1801, kept by Capt & Lt Col Sit Warren Marmaduke Peacock, 2nd Guards, National Army Museum, 82-09-28-1; Nicol, *Experiences*, 52, 79, 87; Robertson, *Journal*, 21; Hill Diary, 124.

⁹⁴ Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785* (London, 1787), 62, quoted in John Antes, *Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Egyptians* (London: 1800), 14.

between 1777 and 1779, wrote that the route between Cairo and Kossier, which the Indian expeditionary force traversed in 1801, was not too arduous:

The inconveniences of the road from Cossier [sic] are not so great during winter the heats being much less... Even during summer, if proper care is taken to have a supply of provisions and water, in jars or skins... people who are accustomed to these climates perform this journey with tolerable ease.⁹⁵

The conflicting views of soldiers and civilian travellers on the rigours of the Egyptian environment, highlight some of the differences in the experiences of these two groups of writers. Soldiers camped in the Egyptian countryside for the duration of the campaign and, due to failings in planning and preparation, lacked proper camping equipment. They were entirely exposed to the harshest environmental features of the country: the hot climate, desert winds and irritating vermin. These circumstances were quite unlike those of tourists, who stayed in caravanserais, or carried their own camping equipment.⁹⁶ In some ways however, military personnel benefited from superior living conditions to those of civilian travellers who had visited Egypt. Soldiers found it relatively easy to attain food provisions and they expressed a sense of personal security, which derived from the sizable British force, and the friendliness of the local inhabitants. Such conditions were rarely enjoyed by civilian travellers. John Antes illustrates this point. In 1779 he was seized and tortured by the Mamluks, who mistakenly thought Antes had hidden his wealth from them. He was quickly released when Antes could not pay, but he never fully recovered from the wounds he had received.⁹⁷ Understandably, there are several instances where European travellers felt compelled for their own safety to impersonate and adopt the dress of a Muslim.

⁹⁵ Savary, *Letters on Egypt*, vol. 2, 29-30., vol. 1, 47, vol. 2, 216-218; Volney, *Travels*, vol. 1, 305; Sonnini, *Travels*, 132-133.

⁹⁶ Gavin Daly, 'Liberators and Tourists: British Soldiers in Madrid during the Peninsular War', in *Soldiering in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850 Men of Arms*, ed. Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 130-131; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 214; Maule, *Memoirs*, 97, 107.

⁹⁷ Antes, *Observations*, 116-125.

One of the most famous was Carsten Niebuhr, the only survivor of a Danish expedition to Arabia between 1761 and 1767. He attributed his survival in part to his adoption of native dress and eating habits.⁹⁸ By the start of the Egyptian campaign, W.G. Browne, who published his travels in 1799, was perhaps the most recent tourist in Egypt to adopt Muslim attire for his safety.⁹⁹

This problem was not encountered by the British army in 1801. As a large, concentrated and easily recognizable military force, which paid for its supplies and made it clear that they were in Egypt to remove the French, the British forces were tacitly supported by most of the local population. According to some of the memoirists, this was evident in the delight of the Egyptian inhabitants in towns and villages as the army marched past. “men, women, and children got on the top of their flat-roofed houses and shouted for joy”.¹⁰⁰ Others “crowded about us received us with every expression of delight, offered up prayers for our success, and the women congratulated us by a quick motion of the tongue... This uncommon mode of reception, it seems, meant to assure us how they rejoiced at our arrival”.¹⁰¹ This response brought great satisfaction to the British, not least because the French had been treated in an entirely different manner. Robert Wilson summarized these thoughts. He claimed to have ridden through the country frequently without escort, all the while

...experiencing the kindest attentions of friendship from every individual... There was a vanity justly indulged in reflecting, that a Frenchmen could never venture to pass through the same districts, even when the French army ruled with uncontested dominion,

⁹⁸ Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia, and other countries in the East, performed by M. Niebuhr* (Edinburgh: 1792), 2 vols.

⁹⁹ W.G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798*, sec edn (London: 1806), 19-21.

¹⁰⁰ Nicol, *Experiences*, 61-62.

¹⁰¹ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 49.

unless guarded by a force sufficient to command his security.¹⁰²

Another officer, writing anonymously, offered a similar view, and even suggested the British were idolized by the Egyptians.

From these very people have we received, and continue to receive every possible mark of attention, hospitality and attachment: they look upon us as a wonderful race, who, though able to defeat the French, whom they supposed invincible, yet do not exercise that strength which we are known by them to have, in levying contribution, taking things without paying for them, or in any way oppressing them.¹⁰³

Egyptian support for the British was manifested primarily in supplies. After the victory at Mandara on 13 March, local Arabs began to appear at the British camp, and a sizeable market sprang up. Various kinds of provisions could be attained, for a price. On sale were water, coffee, bread, sheep, goats, fowls, eggs, fish and all kinds of indigenous fruit and vegetables, “in short, every thing that the country afforded”.¹⁰⁴ A little money was distributed to the troops to buy what they wanted, and Daniel Nicol had a particularly successful first visit to the market: “I bought a sheep for a Spanish dollar and a cheese about 10lbs. for 60 *paras* and a bunch of young onions.”¹⁰⁵

The market was important enough as a source of supply that George Baldwin, the former consul in Egypt, was appointed its superintendent to keep the stalls regular and organized.¹⁰⁶ Other services were occasionally supplied by the Arabs, as Nicol observed. “Some stout fellows among them would carry eight or ten men’s knapsacks

¹⁰² Wilson, *History*, xi.

¹⁰³ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 86-87.

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, *Journal*, 239-240. See also: Walsh, *Journal*, 83. Robertson, *Journal*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁵ Nicol, *Experiences*, 52. See also: 58, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Walsh, *Journal*, 94.

a whole day's march for ten or twelve *paras*.”¹⁰⁷ Later, Arabs were employed to supply the hospitals with water, bringing it from the Nile on their backs in goat skins. To the delight of the sick and wounded, a few skins arrived full of wine and honey.¹⁰⁸ Some British soldiers were conflicted as to whether these Arab salesmen were motivated by kindness or greed. Thomas Walsh for instance, was certain that the Arabs made a tidy profit, and he became irritated with their attempts to “impose on us as much as possible.” Yet Walsh later recognized that the Arabs travelled to the British camp at their own risk. The French executed any who were caught heading to the British camp with provisions.¹⁰⁹

Moreover, food and refreshments were occasionally supplied to the British free of charge. This was most common when the vanguard of the British force arrived to occupy settlements previously held by the French. Milk, bread and jars of water would often be distributed among the thirsty troops. A notable instance of this occurred at Darmanhur, when crowds of Egyptians met the British and handed out refreshments a mile from the outskirts of the town.¹¹⁰ The British force from India, marching through the desert, rarely had to pay for the stream of supplies they received from the locals. The Indian troops, “experience the greatest friendship from the Arabs; who willingly afforded them all the assistance in their power, without which it would have been almost impossible for them to have reached Cairo.” It later emerged that this payment had merely been deferred. Osman Bey, in command of the Mamluks, had arranged the payment for the supplies, and shrewdly sent the bill to the Ottoman Grand Vizir. The Vizir refused to pay and, on the conclusion of the campaign, charged it to the British.¹¹¹

Although British soldiers received assistance from the fellahs, the Egyptian peasantry, they were not supported by the Bedouin. These bands of nomadic, desert dwelling tribes had no allegiance, and had little care whom they assaulted. Although the British

¹⁰⁷ Nicol, *Experiences*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 111-112.

¹⁰⁹ Walsh, *Journal*, 52-53, 95.

¹¹⁰ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 49.

¹¹¹ Walsh, *Journal*, 206.

were safe in numbers, isolated soldiers and stragglers were easy prey to the Bedouin, who invariably robbed and murdered their victims, leaving the mutilated bodies for their comrades to find. The hazards the Bedouin posed were reflected in general orders on 13 May: “Officers will be careful to explain to the soldiers, and all persons belonging to the army, the danger which they incur of being robbed and plundered by the Arabs, if they stray from, or remain behind their regiments.”¹¹² The fear of the Bedouin is most apparent in artilleryman Benjamin Miller’s account. On 13 June, he became seriously ill and was barely able to stay upright on his horse. He quickly fell behind the main body of the army on the march, and was provided with a “Non-Commissioned officer and two men to guard me and get me along, as it was dangerous of being killed by the Arabs if we stopped in the rear”.¹¹³

Although British soldiers generally benefited from the affability of the local Egyptians and the supplies they provided, one must remember that soldiers were not ordinary travellers. They did not enjoy an itinerary defined solely by travel books or the more temperate seasons of the year. Their paths were largely determined by the exigencies of war, often taking them to remote and inhospitable regions; and they travelled in all weather conditions, common soldiers slogging it on foot. The soldiers’ travel arrangements were therefore physically and psychologically more demanding than those of civilians. This is perhaps most apparent with regard to voyages at sea. Before sailing to Egypt, most of the troops in the Abercromby’s force had been employed during the past seven months on various abortive expeditions. Apart from rare intervals, they had been confined on crowded, filthy and stinking transports either at sea or in harbours. Daniel Nicol wrote a detailed account of the abysmal accommodation aboard the troopship *HMS Stately*:

we had no hammocks or beds but only our camp blankets to sleep in. We lay on the under deck and when the weather was stormy so much water leaked in by the edges of the ports as made the lee side of the ship very wet. When she tacked the water would run across the

¹¹² Anderson, *Journal*, 310.

¹¹³ Miller, *Adventures*, 21. See also: Maule, *Memoirs*, 119.

whole deck and so we had to lie in the damp. This made us very uncomfortable and caused us to feel stiff and our bones sore.¹¹⁴

In these conditions the men lived on an unappetising diet of foul water, salt pork, and biscuits which, “were bad and full of worms; many of our men *could only eat them in the dark!*”¹¹⁵ It is unsurprising that men fell ill. Daniel Nicol recalled: “An infectious slow fever broke out in our regiment... Our condition on board the *Stately* contributed towards it...” When Nicol’s regiment, the 92nd, landed at Aboukir, he claimed, “About 400 of our men were left on board the fleet ill of fever”.¹¹⁶ The condition of the 92nd was not exceptional. Clearly, living for months on board troopships was not conducive to physical fitness or health, and this was reflected in the sick lists. When the army finally sailed to Egypt, over ten per cent of the expeditionary force was ill.¹¹⁷ Reflecting on the prevalence of sickness, one officer remarked, “on shipboard private

¹¹⁴ Nicol, *Experiences*, 30-31.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29. See also: Anon., [Billanie] *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 59; See: Documents relating to Lt James Brown, 44th (East Essex) Regiment of Foot, 1798-1801, National Army Museum, 80-11-40-1, pp.13-15; ‘Fortunes of Highlander Whimster’ - Memoirs and letters of James Whimster, 79th Highlanders 1800-1811, National Army Museum, 87-03-21, pp.1-2. Voyages in these troopships were so despised that soldiers were haunted by memories of the passage once they had disembarked. “I never wish to be on board a man of war again” wrote Lieutenant James Brown of the 44th Regiment, after landing at Marmaris. His next voyage would sadly be his last.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31, 47. Taking the 92nd as an example, the regiment had 681 men fit for duty at Marmaris in January. According to the order of battle for 8 March, only 529 men were fit for duty. 152 men had been rendered unfit before the fighting had begun. By 18 March, the 92nd comprised of 643 men, and only 283 were fit for duty. These figures must take into account the losses in combat: The 92nd had been in the thick of the fighting on 8 March, when the army as a whole sustained 625 casualties. See: Abercromby to Dundas, 16 February 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.79-80; State of the Army, 18 March 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.113; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 70, 75.

¹¹⁷ See: G. Kempthorne, ‘The Egyptian Campaign of 1801’, *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 55, no.3 (1930): 219-220. See also: McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 89. On assuming his duties as the expeditionary force sailed to Egypt, Dr. James Franck, the Principal Medical Officer, found that there were 1,098 sick with the army and a further 798 at Malta, Minorca and other places in the Mediterranean. The number of effectives numbered 16,347.

soldiers suffer ten times as much almost, as before an enemy".¹¹⁸ By comparison, on his voyage from Gibraltar to Constantinople, the novelist John Galt enjoyed lengthy stopovers at Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, Crete and the southern coast of Anatolia.¹¹⁹ Shorter voyages allowed the body to recover from the debilitating conditions on board ships.

Already weak from the conditions on the transports, soldiers naturally succumbed to more serious illnesses as they undertook the demanding day-to-day routine of campaigning in a climate to which they were unaccustomed. Benjamin Miller, an artilleryman, provided an insight into the soldier's routine, at the height of summer in August. After the march had been halted for the day, he had to travel "often 10 or 12 miles to go for forage", and then "perhaps 2 or 3 miles to go to the Nile" to feed and water the horses, "before we could look to ourselves, which would be frequently very late at night". The following morning, Miller had to be "up by two o'clock, and formed into line 2 hours before other soldiers were out of [their] tents."¹²⁰ Miller was an exceptional case; such an exhausting routine was not constant throughout the campaign, and in the hottest season the army marched by night. During the British advance along the Nile, General Hutchinson occasionally ordered a halt for a day to allow the men to recuperate. In spite of this, the soldiers were required to endure extended periods of intense activity, which involved several weeks if not months of long marches, with little rest.

The language of sensation and sentimentality were important elements in the emotional response of military memoirists to the climate, but it was employed most often in descriptions of infection and disease. Although civilian writers often described their own struggles with sickness during their travels in Egypt, this problem was more common, and more serious, in military bodies, where standards of hygiene

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 226-227. The transports used by the Anglo-Indian army in the Red Sea provided similar loathsome living conditions. The fleet was compelled to repeatedly stop for water because the water tanks on board many of the ships were leaking. See: Auchmuty, 'Lachlan Macquarie', 128.

¹¹⁹ John Galt, *Voyages and travels in the years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (London: 1812). See also: John Griffiths, *Travels in Europe, Asia Minor, and Arabia* (London: 1805).

¹²⁰ Miller, *Adventures*, 24.

were naturally reduced. Sickness was a constant feature of armies in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and the Egyptian environment exacerbated this problem. The scarcity of water, desert winds and swarms of flies and mosquitoes made the maintenance of any hygiene whatsoever almost impossible. The situation was exaggerated by the lack of spare uniforms. By September, the British had lived in the same clothes day and night for six months, only undressing to wash.¹²¹ The result of such conditions was a rapid and alarming spread of various diseases, and a tendency for even the slightest wounds to fester. By 30 March, three weeks after the initial landing, the number of sick had swelled to over twenty-five per cent of the army.¹²²

The physical pain from wounds and disease, and the fear that they might prove fatal or permanently debilitating, was effectively conveyed in the soldiers' writing. George Billanie in the 92nd Highlanders, had been "wounded in a comparatively merciful manner" during the Battle of Alexandria on 21 March. The wound became infected, and "continued for some time to get worse, the inflammation spreading, the lower part of the leg swelling greatly, and the pain being excessive." His leg healed and he began to move about with a crutch, only to fall and re-open the wound, which became infected again. Too sick to move, Billanie was tormented by fleas, while swarms of flies hatched maggots in his wound. He "prayed earnestly for mercy", acutely aware that his condition might claim his life. He survived the recurring infection, and embarked from Egypt in September, but his wound was still opening when he landed in Britain at the end of 1801. He never fully recovered, and was enrolled as an out-pensioner at the Chelsea Hospital.¹²³ Others were not so fortunate. One soldier, who

¹²¹ Ibid., 24-28; When Hutchinson's army embarked on the troopships in October, the men were still sleeping in the same uniforms in which they had arrived in Egypt in March. See: Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 114.

¹²² Kempthorne, 'Egyptian Campaign', 223. On this date, 30 March, there were 3,180 sick present and 1,187 sick absent. The number of effectives had reduced to 12,639. Dysentery, bubonic plague and ophthalmia were most common, but there are recorded hospital admissions for leprosy, elephantiasis, hernias, syphilis, dropsy, sore heads, worms and liver complaints. See: Wilson, *History*, 263.

¹²³ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 98-119, 129-130.

for a time occupied the bed next to Bilannie, “had been slightly wounded: a musket ball having grazed the front of his leg; he was able to walk about with little inconvenience.” Within a few days, “His wound had got much worse...it was soon found necessary to amputate his leg, an operation which he did not survive long.”¹²⁴ The bereavement following the deaths of comrades in this manner was often written about. As the army prepared to march on Cairo, Daniel Nicol made one last visit to his wounded friends in the hospital sheds at Aboukir. Recalling his visit brought him considerable grief: “few that had limbs taken off recovered. This day I shook hands with many a one I never saw again.”¹²⁵

One condition the British had not previously encountered was “Egyptian” ophthalmia, a severe form of bacterial conjunctivitis, that was highly infectious and capable of rendering its victims blind.¹²⁶ This ailment was endemic to Egypt; it was so widespread, wrote Captain Thomas Walsh, “that eyes perfectly sound and uninjured are very seldom to be seen.”¹²⁷ Its prevalence was probably due to the economic distress of the common Egyptians, who lived in appalling poverty under the rule of the Mamluks. Poor sanitation, crowded living conditions and inadequate clean water, all contributed to the spread of the disease. The number of cases peaked during the

¹²⁴ Ibid., 102-105. Another man who suffered an infection had “purposely scratched his own shin with a stone”, so that “he might remain in the hospital until the danger was over. The very means he took to avoid danger, to which he might never have been exposed, provided his destruction.” Amputation was performed, but the inflammation had already spread, and he died the day following the operation.

¹²⁵ Nicol, *Experiences*, 54-55.

¹²⁶ Mayerhof, ‘History of Ophthalmia’, 147-150. Today “Egyptian” ophthalmia is known as granular conjunctivitis. It causes a roughening of the inner surface of the eyelid, leading to a breakdown of the eye if untreated. Descriptions of ophthalmia given by surgeons were vague during the Egyptian campaign, hence it is possible that some cases were in fact other forms of less serious conjunctivitis or even photokeratitis, a condition brought about by overexposure to ultraviolet light.

¹²⁷ Walsh, *Journal*, 189. See also: Nothing Pertickler Happened: An Autobiography of William Billows, Queens Regiment, 1797-1817, National Army Museum, 11-10-7-1, pp.70-71; Diary of Ens (later Paymaster) David Wainwright, 2nd (Queen’s) Regiment, c1787-1802, National Army Museum, 07-10-15-1, p.30; Evans Diary, 173; William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London: 1803), 264, 541.

flooding of the Nile, as suburbs and villages on the banks of the river were submerged and standards of hygiene deteriorated.¹²⁸

Unsurprisingly, ophthalmia was rapidly transmitted to the British soldiers. One of the most complete reports on the disease was written by James McGrigor. Almost as soon as the Indian expeditionary force arrived in Egypt, at Kossier, McGrigor reported that ophthalmia “prevailed very generally” among the troops. By October 1801, having reached Alexandria, McGrigor stated that “the great degree of violence in which this disease was now seen”, was “really alarming.”¹²⁹ George Billanie was dismayed at the volume of ophthalmia sufferers who passed through his hospital tent. He declared: “There was hardly an individual who did not suffer, more or less, the consequences of this painful malady.”¹³⁰ Nothing had been encountered before that was comparable to the horrendous symptoms of this disease. Accompanied by fever, an ophthalmia sufferer’s eyelids commonly swell to such an extent they cannot be opened. The eyes become irritable, discharging pus, and any direct light causes pain. The main cycle of the disease usually passes in two weeks, the majority of British soldiers in Egypt recovered without medicine. However, there were numerous cases in which inflammation lasted for months, and many of these unfortunates were permanently

¹²⁸ Mayerhof, ‘History of Ophthalmia’, 131; Hill Diary, 111-112. Granular conjunctivitis remains common in the poorest regions of the globe. In 2012, it was estimated that 84 million people worldwide suffer from the disease. See: A. Fenwick, ‘The global burden of neglected tropical diseases’. *Public Health* 126, no.3 (2012): 233-236.

¹²⁹ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 15, 21, 23; Kelly, ‘Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign’, 327-328, 333; Anderson, *Journal*, 357; Mayerhof, ‘History of Ophthalmia’, 140. Several memoirs record that more than half of the army that landed at Aboukir suffered from night blindness or a “want of their ordinary sight”, conditions symptomatic of ophthalmia. There were too many cases for all victims of ophthalmia to be excused from duty. Blind men were paired with the healthy, working together as sentries or building breast works, redoubts and batteries. Using the figures from a report by Sir Thomas Young, Inspector-General of the army’s sanitary service, Wilson mentions that 160 troops were rendered “totally blind” by ophthalmia, and 200 had “lost one eye irrecoverably.” See: Wilson, *History*, 253-254; Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 90; Nicol, *Experiences*, 33, 37, 39, 44-45; Robertson, *Journal*, 16.

¹³⁰ Clarke, *Travels*, vol. 5, 56-59, quoted in Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 112-125. See also: Billows Autobiography, 74; Downing, *Narrative*, 91-94; Hill Diary, 111-112.

blinded in one or both eyes.¹³¹ Captain Vincent recalled in gruesome detail the agony of “several hundred” men, who “were attended with a most excruciating torment; in the course of a few days the eyes became so inflamed and swelled, as literally to burst in their sockets, and through this produce total blindness...”¹³² Soldiers were not the only sufferers. John Nicol, a sailor on board HMS *Goliath*, had been employed with supplying provisions and water to the army, when he contracted the disease. Following the sailor’s tradition for storytelling, Nicol revealed in detail the pain that he endured:

My sufferings were most acute. I could not lie down for a moment, for the scalding water, that continually flowed from my eyes filled them and put me to exquisite torture. I sat constantly on my chest with a vessel of cold water bathing them. If I slept I awoke in an agony of pain.¹³³

The horrific nature of their wounds and the painful symptoms of disease had a profound psychological effect on British servicemen. Until the twentieth century, the most commonly diagnosed psychological condition in the military was homesickness or ‘nostalgia’. It was often triggered by dates in the calendar such as Christmas, by letters received from loved ones at home, or by the onset of illness or extreme hardship. Instances of homesickness are difficult to establish with any precision, as in medical circles the term “nostalgia” was used to refer to a range of mental disorders.

¹³¹ Luke Davidson, ‘Identities Ascertained,’ *British Ophthalmology in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, *Social History of Medicine* 9, no.3 (1996): 315.

¹³² Vincent Diary, 31-32.

¹³³ John Nicol, *Life and Adventures 1776-1801*, *John Nicol, Mariner* ed. Tim Flannery (Melbourne: Grove Press, 2000), 179-180. In some cases, the fear of blindness and the agonizing symptoms of ophthalmia prompted suicide. Sergeant William Billows remembered that a fellow ophthalmia patient had hung himself while being treated at one of the hospitals. James Downing, who was permanently blinded during the campaign, also wrote of his wish to die during the weeks of torment after contracting ophthalmia: “Oft have I wish’d that some one would, Without pistol, sword, or knife; In order to relieve my pain, Cut short my wretched life.” See: Billows Autobiography, 75; Downing, *Narrative*, 94.

Although the condition appears not to have been markedly present in the British army during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in comparison to the French legions, there are records of depression and suicide in the mortality statistics of campaigns in exotic theatres far from home, especially the West Indies.¹³⁴ Egypt was no exception. After suffering from a range of maladies, including fever and a violent bout of cholera, Captain Warren Marmaduke Peacocke, of the 2nd Guard Regiment, wrote of his longing to be “under the shade of some friendly tree in England”.¹³⁵ George Billanie, wounded in his ankle, and who at the time also suffered from a mild case of ophthalmia, expressed a similar feeling. Referring to disease as the by-product of a wicked society, Billanie wrote: “from Egypt, the land of bondage, I cast a longing eye to my native home, and wished myself there, that I might enjoy the benefits of a Sabbath, the instructions of religious teachers, and freedom from the society of the wicked.”¹³⁶ Sergeant Robertson, severely dehydrated during a desert march, expressed a longing for his native Scotland.

I have no doubt that many a poor fellow, suffering from burning thirst – his throat parched, and his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth – was, like myself, thinking of the hills and rills of our dear loved Scotia, ‘the land of the mountain and the flood.’¹³⁷

According to Carl Thompson, who has explored the romance attached to the notion of suffering in travel, one of the main reasons behind a traveller’s emphasis on their suffering was the real political and social power these stories could wield. Stories of misadventure, especially during the Revolutionary period, were politically charged. This was especially the case for tales of shipwreck or maritime misadventure. Political commentators frequently imagined British society as a ship, or referred to the ship as

¹³⁴ Martin R. Howard, *Death Before Glory The British Soldier in the West Indies in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars 1793-1815* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2015), 204; Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland*. (London: Palgrave, 2013), 95-96.

¹³⁵ Peacocke, *Diary*, see entries 20 May, 24 and 31 June.

¹³⁶ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 113-114.

¹³⁷ Robertson, *Journal*, 25-26. See also: Downing, *Narrative*, 91.

a microcosm of society, hence maritime narratives could easily become suggestive of wider debates. For example, the troubled relationship between a captain and his crew, called on readers to reflect on the level of authority invested in a sea captain, and whether there were ever legitimate grounds for seamen to oppose their superiors.¹³⁸ One could apply a similar argument to the British army. A company or regiment might be referred to as a microcosm of British society, and the suffering that soldiers endured in Egypt could be interpreted as an appeal for readers to reflect on the quality of planning, organization and leadership in the military services. In some ways, this argument lacks substance: maritime narratives were politically charged in part because Britain had an intense preoccupation with the sea, and was reliant on the Royal Navy for prosperity and security.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, there were instances during the Egyptian campaign where soldiers attributed their suffering to poor decisions or planning by their superiors. Daniel Nicol's narrative provides a detailed example. On 17 May, as the army camped at Algam on the bank of the Nile, Nicol and his regiment, the 92nd, were heading to the boats for their rations and water. Before they could do so, "an Arab was seen riding into the camp at full gallop... he gave intelligence that the French were in the desert to our right and rear. On this alarm... our brigade got under arms." General John Doyle, the brigade commander, had promised to provide the men with rum, bread and water before they marched. Unfortunately, "just as he and the rations came in sight the order to march was given, and we entered the desert very ill prepared indeed." In a climate where temperatures could reach 40 degrees, spending a few minutes to provision the men with adequate water should have taken precedence over catching the French detachment. The British followed their Arab guide as quickly as they could, and, after marching seven miles, forced the party of 600 Frenchmen to surrender. However, dehydration took its toll on the British army. Nicol unhappily remembered:

This was the worst day's march we had in the country. Very few men had time to get water in their canteens, at every step we sank over the ankle in light sand, and for three paces to the front we slid one back. The sun

¹³⁸ Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 109-110.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

was very hot and not a breath of wind. Hundreds of our people dropped down and had to be taken up by the camels and I am sorry to say that some of the men of our brigade while in this helpless condition were killed by the Bedouin Arabs for the sake of their arms and accoutrements.¹⁴⁰

In these hot conditions, it was sensible for officers to soften the physical demands they put on their men whenever possible, but some refused to do so. Nicol was furious at Colonel Spencer, his brigade commander, who had told Hutchinson there was no need for the camels the general provided to help the men carry their equipment on their march from Cairo to Aboukir in July. The 92nd, along with the other regiments of Spencer's brigade, suffered accordingly.¹⁴¹ Irrespective of their political impact, there is evidence to suggest that accounts of soldiers' suffering earned them respect from their readers. This is apparent in a review of Francis Maule's *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt*, published in the *Monthly Review*. Although the periodical considered Maule's book "extremely defective", there was a sense of respect for the ordeals described within it. "the annoyance experienced by the troops in so hot a climate was greater than persons accustomed to the enjoyment of a moderate temperature can possibly conceive."¹⁴² Another example can be found in an anonymous letter to the *Christian Observer*, published in 1803. It declared: "I can scarcely express how much gratitude I feel towards those men who have gone forth so cheerfully to assert our rights and defend our cause, amidst the tainted gales of Cairo, and the burning sands of Alexandria."¹⁴³

The soldiers' emotional responses to the environment were not solely concerned with negative feelings; they were incredibly varied, ranging from despair to delight.

¹⁴⁰ Nicol, *Experiences*, 68-69.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴² *Monthly Review for September 1816. review of Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt*, by Major Francis Maule. 81 (September 1816): 207-209.

¹⁴³ Anon., 'On Sir R. Wilson's History of the Egyptian Expedition', *Christian Observer*, 2 (1803): 671-674. See also: *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of Voyages to Portugal, Spain, Sicily, Malta, Asia-Minor, Egypt, &c. From 1796 to 1801*, by Francis Collins. 7 (1808): 108.

Representations of the environment was a medium through which soldiers could transmit the extreme psychological experience of war to their readers. The sight of the river Nile, after days or perhaps weeks of marching and fighting in stifling conditions, commonly provoked extreme emotions of joy among the soldiers. For several memoirists, the moment in which they reach the Nile served as an important turning point in the narrative. Up to this point, the British had conducted the campaign on dull, dry, arid terrain, in which fresh water was scarce.¹⁴⁴ They had defeated the French in several engagements and one pitched battle. Once the British reached the Nile and seized Rosetta and Rhamanieh, no further sizeable engagements took place. Reaching the Nile therefore had symbolic significance, providing visual confirmation that the worst privations of the campaign were over, and the misery of the desert was replaced by the joys of the fertile Nile delta. In several cases, this moment sets up the remainder of the narrative, as a British victory became increasingly assured. One of the best examples of this turning point was written anonymously by one of Abercromby's staff officers. Describing the landscape immediately surrounding Alexandria and Aboukir, he wrote:

...from the day of our landing until after the action on the 21st, my ideas of Egypt, and the conjectures I formed, were not particularly favourable;... the eye ranged over a vast space of country, yet met nothing but a continuation of that dreary, glaring, white sand, which fatigued and oppressed the eye, and bespoke only intense heat, and its comitant *agrémens*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ For complaints about the landscape at Alexandria, see: Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 6, 9; Evans Diary, 127; Memoirs and journal of Capt Peter Jennings, 1770-1814, National Army Museum, 83-01-102-1, pp.27-28; Anon., Narrative of the Proceedings of the Forces that left Bengal in December 1800 to Egypt, National Army Museum, 68-07-223-1; Rev. Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson... with a description of the battle of the Nile* (London: 1802), 142-143.

¹⁴⁵ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 2-3.

The staff officer was wounded in battle on 21 March, and was removed by boat to the hospital at Rosetta. He described his condition as “faint, debilitated and miserable, with a nasty fever”, which, quite understandably,

oppressed my spirits dreadfully; but the sudden transition from barren hot sand, and every thing that proclaimed a desolate and melancholy country, into the cheerful verdant soil which, either side of the Nile, presented to my feverish, but now all-devouring eye, gave such a fillip to exhausted and desponding nature, that, as if roused from lethargy, inspirited and revived by the unexpected novelty of the scene, I involuntarily rose up in the boat, and felt a degree of strength for a long time quite unknown to me. Every minute added to the beauty of the scene, and to my strength.¹⁴⁶

Reflecting on this scene, he wrote:

I never can forget my first trip up the Nile; which must at all times gladden and rejoice the poor unfortunate fellow who, like myself, shall enter it, either from a long séjour on board ship or from the barren plains of Alexandria. I confess the effect it produced upon me, was that of doing for me more than all the medicins, or medicines in the country; I felt myself, for the moment, a renovated man.¹⁴⁷

Having reached the Nile, the officers’ description of his suffering ended abruptly. It is replaced by a description of his recovery and of his walks through the landscape filled with a dazzling array of produce – orange, citron, lemon, fig, banana, olive and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

date. “Nothing can be more grateful than an afternoon’s stroll into these wildernesses” he wrote contentedly.¹⁴⁸

A similar turning point was conveyed by members of the Anglo-Indian army, once they reached Qena, on the banks of the Nile, after marching across the desert from Kossier, on the coast of the Red Sea. Marching by night, the Nile suddenly appeared before them as dawn broke. Lachlan Macquarie, the deputy adjutant-general to the Anglo-Indian army, wrote:

On the appearance of the day this morning we were most agreeably surprised with the change of Scene now before and around us in comparison with the wild dreary and arid Desert we have been travelling in for some days past. We are now at length arrived in a cultivated country and everything here is green and beautiful.¹⁴⁹

Charles Hill struggled to convey the striking appearance of the Nile before him: “the contrast between this and the desert may be much easier imagined as it struck us than described.”¹⁵⁰ The tendency for military servicemen to describe the arrival at the Nile

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 41. The delight of the common ranks at reaching the Nile was just as evident as among their superiors. Sergeant Robertson wrote: “On coming to a place where the earth was clothed with grass, no one who has not been similarly situated can imagine how cool and refreshing it was to us, so long scorched among the arid sands, and who had not seen the verdant face of nature for a long time; - we all felt joy and delight.” See: Robertson, *Journal*, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Auchmuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 86.

¹⁵⁰ Hill Diary, 80-81. Another emotional turning point designed by memoirists in Abercromby’s army came about as they disembarked at Marmaris Bay, on the southern coast of Turkey, prior to the Egyptian campaign. Before their arrival, the troops had endured months of abysmal conditions aboard dirty, stinking, crowded, disease-ridden troopships. The tone of several narratives changes as they leave their loathsome transports to camp in the scenic bay. See: Wilson, *History*, 3; Walsh, *Journal*, 45-46; Maule, *Memoirs*, 58; Anderson, *Journal*, 190; Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 389; Evans Diary, 89; Coote to Gloucester 10 Feb 1801, Coote Letters and Dispatches; Papers of Major General Charles Barnett, 3rd Foot Guards, 1786-1803, National Army Museum, 85-12-15; James Brown to his friend ‘Tom’, 6 Feb 1801, Lt. Brown Documents, 13-14; Nicol, *Experiences*, 28; Collins, *Voyages*, 198-202.

as a turning point in the narrative suggests that soldiers were tapping into the Romantic fascination in the misfortune of travellers among British reading audiences. Military memoirists often competed with the most popular travelogues and, at times, appropriated not only their writing conventions but also their structure. The voyage to the war-zone, the suffering of combat and campaigning, and the joy and relief at military victory, returning home, or merely surviving, draws comparison with framework of the ‘suffering’ travel narrative.¹⁵¹

Aspirations for imperial intervention

In spite of the suffering they had endured in the Egyptian environment, it is apparent that British soldiers discussed the possibility of further imperial ventures in the country. The picturesque was vital in this regard. Picturesque tourism was one of the primary ways in which British officers engaged with the landscape during their recreational hours. This had become a popular activity from around 1775; the search for and appreciation of natural, pastoral scenery became a means by which Britons could escape physically, imaginatively and intellectually from the growing pressures and complexities of metropolitan life. It seems that for some officers in Egypt, the picturesque offered a temporary escape from the strains of the campaign.¹⁵²

Crucially, as Jeffrey Auerbach notes, literary and visual representations of the picturesque employed a consistent set of principles or formulae. As a result, diverse regions such as South Africa, India, Australia, the Pacific Islands and Egypt were presented through the picturesque lens in remarkably similar ways. The picturesque had initially been used to represent English landscapes, and depicting imperial landscapes in these terms served to portray these regions as similar to, rather than different from Britain. In other words, the picturesque helped to homogenize representations of landscapes in Britain and its imperial regions. It created a concept of sameness rather than difference. Although there was some freedom to capture and

¹⁵¹ Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 5.

¹⁵² James Buzard, ‘The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43-44, 46; Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque, Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 5, 7-10, 13, 40, 56, 59.

convey local differences, everywhere the picturesque was deployed it served to conceal hardships and beautify unattractive or unpleasant features of life on the imperial frontiers.¹⁵³ David Cannadine has identified this process as “the domestication of the exotic”: Exoticism was still expressed in the picturesque, but was largely stripped of its alien otherness, allowing the British viewer to remain in their visual comfort zone.¹⁵⁴ One must be careful however, not to overemphasize the similarities between picturesque representations of Britain and the imperial frontier. Although there was a general resemblance they were not identical. The picturesque in Britain emphasized novelty and rugged, unkempt beauty, but representations of the colonies, particularly India, could be slightly different. In reaction to the dangers of the Indian climate, and the perceived violence and oppression of its inhabitants, picturesque representations of India were softer and more regularized, with gentle curves and delicate colouring.¹⁵⁵ These “feminine” qualities of the landscape provided a subtle visual representation of the gendered relationship between ‘manly’ Britain and ‘effeminate’ India.¹⁵⁶

Picturesque painters achieved “the domestication of the exotic” using a standardized set of techniques. They frequently used a Claude glass, a small convex mirror that brought every scene within the compass of a picture, and they produced pictures with an identifiable structure and tint. Picturesque paintings were commonly divided into three distances: foreground, middle ground and a hazy background. Features such as trees and ruins were positioned to create a balanced composition, and frame the viewer’s attention. Ruins, small settlements or bodies of water were frequently the central feature of the picture, the whole of which was commonly tinted with a soft golden light.¹⁵⁷ One can discern this approach among British officers in Egypt. Indeed, views were often described as if they were paintings. A good example of this is Thomas Walsh. After the surrender of Alexandria in September 1801, he

¹⁵³ Auerbach, ‘The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire’, 47-48.

¹⁵⁴ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, xix. See also: Auerbach, ‘The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire’, 53.

¹⁵⁵ Auerbach, ‘The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire’, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 42.

¹⁵⁷ Auerbach, ‘The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire’, 48, 50.

accompanied Eyre Coote and George Ludlow on a boat trip to Cairo. He described the impressive view before him as they sailed from Rosetta:

Nothing at the moment could surpass the beauty of the scene; and to our eyes, so long unaccustomed to any kind of verdure, the environs of Rosetta, and the shaded banks of the Nile, could not but exhibit a prospect highly delightful. This reviving verdure, both sides of the river thickly covered with date and other trees and numberless villages not half a mile asunder scattered along the banks, render the whole of the picture quite enchanting, nor could we keep our eyes from the beauty of the scene for the remainder of the day.¹⁵⁸

The conventions and features of picturesque are apparent in this description. Walsh could easily have been describing the features of a painting. The image he depicted is centred on the Nile, the shaded banks in the foreground provide the frame. In the middle-ground and background he described the winding river flanked on either side by trees and “numberless villages” - his use of this phrase gives the scene a sense of grandeur. One might argue that the description he provides paints a mental image similar to Claude Lorrain’s paintings *Landscape with Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Sylvia* (1682), or *A view of the Roman Campagna from Tivoli, evening* (1644-5). Both of these popular picturesque paintings show a lush valley, with a winding river flowing from foreground to background, bordered by trees, shrubs and ruins. The small size of the buildings, animals and people dotted across the scene provides a sense of size to the view represented within these paintings.

Cooper Williams’ narrative provides another example of a military memoir which adhered to picturesque principles. He served as the reverend on board the HMS *Swiftsure*, a 74-gun third-rate ship of the line, which took part in the battle of the Nile. After the battle, a small squadron remained stationed off the coast of Aboukir to maintain the blockade of Alexandria. The *Swiftsure* was part of this squadron. In

¹⁵⁸ Walsh, *Journal*, 247-250.

January 1799, when the *Swiftsure* sailed to Acre to acquire supplies for the blockading fleet, Williams obtained leave to go on shore at Haifa, fifteen miles south of Acre. Accompanied by a party of officers, he proceeded to ascend Mount Carmel which overlooked the city. Williams recalled the scene on reaching the summit:

From this height we had a delightful view of the surrounding romantic country. Directly under us appeared the town of Caiffe; [Haifa] to the right extended a level plain of apparently rich land, watered by the rivers Belus and Kishon, and bounded by the mountains of Nazareth.... Over these mountains, at the distance of twenty miles, the towering heights of Mount Lebanon raised their snowy heads. The summit of Carmel, though perfectly wild and uncultivated, had its peculiar beauties. Small grass-plots of the finest herbage were surrounded by flowing shrubs of various kinds; among which the arbutus and dwarf-oak bore a conspicuous character.¹⁵⁹

Williams' description, and the two engravings of this scene which accompanied it on the following pages, was set very much by the conventions of picturesque painting. The view he described (and later engraved) was centred on a small settlement and a body of water - Haifa on shores of eastern Mediterranean. The view was framed by the trees and shrubs of Mount Carmel in the foreground. In the hazy background were the snow-tipped mountains. Through the use of picturesque principles in his description and engravings, one can see a resemblance between his mental (and physical) images of Haifa, and William Daniell's paintings *Penmuan-maur, taken from near Aber, N. Wales* (1815), and *View from Portsdown Hill* (1824).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Williams, *Voyage*, 152-154.

¹⁶⁰ See: Figures 3 and 4, Appendices. For other picturesque descriptions of the landscape, see: Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 350; Williams, *Voyage*, 132-133; Collins, *Voyages*, 99-100, 262, 265-266.

Representing the Egyptian landscape as visually familiar to Britain made it desirable, and such feelings were also expressed as British personnel reflected on the productivity of Egypt. On reaching the Nile, British soldiers were struck by the sheer fertility of the ground on which they marched. “I have seen plenty of barley and all other grain” wrote Daniel Nicol, “and at this season, standing on one of the raised banks and looking east over the river across the Delta which is level as far as the eye can reach, to see the fields bringing forth their yellow treasure is a very pleasant sight”¹⁶¹ Lieutenant Aeneas Anderson agreed: “The environs of Rosetta are well cultivated, and produce an abundance of wheat, barley, rice and different kinds of delicious fruits and vegetables...”¹⁶² This description of a highly productive landscape was interspersed with melancholic accounts of agricultural regression. Writing on this subject was common in descriptions of Alexandria and Aboukir. This area was known to have been lush and fertile in past centuries, a result of regular irrigation with fresh water from the canal linking Alexandria to the Nile delta. Over time, the canal, built under Ptolemy I, became clogged with silt and the irrigated fields dried up. By 1801, it was no longer navigable and barely produced sufficient water to supply the wells in Alexandria.¹⁶³ Major Francis Maule reflected on this deterioration:

All this coast, was in ages back, well inhabited, containing cities, towns and well inhabited countries... At the present day, the eye discovers...to the south and west... nothing but a void still more discouraging, of sterile sands, without even a solitary house or tree, a boundless horizon of barrenness.¹⁶⁴

Charles Hill, expressed the same opinion. “it is plainly to be seen that this Peninsula [at Aboukir] must formerly have contained the largest (and I believe I may say) the

¹⁶¹ Nicol, *Experiences*, 60.

¹⁶² Anderson, *Journal*, 280. See also: Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 123-124.

¹⁶³ Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, 'The Greatest Glory'* (London: Vintage, 2008), 73.

¹⁶⁴ Maule, *Memoirs*, 201.

largest city in the world at present. It is a most desolate wretched view, not a tree, not a blade of grass, nor a bush to be seen...’’¹⁶⁵

The seemingly deplorable condition of Aboukir provided Britain with a pretext to intervene, to help improve the lot of the inhabitants, and return the region to its former splendour. Writing in the context of the Enlightenment and Britain’s profound agricultural transformation, soldiers acknowledged the productive soil, but condemned poor standards of cultivation. Outlining potential improvements enabled soldiers to demonstrate their own refinement, and express the profound sense of technological superiority that they felt over ‘Eastern’ powers. In the words of Robert Wilson:

Egypt, from its fertility, is a most valuable colony to any power.... every thing which the wants and luxuries of Europe demand might here be cultivated. From her locality, Egypt would soon again recover by commerce considerable splendour, if a good government did but direct the resources.¹⁶⁶

Wilson asked his readers “to what vast extent would it expand, when cherished and protected by the regulations of an adequate government.”¹⁶⁷ Francis Collins was one of the foremost commentators on agriculture. Little is known about him, other than he was formerly a lieutenant who had served on HMS *Dolphin*. He had been on tour since 1796 and had visited Portugal, Spain, Sicily and Asia Minor. By chance, Collins was camped at Marmaris Bay in December 1800 when the flotilla of Abercromby’s expeditionary force arrived to prepare for the landing in Egypt. Collins decided to accompany the army. After the campaign, he denounced Egypt’s lack of productivity.

Egypt has been long considered a farm...Unhappily for this country, its governors, in general, acting on a

¹⁶⁵ Hill Diary, 148-149.

¹⁶⁶ Wilson, *History*, 234-235.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

narrow and selfish principle, instead of a broad and liberal policy, have checked its abundance... had they been equally solicitous to encourage its resources, as they are expert in drawing supplies, it would have yielded half as much again.¹⁶⁸

George Baldwin, the former consul who accompanied the Egyptian campaign in an advisory role, provided the most remarkable plea for intervention in the country. In a letter to Henry Dundas, written in September 1801, and published a year later in his *Recollections*, Baldwin claimed

If Egypt could be improved in any proportion to the susceptibility of improvement, I would not hesitate to say that we might reckon upon a circulation of two thousand ships of commerce in one year from Egypt to the ports of England... If it can be held to England, she may talk of jewels in her crown, but a brighter than this she will not possess.¹⁶⁹

Interestingly, references to agricultural regression in support of imperial intervention was rare among officers of the East India Company. Reflecting the priorities of the East India company throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, most company officers put forward geo-political justifications for colonization, rather than referring to the financial benefits or the suffering of the local population. Charles Hill, for example, wrote:

This must at all events prove a new and very interested Expedition in regard to the Eastern Empire. The French

¹⁶⁸ Collins, *Voyages*, 172-173, 273-275.

¹⁶⁹ George Baldwin, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt, with a Narrative of the Ever-Memorable British Campaign in the spring of 1801* (London: 1802), 174-176. See also: Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 51; Beatrice Brownrigg, *The Life & Letters of Sir John Moore* (Oxford: 1923), 133; Wilson, *History*, 239-242; Maule, *Memoirs*, 58; Williams, *Voyage*, 111; Miller, *Adventures*, 24; Walsh, *Journal*, 60-61; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 14-15.

must have it, as our possessions in India be in the utmost danger – nothing can be more easy for them than wafting their army in small craft from the Red Sea to any part of the Malabar coast.¹⁷⁰

The criticism of Egypt's agricultural industry, and the conviction it could be improved through British intervention, was a view that had been framed in part by prevailing cultural values and practices in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. The bulk of civilian travel literature published in this period condemned Egyptian agriculture in a very similar style to the soldiers. William Eton, who first published *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* in 1798, wrote: "In the beautiful country and climate of Egypt, it is distressing to consider how little the advantages of nature are cultivated..."¹⁷¹ Perhaps the two most vehement critics of Egyptian agriculture in this period were the Comte de Volney and Claude-Étienne Savary, whose travelogues proved hugely influential to the French expedition to Egypt, and were translated and widely read in Britain. They described "the art of cultivation" in Egypt as being "in the most deplorable state; the husbandmen is destitute of instruments... his plough is frequently no more than the branch of a tree".¹⁷² Much like their military counterparts, the comments by travel authors provided a moral justification to intervene in Egypt, by portraying imperial expansion as a sentimental response to the lack of development.

¹⁷⁰ Hill Diary, 31, 36.

¹⁷¹ William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* (London: 1798), 296-297. See also: 441.

¹⁷² Volney, *Travels*, vol.2, 413; Savary, *Letters on Egypt*, vol. 1, 33-35, 55, 286, 426-427; vol. 2, 30-31, 198-205, 252-258. See also: Antes, *Observations*, 135-139; Browne, *Travels*, 415-416, 487-489; 530; Dallaway, *Constantinople*, 173; Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, in Company with several divisions of the French Army under the Command of General Bonaparte*, trans Francis Blagdon vol. 1 (London: 1802), 312-313; Eton, *Survey of the Turkish Empire*, 240-241; William Hunter, *Travels through France, Turkey, and Hungary, to Vienna, in 1792* (London: 1798), vol. 1, 188-205; Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*, vol. 1, 94; John Remmey, *An Account of the Present State of Egypt* (New York: 1799), 19-20; Sonnini, *Travels*, 392-399, 695-697; Volney, *Travels*, vol. 1, 218-219; vol.2, 165.

‘Eastern’ diseases and medical topographies

The aspiration expressed by British soldiers to acquire or exploit the Egyptian landscape was tempered to some extent by widespread concerns about ‘eastern’ diseases. The connection that soldiers made between Egypt on one hand, and India and the West Indies on the other, was vital in driving these concerns. In this period, several philosophes and medical practitioners were convinced that physical diseases were determined by climate and geography.¹⁷³ By the start of the Egyptian campaign, India and the West Indies had become infamous in military circles for the high mortality rates from disease. As Egypt was geographically close to India, it was assumed that the two countries possessed a similar climate, which held within it lethal diseases of a similar nature. Therefore, the encounters with disease in India and the West Indies helped to develop a subconscious fear of sickness, which in Egypt was largely unwarranted. In India, wounds healed poorly in the humid, damp weather, and large parts of the country were malarial, but the greatest killer was cholera, which raged with great potency during this period. Soldiers were petrified of the disease, and rightly so. Its onset was sudden and unexpected, its symptoms were shocking and agonizing, and its mortality rate alarmingly high; approximately half of those who contracted the disease in India died. Officers employed by the East India company embarked from Britain with a sense of trepidation, as few survived their term of service. During the period 1796-1820, 201 of the Company’s officers retired on pension, and 1,243 were killed in action or died of sickness. Between 1760 to 1834, only about ten per cent of the Company’s officers survived to draw their pensions.¹⁷⁴

British losses to yellow fever and malaria in the West Indies campaigns were proportionally even higher. The fear of West Indian service among British troops was fully justified as entire regiments could be swiftly destroyed. For example, within three months of their arrival in Saint Domingue during the summer of 1794, the 23rd and 41st regiments had lost more than forty per cent of their total strength. Within a

¹⁷³ See, for example: George Power, *Attempt to investigate the cause of Egyptian ophthalmia* (London: 1803); McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁴ Richard Holmes, *Sahib The British Soldier in India 1750-1914* (London: Harper Collins, 2006), 402-405; 470-474.

year, both had buried more than three quarters of their men. Estimates on the total death rates in the West Indies during the wars vary, but it was clearly a human disaster, with conservative estimates claiming 44,000 deaths, between 30 and 40 per cent of those sent to fight.¹⁷⁵ These losses were felt more keenly through the lack of any tangible military gains in the West Indies during the Revolutionary Wars. Between 1793 and 1798, Britain directed her primary military efforts towards the French West Indian colonies. By 1798, when commitments in the West Indies were cut back, Britain had remarkably little to show for its efforts.¹⁷⁶

After the sobering encounters with tropical diseases throughout the 1790s, it is understandable that there was considerable opposition among policymakers to the Egyptian campaign. When Henry Dundas finally pushed the proposed expedition through the cabinet on 3 October 1800, the King made his reservations about it clear. Recalling the difficulties caused in the American war by ocean supply lines, George predicted that the force sent to Egypt would starve, and even if it found supplies, disease would wither away the British forces just as in the West Indies. Others held a similar view. In a heated exchange with Dundas, William Windham, the Secretary at

¹⁷⁵ John W. Fortescue asserted that in the period 1793-9, there were 100,000 casualties, half of them killed and the rest unfit for service. Michael Duffy's estimation is the most conservative, he claims there were 44,000 deaths among white non-commissioned officers and men in the Caribbean between 1793 and 1815. Roger Buckley believed that the casualties among white British troops in the West Indies was 352,000, of whom 70,000 died between 1793-1815. See: Roger Norman Buckley, 'The Destruction of the British Army in the West Indies 1793-1815: a medical history' *Journal for the Society of Army History* 56, (1978): 79-94; Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War Against Revolutionary France* (Ann Arbor: Clarendon Press, 1987): 326-334; J. W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army*, 14 vols. (London, 1899-1930), vol.4, 496, 565, quoted in Howard, *Death Before Glory!*, 199-200.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Duffy, 'Word-Wide War and British Expansion 1793-1815', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 187-92; Robert Harvey, *The War of Wars the epic struggle between Britain and France 1789-1815* (London: Constable, 2007), 142-145; Christopher D. Hall, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War, 1803-15* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 77-79, 95, 109, 184-186; J. R. Ward, 'The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748-1815', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 420-421.

War, told him that he had lost one army to Yellow Fever and now he would lose another to the plague.¹⁷⁷

These concerns proved to be unwarranted. Casualty figures for disease in Egypt are extremely difficult to establish precisely, but Captain Vincent, who recorded 3,691 casualties in combat, stated that “the diseases of the horrible climate were much more destructive.” Sir David Dundas, the acclaimed general and military theorist, estimated casualties from disease during the campaign at 1,000.¹⁷⁸ A good portion of the casualties sustained recovered from wounds or sickness, thus the number of men killed or invalided out of the army was relatively small: no more than fifteen per cent of the 22,000 men in Egypt at the conclusion of the campaign. When one compares the mortality rates in Egypt with those in India and the West Indies, it is abundantly clear that Egypt was far safer for British soldiers than other exotic climates, and even some areas of Europe.¹⁷⁹ For instance, in 1809 over half of the 40,000 troops taking part in the Walcheren campaign in the Netherlands were incapacitated by disease, and 4,000 died.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, only a small minority of soldiers recognized that Egypt’s reputation was undeserved. Lieutenant Thomas Evans was one of the few. He wrote:

We have had, a number of men sick, which could not fail being the case in any part of the world where so

¹⁷⁷ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 6.

¹⁷⁸ Vincent Diary, 31-32; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 227, 265. Of the casualties in combat, 633 men had been killed in action and 3,058 wounded, many of whom were permanently disabled. The casualties of Baird’s Indian contingent amounted to 309 British and 391 Indian deaths. All of the casualties in Baird’s army were sustained outside combat. See: Kempthorne, ‘Egyptian Campaign’, 228.

¹⁷⁹ For mortality rates in India, see: Richard Holmes, *Soldiers: Army lives and loyalties from redcoats to dusty warriors* (London: Harper Collins, 2011), 402-405, 470-474. For the same in the West Indies, see: Howard, *Death Before Glory!*, 199-210; and in Egypt, see: Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 227, 265.

¹⁸⁰ See: R.M. Feibel, ‘What happened at Walcheren: the Primary Medical Sources’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 42, no.1 (1968): 62-79; Peter Mathias, ‘Swords and ploughshares: the armed forces, medicine and public health in the late eighteenth century,’ in *War and economic development, Essays in memory of David Joslin*, ed. J.M. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 76.

large an army is assembled, but this I can with truth assert, that (wounds received in battle excepted)... in the Island of Minorca, which is considered healthy... and at the same period of the year, the troops there had, in proportion, more than double the present number of sick, and in the West Indies I have known it to exceed treble its number.¹⁸¹

Evans' outlook was rare. It was more common for Egypt to be regarded in a similar light to the deadly tropical climates in India and the West Indies. Robert Wilson believed that the multitude of ailments succeeded in "distinguishing Egypt to the world as an almost uninhabitable country".¹⁸² Following an account of the excessive heat, Francis Maule wrote: "Life indeed here is almost insupportable".¹⁸³ It was unsurprising, according to one officer, that the French capitulated in Egypt, for "they were perfectly sick of it...and they sincerely pitied the lot of their supposed successors."¹⁸⁴ Using the work of the renowned naturalist and traveller Edward Daniel Clarke, George Billanie wrote: "strangers, and especially the inhabitants of *Northern* countries, where wholesome air and cleanliness are among the necessities of life must consider Egypt as the most detestable region upon earth."¹⁸⁵

How did British soldiers reach such an emphatic conclusion? One must concede that the mortality rates in Egypt do not take into account the number of hospital admissions, nor the total number of cases of disease. Ophthalmia, one of the most common diseases amongst soldiers in Egypt, was not fatal, despite its agonizing symptoms, and victims often made a full recovery. By contrast, the common diseases in India and the West Indies - yellow fever, malaria and cholera - were frequently lethal. The prevalence of ophthalmia among the army is evident from the rapid

¹⁸¹ Evans Diary, 163.

¹⁸² Wilson, *History*, x. See also: 253.

¹⁸³ Maule, *Memoirs*, 127.

¹⁸⁴ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 122-123. See also: Nicol, *Experiences*, 79.

¹⁸⁵ Clarke, *Travels*, vol. 5, 56-59, quoted in Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 124.

transmission of the disease to civilian populations at Gibraltar, Malta and Britain, particularly after peace was declared in May 1802, as many regiments were returned to England and disbanded. In 1806, Arthur Edmondson, the young Scottish surgeon to the second regiment of Argyleshire Fencibles, wrote that the disease was present “in the most distant parts of Great Britain, and...familiar to almost every medical practitioner...”¹⁸⁶ Research on ophthalmia attained considerable political importance, and even received the backing of George III. A direct consequence of this was the establishment of the Royal Infirmary for the Diseases of the Eye in 1805.¹⁸⁷

Aside from this, there is evidence to suggest the existence of a subconscious fear of ‘eastern’ disease in British popular culture throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. A common concern was that diseases contracted in the orient could be moral as well as physical. There was genuine anxiety that the perceived decadence and corruption of ‘eastern’ societies was contagious. Montesquieu was crucial in this formulating these anxieties. His *Spirit of Laws* argued that the hot climate of the orient had a debilitating effect on the morals of the people, so that “the effeminacy of the people in hot climates has almost always rendered them slaves, and the bravery of those in cold climates has enabled them to maintain their liberties.”¹⁸⁸ For this reason, Montesquieu defined despotism as an exclusively oriental regime, only to be found in the hot regions of the orient. Montesquieu’s interpretation of oriental despotism in his *Spirit of Laws* became the landmark verdict on the nature of ‘eastern’ societies for British writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹⁸⁹ Travel authors

¹⁸⁶ Arthur Edmonston, *A Treatise on the Varieties and Consequences of Ophthalmia, with a Preliminary Inquiry into its Contagious Nature* (Edinburgh: 1806), 115, quoted in Mayerhof, ‘History of Ophthalmia’, 140-144. See also, for spread of ophthalmia: Fox to Hobart, 20 December 1801, War Office (WO) 1/292, pp.467-476.

¹⁸⁷ Davidson, ‘Identities Ascertained’, 315. For research on the causes of ophthalmia, see: Power, *Attempt to investigate the cause of Egyptian ophthalmia*, 19-24; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 317, 541-543; Daniel Whyte, ‘Mode of managing ocular inflammations,’ *The Medical and Physical Journal* 7, (1802): 209-216; McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 149.

¹⁸⁸ Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, 278-285.

¹⁸⁹ Aslı Çırakman, ‘From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment’s Unenlightened Image of the Turks’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, no. 1, (2001): 55-59; Aslı Çırakman, “From the ‘Terror of the World’ to the ‘Sick Man of Europe’” *European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 1-24; 106. See

such as William Eton, François Baron de Tott and the Comte de Volney, all shared Montesquieu's core beliefs concerning 'eastern' despotism and decadence, and commonly wrote of the destructiveness of various maladies under the eastern climate, especially bubonic plague.¹⁹⁰ Throughout the late eighteenth century, Montesquieu's ideas were adopted and revised by the British to help consolidate their rule in India. British superiority could be explained in terms of climate: the cool temperatures of Europe produced men more suited to command than the enervating climate of India. However, the need for longer periods of residence in India following Britain's imperial successes, meant that increasing numbers of Britons would be exposed to the debilitating and corrupting influence of the climate. The question arose whether Britons themselves would acquire the traits of their subjects; characteristics which had caused India to fester and decay.¹⁹¹

In this context, the possibility that 'Eastern' corruption could be transmitted to Britain was frequently cited by opponents of empire, and was an important element in the attacks on Nabobs and leading figures in India such as Robert Clive and Warren Hastings. Lord John Cavendish, a prominent Whig MP of the old school, "wished to God every European could be extirpated from India and the country resorted to merely

also: Franco Venturi, 'Oriental Despotism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no.1 (1963): 133-142; David Young, 'Montesquieu's View of Despotism and His Use of Travel Literature', *The Review of Politics* 40, no.3 (1978): 392-405; Shraon Krause, 'Despotism in *The Spirit of Laws*', in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on The Spirit of Laws*, ed. David W. Carrithers, Michael Al Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 231-271; Thomas Kaiser, 'The Evil Empire? The Debate on Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture', *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no.1 (2000): 6-34; Melvin Richter, 'The Concept of Despotism and l'abus des mots' *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 3, no.1 (2007): 5-22.

¹⁹⁰ See Volney, *Travels*, vol. 1, 192, 240-241, 254-257. For other civilian travellers who commented on disease in the Near East, see: Savary, *Letters on Egypt*, vol. 2, 218-225; Hunter, *Travels*, vol. 1, 243; vol. 2, 41; Eton, *Survey of the Turkish Empire*, 264-271, 279-280; François Baron de Tott, *Memoirs of Baron de Tott: Containing the State of the Turkish Empire and the Crimea during the late war with Russia*, 2 vols (London: 1786).

¹⁹¹ Mark Harrison, *Climates & Constitutions Health, Race, Environment and British imperialism in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16-17.

on the principles of commerce.”¹⁹² John Logan, the popular preacher, historian and hack writer, warned in his lectures on Asian history in Edinburgh in 1780 that “Even the Grecian virtue gave way to the luxury and voluptuousness of the East.”¹⁹³ The King expressed similar concerns, remarking that a mismanaged India could be the ruin of Britain.¹⁹⁴ Imperial anxieties were also reflected in fictional writings, which associated the orient with danger, corruption and sensuality. Novelists and poets used the orient as an environment in which they could express their most nefarious thoughts, feelings and desires. One of the most influential novels of this genre was William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786).¹⁹⁵ Many of these concerns were poignantly illustrated by Robert Southey in *Letters of England*, written in 1807. Under the pseudonym Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, in an account of a tour of Britain from a foreigner’s viewpoint, Southey wrote: “At present, as the soldiers from Egypt have brought home with them broken limbs and ophthalmia, they carry an arm in a sling, or walk the streets with a green shade over the eyes.”¹⁹⁶ Southey’s image of soldiers who returned from Egypt sick and broken, had undoubtedly been influenced by descriptions of disease in the Egyptian campaign.

¹⁹² P. J. Marshall, ‘A Free Though Conquering People’: Britain and Asia in the Eighteenth Century’ in in ‘*A Free though Conquering People*’, *Eighteenth-Century Britain and its Empire*, ed. P.J. Marshall (Hampshire: Routledge, 2003), 9-10.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁹⁴ P. J. Marshall, ‘Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25, no.2 (1987): 113.

¹⁹⁵ Saree Makdisi, ‘Literature, national identity and empire’ in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830*, ed. Thomas Kaymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 71. For other fictional works that associated the orient with danger, corruption and sensuality, see: Robert Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), Lord Byron’s *The Corsair* (1814), Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* (written 1797, published 1816), Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Laon and Cynthna; or The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century* (1817, published from 1818 as *The Revolt of Islam*), and Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (1821).

¹⁹⁶ Robert Southey, *Letters of England, by Don Manuel Espriella* (London, 1808), vol. 3, 274-275. For analysis, see: Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992).

It is perhaps surprising then, that concerns over a corruption of morals was not a feature of British military writing in Egypt. The military was, after all, an instrument of imperial power, and generally supported the empire: it gave them work. This was especially the case for those who comprised the expeditionary force from India. As members of the East India Company's forces, their career prospects were largely tied to the Company's own fortunes. Indeed, the British forces in Egypt generally appear to have regarded the expansion of the empire as a positive process. Nevertheless, the fusion of concerns in Britain, about the contagiousness of physical and moral diseases, may have amplified the general fear of British soldiers towards a variety of diseases found in the 'east'.

Reading the Bible may have also contributed towards such thoughts. For some of the pious soldiers in Egypt, the presence of disease, the hot climate and the multitude of irritating vermin appeared to confirm the existence of "Egypt's ancient plagues". These were the ten biblical calamities, which, according to the book of Exodus, the God of Israel inflicted upon the country to persuade the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery.¹⁹⁷ Five of the ten plagues the soldiers accounted for: hordes of frogs, vast swarms of lice, fleas and gnats, great clouds of flies, boils or buboes on the skin and swarms of locusts.¹⁹⁸ George Billanie wrote:

The latest descendants of the Pharaoh are not yet delivered from the evils which fell upon the land, when it was smitten by the hands of Moses and Aaron;... the "plague of flies," "the murrain, boils and blains," prevail so, that the whole country is "corrupted" and "*the dust of the earth becomes lice, upon man and upon beast, throughout the land of Egypt.*" This application of the words of sacred Scripture affords a literal

¹⁹⁷ Robertson, *Journal*, 21.

¹⁹⁸ Of the ten plagues, second were hordes of frogs (see: Exodus, 7:25–8:15); third, lice gnats and fleas (Ex. 8:16–19); fourth, swarms of flies (Ex. 8:20–32); sixth, boils and buboes (Ex. 9:8–12); eighth, swarms of locusts (Ex. 10:1–20); and ninth, a darkness (Ex. 10:21–29). For an account of numerous frogs, see: Nicol, *Experiences*, 71-72.

statement of existing evils, such one as the statistics of the country do now warrant.¹⁹⁹

Another highlander, Sergeant Nicol, came to the same conclusion: “We all agreed after we had marched through the country that the Scripture account of it was perfectly correct; and the universal remark was that a remnant of the plagues of Moses still existed in it.”²⁰⁰

Aside from the subconscious fear of ‘eastern’ disease, there is another explanation as to why British soldiers regarded Egypt as a deadly environment similar to India. This can be attributed to the ongoing efforts in this period to create a medical topography of the world. The tremendous losses of the British military in tropical climates resulted in concerted scientific efforts to indicate which areas of the globe were suitable for European soldiers. James McGrigor, the superintendent surgeon to the expeditionary force from India, was one the leading writers on the medical topography of Egypt. He had served as a physician in Europe, India and the West Indies, and wrote extensively on Egyptian diseases in his *Sketches*. McGrigor argued that the Egyptian climate occupied the middle ground between temperate Europe and tropical India, and the diseases endemic to the country reflected this.

In respect to the soil and climate of Egypt, as giving rise to disease, they are of considerable variety. In a country of such extent, stretching from the tropic on the one side, to the shores of the Mediterranean, on the other, this might be expected. If, in Lower Egypt, and on the bleak shores of the Mediterranean, we saw the diseases of Europe, and met with the inflammatory diathesis; in Upper Egypt, and as we approached the tropic, we met

¹⁹⁹ Clarke, *Travels*, vol. 5, 56-59, quoted in Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 124-125.

²⁰⁰ Nicol, *Experiences*, 32-33.

with the same diseases, and succeeded with the same treatment, as in the peninsula of India.²⁰¹

McGrigor's treatment of dysentery in Egypt was crucial in forming this view. Dysentery was "by far the most-generally prevailing, as well as the most fatal disease in the army".²⁰² The sheer number of serious cases convinced McGrigor that he had encountered a new form of the disease: "... it was not till after much doubt, hesitation, and careful observation, that I became convinced, in Alexandria, that, with the change of country and climate, we had a different disease."²⁰³ McGrigor believed there were two species of dysentery: one in Europe and another in the tropical climates of India and the West Indies. The dysentery in Egypt was a blend of these two forms, a combination produced by Egypt's geographical location between Europe and India. "Between diseases, as they occur in Europe and in Asia, there are just as many shades of difference as between the plants of those opposite regions, or in the colour of the inhabitants."²⁰⁴

One can speculate whether McGrigor's conclusion derived from a more general belief that Egypt was located on the boundary between the occident and the orient. If this was the case, he appears to have placed Egypt closer to the orient than the occident. In his observations, he suggested that the Egyptian environment, and the dangers it posed to Europeans, was closer in resemblance to India and the West Indies than Europe.

In the West-Indian islands, as well as on the shores of India, I have repeatedly and uniformly observed the sick-list of European corps more than doubled by the third week after the setting of the monsoon. In these countries a very considerable increase of sick is likewise found to take place on the change from the

²⁰¹ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 69-70.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

rainy to the dry season. The change of season in Egypt had nearly an equal influence on the health of the army while there.²⁰⁵

McGrigor's detailed observations on the plague were crucial in the connection he made between Egypt and the tropics. Although the bulk of the British fighting force which landed at Aboukir avoided contracting the plague during the Egyptian campaign, the hospitals established at Aboukir and Rosetta both suffered outbreaks, as did the expeditionary force from India.²⁰⁶ The disease never seemed to have been totally absent in Egypt, and its prevalence among the population appeared to be a seasonal occurrence to the British. McGrigor denominated the "season of plague" "from November or December of one year, to June of the year following... the disease constantly stops at the period of summer solstice."²⁰⁷ The first cases of plague appeared in the Indian army on 15 September 1801. McGrigor was among the first to treat them. The symptoms of the patients and the mode of treatment McGrigor adopted, led him to remark on the similarities between the plague in Egypt, and yellow fever, which he had encountered during his service in the West Indies between 1795 and 1796.

...after seeing the first cases which occurred in the Indian army, and attentively studying the histories of some of the cases which subsequently appeared, it struck me that there were many points of resemblance between this disease and the destructive [yellow] fever

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

²⁰⁶ In total there were 380 admissions and 173 deaths from plague in the expeditionary force that landed at Aboukir. Later in March 1802, there was a second outbreak of plague, with 46 cases. In Baird's Indian army, there were a further 203 deaths from plague: 38 of these were British and the remaining 165 were sepoy. See: Kempthorne, 'Egyptian Campaign', 224-228; Bengal Narrative; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 356; McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 15-23; Walsh, *Journal*, 185; Vincent Diary, 31-32; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 227; Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 375-378.

²⁰⁷ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 104-105.

of the West Indies, which, some years ago, I saw a good deal of in several of the islands there.²⁰⁸

McGrigor began his *Sketches* with a list of similarities between the plague and yellow fever. For the victims of both diseases, the attack was sudden, and head pains were the initial complaint. In most cases of the plague, and in some of yellow fever, swellings could be seen on the body around the glands. Finally, in cases where “we could excite a flow of saliva”, the patient had a chance of recovery, and “in those cases which proved fatal, it was found impossible to produce salivation.”²⁰⁹ Although McGrigor by no means considered these two diseases to be the same, he believed that their resemblance with one another derived from the similar environmental conditions in the West Indies and Egypt. The heat and humidity of Egypt endowed the plague with similar characteristics to yellow fever, but “in different countries and in different seasons in the same countries, the plague assumes very different appearances.”²¹⁰

For other British officers without medical expertise or experience in the West Indies, the plague appeared to be the result of Egypt’s unique geography. Captain Vincent considered the cyclical outbreaks of plague to be the result of “the falling of the Nile, and is occasioned by the noxious vapours arising from the filth, dead fish, reptiles... which are left scattered on the banks of that river.... And which the scorching sun of this climate soon renders putrid.”²¹¹ Robert Wilson was fascinated by this subject, and provided a detailed explanation on the yearly cycle of plague. After the Nile waters receded, he claimed that they leave “a rich slime” which forms the highly productive soil. When this slime is separated from water, “corruption ensues, and continues until all the putrid juices are totally absorbed by the heat of the sun”. This process created a “corrupted state of atmosphere”, which taints and destroys the human body. The plague ceases at the summer solstice “when the Nile is supposed to receive the first increase.”²¹²

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 86-87.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Table I, front matter.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 111.

²¹¹ Vincent Diary, 31-32. See also: Kempthorne, ‘Egyptian Campaign’, 224-225; Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 124.

²¹² Wilson, *History*, 252-253.

Whatever the cause for the diseases in Egypt, it was clear to James McGrigor that British soldiers were not suited to serving in the country. “We have often seen the changes effected on a European habit by a removal to a tropical or to a warm climate”. The Indian sepoy, by contrast, lost proportionally far fewer men to sickness. Again, the observations McGrigor made on this subject associated the Egyptian climate closely with that of India. Accustomed to the hot climate of their homeland, it appeared naturally easier for the sepoy to adjust to the conditions in Egypt. They bore the desert march well, and remained the “healthiest of all British forces”. This was one of the first occasions when sepoy served in campaigns abroad; the promising results naturally advocated the future employment of sepoy in foreign service. Particularly impressive was the 1st Bombay regiment. Despite many of its sepoy contracting a fever while ship-board during the passage from Bombay to Kossier, the regiment “effected the march across the desert of Thebes, as well as that over the isthmus of Suez, with less difficulty than any corps in the army.”²¹³ Reflecting on the health of the Indian army, McGrigor wrote:

In general we observed that the native troops endured this [climate] better than the European. It ought not to be forgotten that, ... detachments from the native corps were employed, some time before the march of the army, in clearing the roads, digging wells, and on other duties of fatigue more harassing than any that fell to the lot of any other part of the army. Nevertheless, these men continued in a high state of health.²¹⁴

This circumstance was not an isolated occurrence; McGrigor had seen native regiments fare much better than the British before. During his service in the West Indies, the native West India Regiments proved far more resistant to yellow fever. McGrigor argued that the resistance the natives had developed was the result of acclimatization. Prior to the Egyptian campaign, no Indian corps “had been less than

²¹³ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 62-66.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

two years in a warm climate".²¹⁵ Time to adapt to the conditions was crucial, and the 88th regiment of sepoys provided an example of this:

The first year after the arrival of the 88th regiment in India, they suffered considerably. During the month after that on which the monsoon set in, one hundred and forty, or more than one fourth of the corps, were ill of hepatitis and dysentery. In the second year of the regiment being in India, only seventy were admitted into the hospital in the course of the same month, and this number was not quite one tenth of the corps. Here, then, we appear to have gained considerably by being one year inured to the climate.²¹⁶

McGrigor's observations here correlate with the general medical opinion of the time. It was widely believed that, irrespective of their background, Britons who survived a few years in India, or any other tropical country, would enjoy a state of health superior to those who had lived in colder climates.²¹⁷ For newcomers to hot climates, it was generally believed that the mortality rates could be reduced by avoiding excessive consumption and exercise. This was a belief which stemmed partly from the observation of Hindu diets over the late eighteenth century, and partly from prevailing doctrines in physiology, which credited high temperatures with the ability to hinder digestion. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, company soldiers fresh from Britain were recommended a diet composed primarily of vegetables, and were advised to avoid meat and alcohol.²¹⁸ McGrigor recommended a similar diet for the soldiers in Egypt:

...one reason may, with probability, be brought forward to account for the very great difference, in point of

²¹⁵ Ibid., 94. See also: Howard, *Death Before Glory!*, 199-200, 210.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 84.

²¹⁷ Harrison, *Climates & Constitutions*, 10-11.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 10-11. 82-83.

health, between European and Indian corps, viz. the great intemperance of the European in eating and drinking. A native of India is astonished, at first, to see the meals of animal food devoured, and the quantity of spirits drank, by Europeans. There can be little doubt, that the nearer we approach to the mode of living of the natives, the more nearly we shall attain their state of health.²¹⁹

Above all, he claimed “intemperance... always appeared as a principal cause of the diseases which have prevailed.”²²⁰ When access to alcohol was restricted, the British benefitted from a good state of health. During the voyage down the Nile, from Qena to Cairo, “the men had no spirits delivered out to them; and I am convinced that, from this, not only did they not suffer, but that it even contributed to the uncommon degree of health which they at this time enjoyed.”²²¹

The superior health of the Indian Sepoys in Egypt may have been a consideration when, after the French capitulation, Hutchinson proposed an amalgamation between the British and Indian troops that were to be left to garrison Alexandria. The proposal was abandoned after the determined opposition it received from General Baird. He lectured Hutchinson at length on the incompatibility of such a merging. His primary concern was that any unification of forces would damage the fragile authority of the British over their Indian troops. The current discipline and confidence of the sepoy had been achieved “by a long series of attention to their customs and prejudices”. It was impossible for a stranger to command them “without offending some of their customs, which tho’ to appearance trifling, are to them of material consequence.”²²² Moreover, the pay and allowances given to the sepoy were greatly different to those given to the British ranks. As a result, Baird argued:

²¹⁹ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 81-82.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²²² Baird to Hutchinson, 24 September 1801, War Office (WO) 1/292, pp.278-279, 485-496.

The jealousies that would arise, should the corps be blended on unequal allowances, must be unpleasant to every rank, but as far as regards the inferior ones, would be dangerous... This difference would immediately be known to the troops... [and would] lead to consequences of the most serious nature.²²³

Baird's comments here reveal an awareness and understanding of the complex and fragile state of British authority over Indian sepoys. They could not be easily amalgamated with British troops, who differed from the sepoys in their pay and in the daily living requirements, such as types of food. Baird does not mention another likely reason for his opposition: should a merger take place he would lose command over a large portion of his troops.

Although the prevalence of diseases in exotic climates such as Egypt provided powerful reasons to oppose the expansion of the British empire, paradoxically, disease also provided a moral purpose and justification for imperial conquests. Explaining this contradiction requires reference to Mary Louise Pratt in her seminal interdisciplinary work, *Imperial Eyes*. She points out that the British portrayed their scientific research and exploration as innocent intellectual exercises, concerned with furthering human knowledge. Such practices were idealized as a means by which Britain could do good in the world, by combatting the inequality and suffering that existed in foreign societies.²²⁴ Cultivating scientific research was one way in which British governors such as Warren Hastings, Charles Cornwallis and Marquess Wellesley, could claim their rule of India honorable and righteous. Hastings in particular referred to his sponsorship of the sciences when defending himself from impeachment in 1787.²²⁵

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1998), 7, 74-75, 81. See also: Richard Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 250.

²²⁵ Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire', 248.

Despite appearances, this research was not innocent. Although intellectual research in imperial regions was not defined solely by the requirements of empire, there was a conviction that the knowledge acquired should be put to practical and profitable use in ways that advanced British interests.²²⁶ Much like the Indian theatre, one can argue that the enthusiasm of British medical practitioners in their study of diseases in Egypt provided a powerful rationale for greater intervention in the region.²²⁷ British physicians felt that they possessed the technical and scientific expertise to treat and potentially cure the diseases they had encountered in Egypt. James McGrigor summarized this line of thought:

Egypt had been called the cradle of the sciences. From this we acknowledge, that the arts were derived to Greece, and subsequently the world. It would surely be the noblest gratification, if in return, at this period, Europe, by extending her benefits and improvements to Egypt and to Greece, could free them from the most cruel scourge of countries, once the most civilized and polished in the world. It would in some measure compensate and console them for the low state of degradation into which they have fallen.²²⁸

For McGrigor, the introduction of British technology and medical science into Egypt, would be a reciprocal act of charity. Readers in Britain were receptive to these ideas. In a combined review of the recent publications by Aeneas Anderson, Robert Wilson, William Wittman, and the French General Jean Reynier, the *Edinburgh Review* concluded that:

²²⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7, 74-75, 81; Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 152-154, 176.

²²⁷ Mark Harrison, 'Networks of Knowledge: Science and Medicine in Early Colonial India, c.1750-1820', in *India and the British Empire*, ed. Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 192-8, 205-7; Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²²⁸ McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 102-103.

It is highly probable, that the virulence of the plague would so far yield to the cleanliness, the watchfulness, and the science of Europeans, as to be ranked with ordinary fevers in danger and malignancy. We may carry our views still farther, and consider the powerful influence which Egypt, colonized by Europeans, would exercise upon the civilization of Africa. We may amuse ourselves with the imaginary spectacle of Europe carrying to the banks of the Nile the arts and sciences, which she received from thence 3000 years ago; and raising from the dust those venerable cities which were animated with commerce, and adorned with learning, ages before the naked savage of Europe could delve, or spin, or govern, or obey.²²⁹

The research on ophthalmia provides a good example of justifying imperialism on charitable grounds. The disease provoked a morbid fascination because it was exotic, widespread, horrid and seemingly incomprehensible. Ophthalmia revealed a large gap in British medical knowledge with regard to ocular ailments, which practitioners sought to rapidly fill.²³⁰ A succession of works on ophthalmia followed in the wake of the Egyptian campaign, over twenty publications on the subject appeared before 1820.²³¹ This research was largely unfettered, and characterized by a profound curiosity and confidence. There was a strong conviction that with the knowledge of modern western science, effective modes of treatment for ophthalmia and other exotic, tropical diseases would be found. News of experiments conducted on the imperial periphery attracted attention in British newspapers and periodicals, and in this way the colonies acted as proving grounds for young and ambitious medical practitioners.²³² It is no coincidence that a number of those who served in Egypt rose

²²⁹ *Edinburgh Review*, 2 (April – July 1803): 64.

²³⁰ Kelly, 'Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign', 337. See also: McGrigor, *Medical Sketches*, 146-159; Whyte, 'Mode of managing ocular inflammations', 209-216.

²³¹ For this list, see: Davidson, 'Identities Ascertained', 314-316.

²³² Harrison, 'Networks of Knowledge', 192-198, 205-207; Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire*, 146-171.

to considerable distinction later in their careers. The most eminent of these was James McGrigor, who gained an enviable reputation for his conduct as superintending surgeon of the Indian expeditionary force. He was promoted to deputy inspector-general in 1805, chief inspector-general in Portugal in 1811, and director-general of the army medical services in 1815.²³³

Conclusion

British military personnel saw the Egyptian environment in a number of different ways. The troops in Egypt collectively displayed a blend of the idioms and quirks of travel writers, and the stresses and anxieties of soldiers. Exclusive to the writing of soldiers was their strategic appraisals of the landscape. They discussed how cities might be attacked or defended, and speculated – with the benefit of hindsight – how the campaign might have progressed differently had they been fully aware of the topography at the time. These strategic surveys were not as common as one might assume. It was a taboo subject in military circles during off-duty hours and was not a popular or fashionable topic to discuss in memoirs. It was more common for strategic features to be conveyed through detailed maps. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, maps were becoming increasingly vital to military strategy, and the lack of

²³³ Kempthorne, 'Egyptian Campaign', 229-230; Chichester, 'McGrigor, Sir James'. Many other physicians in Egypt had distinguished careers. John Webb, a staff surgeon in Egypt, served as deputy inspector-general in the Baltic in 1807, and inspector-general in Walcheren in 1809, from whence he was invalided home. From 1813 to 1850, he was director general of the Ordnance Medical Department. He was knighted in 1821, principally for having volunteered to stay with the troops at Aboukir when plague broke out among them. From this experience he published *Narrative of facts relative to the repeated appearance, propagation, and extinction of the plague among the troops employed in the conquest and occupation of Egypt* (1801-3). Of the remaining staff surgeons, Summers Higgins served with repute in the Peninsula War, and John Pitcairn, who was knighted in 1837, was inspector general of hospitals in Ireland. John Hennon, the surgeon of the 40th Regiment, became a renowned physician, famous for always operating with a cigar in his mouth. J.R. Hume, surgeon to the 92nd Highlanders, became Wellington's personal physician, and attended him until his death. See: Kempthorne, 'Egyptian Campaign', 229-230; W. W. Webb, 'Webb, Sir John (1772-1852)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 11 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/28923>; Gordon Goodwin, 'Hume, John Robert (1781/2-1857)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 11 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/14146>.

accurate maps prior to the British campaign appears to have stimulated the creation of such documents by military memoirists. With little topographical knowledge of the Egyptian terrain, a predetermined tactical doctrine was impractical, and soldiers were forced to adapt to the landscape they encountered. In these circumstances, the rifle detachments of the British regiments excelled, as they fulfilled the role of light and regular infantry on different occasions. Their performance encouraged the creation of dedicated light infantry regiments, which would serve with distinction in the Peninsular War.

Perhaps the most popular subject discussed by military memoirists, was the suffering they endured during the campaign. The accounts of heat, dehydration, unbearable conditions in sandstorms, irritating pests and the prevalence of infection and disease, provided a medium through which soldiers could transmit the extreme physical and psychological experience of war to their readers. This enabled them to establish themselves among reading audiences as sentimental heroes, who endured the misfortunes and rigours of war to defend the nation. The soldiers' description of their suffering highlights that they were not ordinary travellers: their travel itineraries were determined by the exigencies of war, often taking them to remote and inhospitable regions; and they travelled in all weather conditions. Yet as we have seen, soldiers did benefit from certain advantages. The size of the army gave the individual soldier a greater sense of security, and they could easily acquire extra provisions from the Arab merchants who were attracted to the British camp.

Many of the diverse responses of soldiers towards the environment strongly resembled the writing of civilian travellers. It is important to remember that military memoirs competed with popular travelogues, and for this reason, contained a similar structure and narrative arc. It was common for military memoirs to contain a symbolic turning point, usually the moment that the soldiers reached the Nile, when the misery of combat, heat and dehydration was replaced by the joy of the picturesque and fertile landscape of the Nile delta. From this point on, the worst privations were in the past, and British victory was more assured, which set up the remainder of the narrative for a satisfying and happy conclusion.

Soldiers were at pains to emphasize their suffering, but despite this, many seem to have favoured some form of further imperial intervention in Egypt. The picturesque, used by several officers to describe the landscape, played an important role in this regard. The literary and visual representations of the picturesque employed a consistent set of principles, techniques and formulae, which helped to homogenize representations of landscapes in Britain and its imperial regions. This allowed writers and artists to 'domesticate the exotic', and by doing so, render these foreign landscapes desirable. This desirability was reinforced by the productivity of the Nile delta, which, given the lack of proper cultivation, could be improved upon and exploited under British instruction to the benefit of all.

This desire to acquire or exploit Egypt's productive landscape was juxtaposed with concerns over the moral and physical diseases within the country. Although the number of casualties from disease during the Egyptian campaign was relatively low, Egypt came to be regarded in a similar manner to the deadly tropical climates in India and the West Indies. This assumption was largely unfounded and derived from several factors: the geographical proximity of Egypt to India, the biblical account of the ten plagues of Egypt, and the warm climate, which was thought to have an enervating effect on the human body, all contributed towards the belief that Egypt posed a deadly threat to Europeans. This fear of eastern climates was encapsulated by the ongoing efforts to create a medical topography of the world. James McGrigor's observations on the ailments he treated led him to suggest that the diseases within Egypt reflected its geographical position on the boundary between the orient and the occident. It seemed that Egypt was not a country well suited for European soldiers. The Indian sepoy enjoyed a higher state of health than their British comrades during the campaign, and it seemed a period of acclimatization was necessary. It is ironic that the fear of disease in Egypt also provided a rationale for an increased involvement in the country. Disease provided British physicians, who possessed an enthusiastic curiosity and a confidence in the superiority of British medical sciences, with a powerful moral right to intervene. It was a sympathetic response to the suffering endured by the victims of such ailments.

2. Campaigning in an antique land: military encounters with antiquity

In June 1801, after four months of fighting, the British army secured the surrender of the French garrison at Cairo. As the terms for this surrender were being negotiated, the commander in chief, General Hutchinson, organized three tour parties each day to depart from the British camp and visit the Pyramids at Giza. Sergeant Robertson in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders accompanied one of the parties on 5 June. He clearly enjoyed himself thoroughly, enthusiastically telling of his attempt to ascend the pyramid, being “obliged to give up the attempt”, because “the height was rather too much for my head”. He returned to the British camp with his comrades, “highly gratified with our excursion, and astonished at what we had seen.” For many of the common soldiers, knowledge of Egypt was, as previously noted, limited to passages within the Bible, and some were even unaware of the existence of the great monuments of antiquity before the campaign. Robertson was one such example, and the daytrip had been a revelation.

For my own part, not having read much, and never having even heard that there were such colossal structures in the world, I felt a degree of surprise, not unmingled with awe, on beholding the vastness and grandeur of what will ever continue to strike every spectator as the greatest effort of architectural labour that has yet been reared.¹

¹ D. Robertson, *The Journal of Sergeant D. Robertson, Late 92d Foot: Comprising the different Campaigns between the years 1797 and 1818* (Perth: 1842), 29-30. See also: Daniel Nicol, *Sergeant Nicol: The Experiences of a Gordon Highlander During the Napoleonic Wars in Egypt, the Peninsula and France* (Milton Keynes: Lenaur, 2007, repr.), 76; *Reminiscences of my Military Life from 1795-1818*, Lieut-Colonel Charles Steevens, Late XXth Regiment, National Army Museum, 74-12-154-1, pp.15-20.

The British officers' representation of the Pyramids was very different. Captain Charles Hill, in command of a company of Indian sepoy, wrote:

It is a matter of great wonder to me, how they could ever have been styled as a Wonder of the World – It could never have been for their beauty or duration – as they resemble a pile of shot which may be seen in every arsenal, and which (like them) would stand for ages if not pulled down.²

Major-General John Moore formed a similar opinion: “They form immense piles of building without beauty.”³ Not all officers condemned the architecture of the Pyramids - far from it – but it is telling that these two men did. For Charles Hill and John Moore, the monolithic simplicity of ancient Egyptian architecture was too crude and unsophisticated in comparison to Greek or Roman designs. Clearly, British military personnel responded in different ways to ancient Egyptian ruins and antiquities during their service in Egypt. The first objective of this chapter is to emphasize the diversity of these responses. As we shall see, this diversity is most apparent between the officers and the common ranks.

Throughout the Egyptian campaign in 1801, British forces spent considerable time in close vicinity to objects and structures from antiquity. The encounters with antiquities provoked almost unanimous curiosity among military personnel, regardless of their differing opinions on such objects. For soldiers and sailors of all ranks, this was an opportunity to immerse themselves in an exotic, ancient and mysterious civilization. Their interest in antiquities in Egypt was often expressed through the archaeological study and collection of objects. Soldiers had always taken mementoes from campaigns, a process encouraged by civilian cultures of collecting in late eighteenth

² Diary of Captain C. Fitzmaurice Hill, The British Library, (BL) MSS Eur D108, p.103.

³ Sir John Moore, *The Diary of John Moore*, ed. Sir J. F. Maurice, vol. 2 (London: E. Arnold, 1904), 30.

century Britain,⁴ but in Egypt, the soldiers expressed a distinctive military understanding and appreciation of the antiquities they saw and acquired. These objects were not only souvenirs, but trophies of their victory in Egypt. The pursuit of antiquarian scholarship was not at odds with their military occupation. There is some evidence that the techniques of draughtsmanship, surveying and cartography that were considered key to military proficiency in this period also enjoyed a great deal of overlap with the techniques associated with antiquarian study. As Christopher Evans highlights in his article about the Victorian officer-archaeologist Augustus Pitt Rivers, military experiences provided the basic skill-sets by which one could approach archaeological fieldwork.⁵ This can be seen from the mid eighteenth century, as some of the earliest archaeologists were military officers. Major William Roy, the founder of the Ordnance survey, is perhaps the best example: between 1747 and 1752, while working on a military survey of the highlands, he made accurate sketches of the Roman remains found there. He pursued antiquarian research thereafter and was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1776, which published his *Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain* three years after his death in 1790.⁶ James Douglas provides another example: his brief military career gave him the suitable skills to conduct excavations at Roman and Anglo-Saxon sites in Chatham, Ashford and Leicestershire throughout the last three decades of the eighteenth century.⁷ An interest in archaeology was by no means unusual. In this period increasing numbers

⁴ Gavin Daly, 'Plunder on the Peninsula: British Soldiers and Local Civilians during the Peninsula War, 1808-1813', in *Civilians and War in Europe 1618-1815*, ed. Erica Charters, Eve Rosenhaft and Hannah Smith (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 220. See also: Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire, Conquest and Collecting in the East 1750-1850* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006); Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), xx, 13, 21.

⁵ Christopher Evans, 'Soldiering Archaeology: Pitt Rivers and 'Militarism''. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*. 24, no.4, (2014): 1, 14, Accessed 30 Jan 2017, <http://www.archaeologybulletin.org/articles/10.5334/bha.244/>.

⁶ Elizabeth Baigent, 'Roy, William (1726–1790)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, Accessed 17 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24236>.

⁷ Dennis R. Dean, 'Douglas, James (1753–1819)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Accessed 17 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7902>.

of Royal navy officers recorded historical sites and monuments during their coastal surveys, and old ruins or fortifications were regularly documented by engineers and sappers on overseas service.⁸

Writing about Egyptian antiquities and their collection has often been associated by scholars with imperialism, irrespective of military or civilian authorship. In the last decade, this subject has been closely examined by Holger Hoock and Maya Jasanoff. Hoock contends that the pursuit of antiquities played a central role in promoting national and imperial prestige during the “cultural war” that took place between Britain and France throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. With Napoleon expanding French national collections, particularly with Italian artworks, British ministers and officials invested national pride in the British Museum. Ancient antiquities of great empires were shamelessly appropriated to aggrandize and legitimize the British Empire.⁹ There were instances during the Egyptian campaign, where soldiers or sailors appropriated ancient relics for national or imperial gain. Perhaps the most famous example of this was the seizure of French collections of antiquities after their capitulation at Alexandria. The treaty of Alexandria, which finalized the French surrender in Egypt, demanded that the French “hand over all antiquities found by them and to relinquish all rights to any seized at sea by the naval blockade.”¹⁰ The items seized from the French at Alexandria constituted the largest haul of eastern artefacts ever seen, and soon filled the British Museum. The Rosetta Stone became the central piece of this prestigious collection, and still bears the marks to this day of its status as a trophy to British imperial prowess. Inscribed on the left edge of the stone, are the words “Captured in Egypt by the British Army | 1801”¹¹ The arrival of the collection made national news and captured the imagination of the public in Britain. After the Egyptian campaign, archaeologists were increasingly able to call

⁸ Evans, ‘Soldiering Archaeology’, 2-3.

⁹ Holger Hoock, ‘The British State and the Anglo-French Wars Over Antiquities, 1798-1858,’ *Historical Journal* 50, no.1 (2007): 1–24; Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination, Politics, War and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850* (London, Profile Books, 2010), 3-11, 208, 216; Brian Dolan, *Exploring European Frontiers: British Travellers in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 14-15, 135, 147-148; Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 3-4; 216-226.

¹⁰ Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, 220-222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

upon administrative, financial, diplomatic and military resources in their attempts to acquire antiquities. The British Museum's collection steadily grew in succeeding decades, to include the Parthenon marbles, ornamental pillar tombs and giant winged human headed lions and bulls from Mesopotamia. Hooch believes that the number and scale of objects in the Museum's display, testify to the considerable investment of the British military and imperial state in archaeological enterprises.¹²

Building on Hooch's thesis, one could argue that the pursuit of antiquities had a direct importance for the British Empire. The French invasion of Egypt had significantly enhanced the profile of the region in British imperial planning, and opened up a new sphere of British 'informal empire' in the Middle East.¹³ Following the threat posed by the invasion to the Indian Empire, Britain became concerned with safeguarding the two routes to India which ran via Egypt and the Red Sea, and Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. Egypt, above all, was considered crucial, as Henry Dundas, the secretary at war, wrote on the subject, "The possession of Egypt by any independent nation would be a fatal circumstance to the interests of this country."¹⁴ Although the British left no lasting impression on Egypt when the last of their forces evacuated the country in 1803, it is telling that plans had been made for a permanent occupation.¹⁵ That same year, the Peace of Amiens foundered because Britain refused to abandon Malta, fearing that the island would be used as a springboard for a second French invasion of Egypt. The occupation of Malta alone was deemed insufficient to prevent French intervention in Egypt, and the security of the British Empire appeared to rest on finding ways to maintain an informal presence and authority in this area. The

¹² Ibid., 7, 270. See also: Rashad Rushdy, *The Lure of Egypt for English Travel Writers during the Nineteenth Century* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1953), 12-13. David Gange, 'Religion and Science in Late Nineteenth Century British Egyptology' *Historical Journal* 49, no.4 (2006): 1083-1103.

¹³ 'Informal empire' is a term which imperial historians such as Maya Jasanoff and Peter Sluglett have used to describe the reach and influence of British interests in regions that were not formally part of the British Empire. See: Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 123; Peter Sluglett, 'Formal and Informal Empire in the Middle East', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, ed. R.W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 416-436.

¹⁴ Quoted in John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1965), 15.

¹⁵ Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 28.

fascination with antiquities, and the attempts to acquire them, was one of the ways in which the British could maintain an influence and a low-level presence. It is no coincidence that many of the archaeological discoveries in the Middle East in the first half of the nineteenth century were close to these two routes to India.¹⁶

One must be careful however, not to overemphasize the importance of antiquities in aggrandizing British prestige. Hoock's focus is on the collection of high-status objects which were passed onto state institutions; he is less concerned with smaller, lower value items which ordinary soldiers collected, or their personal reasons for doing so. Maya Jasanoff's interpretation of collecting takes personal interests more into account. She regards collecting as a highly complex process, motivated by a combination of factors, such as imperial rivalry, a genuine interest in antiquity, the prospect of great financial reward, and the opportunity for the collector to refashion their self-image and social status. The unmethodical and ill-advised actions of collectors on imperial frontiers, Jasanoff argues, resembled the disorganized and piecemeal acquisitions that formed the British empire.¹⁷ A second objective of this chapter is to build on the work by Hoock and Jasanoff, by examining the motivations behind collecting among British servicemen in Egypt. Some of the soldiers in Egypt were keen collectors, and appear to have been motivated by a combination of factors. The collection of larger items was motivated not only patriotism, but by an egotistical desire to improve their own standing among their peers and wider audiences. Smaller, personal items were acquired for different reasons: they were used as a physical validation for their experiences, and as souvenirs or military trophies, taken as rewards for enduring the hazards of the campaign.

Viewing the ruins and antiquities

For officers such as Charles Hill and John Moore, their accounts of Egyptian ruins and antiquities were informed by classical learning. In British gentlemanly education in this era, there was a heavy focus on the works of Greek and Roman historians and philosophers, and the Latin and Greek languages. It became customary for young gentlemen to undertake a Grand Tour to Italy, where individuals could visit the great

¹⁶ Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, 270-271.

¹⁷ Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 6.

Roman antiquities and compare their nation with the civilizations of old.¹⁸ Although traditionally dominated by the aristocracy, tours to Europe – especially Italy – were increasingly popular among travellers from the professional classes in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ British tourists who followed or hoped to follow a military career frequently embarked on a grand tour of sorts: they attended the Prussian military reviews at Berlin, Magdeburg or Silesia, and visited areas of interest en-route.²⁰ John Hely-Hutchinson was one such individual. While on half-pay between 1781 and 1792, he travelled the continent and studied at the Strasbourg military academy.²¹ John Moore was perhaps the most famous grand tourist in the British army in Egypt. In 1772, he accompanied his father on a tour of France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy. He developed a fondness for Roman designs which probably influenced his dislike of Egyptian architecture.²² For the soldiers in Egypt who had toured in their youth, the campaign provided an opportunity to continue their cultural refinement. For the soldiers who had not experienced the Grand Tour, Egypt provided a limited opportunity to discover what it may have been like. Descriptions of Egyptian antiquities enabled soldiers to display the taste and connoisseurship associated with polite masculinity.²³

According to Nigel Leask, the status of Greco-Roman civilizations as the founders of modern European society gave their designs a cultural exclusivity in Britain. Any art

¹⁸ Dolan, *Exploring European Frontiers*, 114; Anthony Sattin, *Lifting the Veil British Society in Egypt 1768-1956* (London: Dent, 1988), 17.

¹⁹ Dolan, *Exploring European Frontiers*, 12-14; Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe 1750-1800 Authorship, gender and national identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 2001), 16-17.

²⁰ Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 7.

²¹ P. J. Jupp, 'Hutchinson, John Hely-, second earl of Donoughmore (1757-1832)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Jan 2008, Accessed 10 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12883>.

²² John Sweetman, 'Moore, Sir John (1761-1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, Accessed 10 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19132>.

²³ Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 94.

and sculpture that was radically different from this style was inherently inferior.²⁴ This preference for Greco-Roman designs is most conspicuous in the soldiers' accounts of Pompey's Pillar, a giant Roman triumphal column located on the southern periphery of Alexandria. Very few memoirists fail to mention their visit to the Roman column, and the vast majority were amazed. While the lower ranks focused largely on the size of the pillar, officers focused more on its qualities as a work of art. The prevailing view was encapsulated by Robert Wilson: "At a distance the appearance is noble; approached closer, the pillar is lovely beyond description. The dimensions are so stupendous.... The eye rests on this pillar with delight, as the chef d'oeuvre of the arts."²⁵ To demonstrate their cultural refinement, the officers translated the Greek inscriptions on the pillar, discussed the life of Pompey after whom the column was named, and debated at length who had ordered its construction.²⁶ Charles Hill and John Moore – the officers who had been unimpressed by the Pyramids at Giza – were

²⁴ Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840: 'From an Antique Land'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2, 106.

²⁵ Wilson, *History*, 221. See also: Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt: Including Descriptions of that Country, and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmorice and Macri* (London, 1803), 236-237; Anon., *A Faithful Journal of the Late Expedition to Egypt. Including a Circumstantial Account of the Voyage, Disposition of the Fleet, Arrangements on Landing, Battle of Aboukir, Surrender of Alexandria, Death of Abercrombie, and other Interesting Particulars, by a Private on Board the Dictator* (London: [1819?]), 35; Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820), 91; Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), 199-200; Walsh, quoted in Benjamin Miller, *The Adventures of Serjeant Benjamin Miller whilst serving in the 4th Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Artillery. 1796-1815* (Darlington, Heathfield: The Naval and Military Press, 1999), 26; William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London: 1803), 359; Diary of Lt (later Gen) Thomas Evans, 8th Regiment of Foot, 1 May 1799 to 3 Sep 1801, National Army Museum, 95-09-101-1, p.187; Anon., *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Forces that left Bengal in December 1800 to Egypt*, National Army Museum, 68-07-223-1; James J. Auchmuty, 'Lachlan Macquarie and the Anglo-Indian Expedition to Egypt', *Egyptian Society of Historical Studies* 2, (1952): 104.

²⁶ See: Maule, *Memoirs*, 199-200; Walsh in Miller, *Adventures*, 26; Walsh, *Journal*, 276; Diary of Ens (later Paymaster) David Wainwright, 2nd (Queen's) Regiment, c1787-1802, National Army Museum, 07-10-15-1, p.30; Wilson, *History*, 386.

among the greatest admirers of Pompey's Pillar. It was, according to Hill, "very well worth seeing, the shaft is very beautiful and one entire column of granite". For Moore, the column was "a most beautiful object. It is difficult to conceive how a single pillar can convey so much majesty and beauty."²⁷

Although ancient Egypt was never quite as fashionable or popular as Greece or Rome, it nevertheless attracted considerable interest, especially after theories emerged that the Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations may have had their origins in Egypt.²⁸ Many of the soldiers expressed excitement at their proximity to ancient history. One officer, a member of the expedition sent from Bombay under the command of General Baird, wrote of the ancient port of Alexandria: "at every step you meet with beautiful granite pillars, obelisks & marble columns which evince the magnificence & splendour that formerly existed". The officer spent much of his time in the city speculating on the location of Alexandria's two legendary structures from antiquity – the library and the lighthouse. He became convinced after much deliberation that the ruins of a large building not far from the sea must have been the library.²⁹ James McGrigor, the superintendent surgeon to this force, was fascinated by the history of the route that his army took from Kossier to Cairo. It was, he declared, "a route unattempted by any army for perhaps two or three thousand years."³⁰

This sense of excitement was also discernible among the ordinary soldiers. The rank-and-file had far less freedom than their superiors when off duty – they were not permitted to enter Alexandria after the surrender of the French garrison. Nevertheless, the ranks discovered pieces and fragments of artefacts as they campaigned through

²⁷ Hill Diary, 131; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 48-51.

²⁸ Patrick Conner, *The Inspiration of Egypt Its Influence on British Artists, Travellers and Designers 1700-1900* (Brighton: Brighton Borough Council, 1983), 1-3.

²⁹ Anon. Narrative of the Proceedings of the Forces that left Bengal in December 1800 to Egypt, National Army Museum, 68-07-223-1; See also: Francis Collins, *Voyages to Portugal, Spain, Sicily, Malta, Asia-Minor, Egypt, &c. From 1796 to 1801* (London: 1807), 248; Maule, *Memoirs*, 204-205; Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 25, 217-218.

³⁰ James McGrigor, *Medical Sketches of the Expedition to Egypt, from India* (London: 1804), 4-5, 10. See also: Hill Diary, 90-91.

Egypt. During the initial stages of the campaign after landing at Aboukir in March, and in the final month of the siege of Alexandria in August, the soldiers worked in parties among the ruins around Alexandria, digging up sand to construct batteries and crude fortifications. In the process they uncovered “fine pillars”, “blocks of marble” and “ornaments of ancient palaces”, which they placed in their breastworks and redoubts.³¹ Thomas Walsh included a sketch in his journal of one such stone that his men had uncovered while constructing a redoubt.³² The unearthing of artefacts produced a palpable sense of excitement among the soldiers from their proximity to ancient civilizations, and the ‘great men’ associated with them. The Bible largely shaped the common ranks’ prior knowledge of Egypt, and for the more devout individuals, there was an additional thrill at viewing the lands and objects described in the Old Testament. Daniel Nicol, who had unearthed several relics, conveyed these feelings:

...it made me and many others reflect on the ancient glory of Egypt of which there are so many evidences in the barren peninsula of Aboukir. I saw in these ruins the fulfilment of Scripture and from the description which I read on board ship after I knew we were bound for this place, I supposed such a city might have stood in this vicinity... These reflections gave great interest to our operations. We were now upon Scripture ground; we had come from a distant island of the sea to the country of the proud Pharaohs to carry on war where Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great, Caesar, and other great warriors had put armies in motion.³³

A common feature of the British military’s description of Egyptian places, structures or objects was the frequent reference to events of historical or religious importance.

³¹ Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92d Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow, 1820), 90-91.

³² See: Figure 5, Appendices; Walsh, *Journal*, 132.

³³ Nicol, *Experiences*, 11, 44-45.

This practice may have been a sales tactic: it looked good, demonstrated cultural refinement, and served as a form of authentication for the events in the narrative. Such writing habits were framed in part by prevailing cultural values in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain. Claude-Étienne Savary's *Letters from Egypt*, translated into English in 1787, is one of the most conspicuous examples. His account contains detailed descriptions of Egyptian ruins and antiquities, often accompanied with historical context. He mentioned several Egyptian dynasties, the Romans, crusading kings and the Mamluks, and embellished his prose with quotations from ancient sources such as Strabo and Herodotus.³⁴ As Nigel Leask notes, the frequent reference to history may have also arisen from the lack of association with Egypt and its people, which led travellers – both civilian and military – to “temporalize” the land and its inhabitants, by comparing them with more familiar classical, biblical or medieval worlds.³⁵

Perhaps the best examples of the frequent reference to history are the accounts of two naval officers serving on board HMS *Swiftsure* on blockade duties off the coast of Alexandria. From October 1798 to February 1799, the *Swiftsure* docked at Rhodes, Acre and Limassol to collect provisions for the blockading fleet. Much like the accounts of the soldiers from the campaign two and a half years later, the memoirs of officers on the *Swiftsure* are littered with detailed narrative history of these places, written to display their gentlemanly knowledge and historical appreciation of the region. Both John Theophilus Lee, a young midshipman, and Cooper Williams, the *Swiftsure*'s reverend, focused their narrative histories on the Crusades, an era endowed with romantic importance in Britain. One suspects that historical or mythical details were employed when the factual narrative was thin, as would have often been the case on board a ship of war employed on blockade. They described how Rhodes had evolved under the dominion of the Romans, the Knights Hospitaller and later the Ottomans, and speculated on the appearance of the Colossus of Rhodes, and the

³⁴ Claude-Étienne Savary, *Letters on Egypt* (London: 1787), vol.1, 257-273; vol. 2, 44-60, 80-82, 109-122 129-178, 212-213, 238-239, 249-252. 300-484. For citations of Savary in military publications, see: Wilson, *History*, 62-63; Maule, *Memoirs*, 136; Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 9-10.

³⁵ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 2.

method by which it had been constructed. At Acre, they recalled that the city served for a time as the capital and headquarters of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, that it had been defended by Richard I against Saladin, and later witnessed a Muslim assassin's attempt on Edward I's life. Finally, during their time at Limassol, Williams and Lee wrote of Richard I's visit to Cyprus, on his voyage to and from the Holy Land.³⁶ In one example, while on the summit of Mount Carmel, overlooking the town of Haifa, just south of Acre, Lee listed all of the sites of religious importance which, to his knowledge, were in the vicinity.

To the north of Acre is the ancient Samaria, ... a city which Herod raised to great magnificence. A church is shewn where St. John was imprisoned and beheaded, and the dungeon where his blood was shed is also exhibited;... A little further is seen Naplos, the ancient Sychem. On one of the two mountains, on each side of this city, the children of Israel were commanded to set up great stones inscribed with the Holy Law, and to erect altars. At a small distance from Naplos is Jacob's well, famous for our Saviour's conference with the woman of Samaria...³⁷

Lee was fortunate to accompany the British consul at Acre on a visit to Jerusalem, and he recounted an impressive range of religious sites he visited. These included a mosque on the site of Judas' betrayal, a convent where Jesus was allegedly confined before crucifixion and another where the last supper supposedly took place, the house in which the Virgin Mary died, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, "an object of interest to all who visit".³⁸ William Wittman, the surgeon to the British military

³⁶ John Theophilus Lee, *Memoirs of the Life and Services of Sir J. Theophilus Lee, of the Elms, Hampshire* (London: 1836), 142, 149; Rev. Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson... with a description of the battle of the Nile* (London: 1802), 112-113; 158-159; 167. See also: Pocket book of Lt Lewis Stephen Davis, National Maritime Museum (NMM) HIS/35.

³⁷ Lee, *Memoirs*, 139-140.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 143-147. See also: Williams, *Voyage*, 159.

mission attached to the Grand Vizir's Ottoman army from July 1800 to the conclusion of the Egyptian campaign in October 1801, provides another example. In autumn 1800, while camped at Jaffa, the military mission had very little with which to occupy themselves, so Wittman resolved to visit the Holy Land. Although the trip may have been devised merely to alleviate boredom and escape the disease ridden Ottoman camp, Wittman thoroughly enjoyed himself. He listed the many sites of religious significance he visited, which included "all the interesting places which respected our Saviour previously to his death".³⁹ Although descriptions of historical sites were common within military memoirs, they were not always well received. In a review of Major Francis Maule's *Memoirs*, the *Monthly Review* considered that

The Major has trespassed chiefly when he goes out of his professional line, and attempts to interweave historical notices with the description of the events that passed under his eye. He cannot, for example, sail up the Mediterranean without summoning to his reader's recollection the battle of Lepanto...⁴⁰

Surprisingly, it was rare for British military personnel to directly associate, compare or identify themselves with the crusades during the Egyptian campaign. Although Edward Gibbon and David Hume argued that the romanticism and chivalry of the crusades had faded by the latter half of the eighteenth century, recent scholars believe this was not the case. Marc Girouard and Adam Knobler have discussed how the British popular imagination of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century looked fondly upon the crusades, complete with notions of medieval chivalry and gentlemanly honour. The romance of the crusades and crusading remained an important influence on romantic literature at this time, such as in the work of Sir Walter Scott. The crusading metaphor was readily transferable: it provided a simple, easily understandable vision of moral absolutes: good and evil, without any confusion. For this reason, the crusades of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries provided

³⁹ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 157. See also: 149, 156-161, 170, 173-184.

⁴⁰ *Monthly Review for September 1816. review of Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt*, by Major Francis Maule, 81 (September 1816): 205.

the perfect historical precedent for contemporary dilemmas. It romanticized warfare by contextualizing current conflicts as wars with true and just causes. A key element of the crusader knight's sacrifice was his parting from home, family and friends to embark on an uncertain and dangerous mission which drew similarities with the experience of British soldiers in the French wars.⁴¹ Furthermore, one may argue that the events prior to the Egyptian campaign lent themselves to crusading imagery. Napoleon, leading a secular force, posed a threat to most of European Christendom. In 1798, he had expelled the Knights of St John from Malta on his way to Egypt, thus formally ending the crusades. However, there were several obstacles to an identification with the crusades during the Egyptian campaign. Perhaps the most significant of these was Britain's alliance with the Ottoman Empire. The British fought alongside, rather than against Muslims. Moreover, few British soldiers mourned the destruction of the Order of the Knights of St John. Prior to Napoleon's arrival, Thomas Walsh thought the order "had begun evidently to decline; it's [sic] navy had become so insignificant, as scarcely to deserve the name; it's military ardour had subsided". Walsh concluded the Order fully deserved its ignominious end, their resistance against the French "may probably be better termed a deliberation between cowardice and shame."⁴² The closest that British soldiers came to an association or identification with the crusades were a few short lines indicating an interest in the crusading knights. For instance, as the British flotilla sailed past Rhodes on its voyage to Marmaris, Daniel Nicol wrote:

The island was the residence of the Christian knights after their retreat from the Holy Land...I felt a more than usual interest in looking at those places, from what I had read of them in history and Scripture; I stopped

⁴¹ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 19-20, 42-43; Adam Knobler, 'Holy wars, empires, and the portability of the past: The modern uses of medieval crusades', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no.2 (2006): 311, 323-325; Elizabeth Siberry, *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 89.

⁴² Walsh, *Journal*, 21-22, 39-40.

aloft on the foremast crosstrees until I could discern the objects no longer.⁴³

What is interesting about these military accounts of historical and biblical sites was the level of detail often included. Monuments, objects and ruins were described in terms of their dimensions and the materials and methods employed in their construction. It was common for officers to closely study and measure objects and buildings of interest. William Wittman, for example, stated that the exact dimensions of the Great Pyramid had been subject to much dispute in recent years. He proceeded to compare measurements from different sources before supplying those undertaken by British engineers during the campaign.⁴⁴ Captain Charles Hill observed similar measurements being taken of Pompey's Pillar: "so many people have taken them [measurements] that it will always be easy to find them."⁴⁵ An important factor to consider here, highlighted by Michael Greenhalgh, is that the recording of precise detail may have been useful for military purposes. Greenhalgh focuses on the French military's use of ancient structures in the early nineteenth century, and he argues that scholarly interest in these buildings was valuable as it provided essential information on the still-usable Roman infrastructure during the French takeover of Algeria.⁴⁶ There is evidence to suggest that the British soldiers in Egypt looked at the ancient structures and the landscape in similar ways. On 28 April 1801, William Wittman entered the fort of Salahieh, on the eastern border of the Nile delta. It had probably been built by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, and had been garrisoned by the French from late 1798. A few days prior to Wittman's arrival, the French garrison had evacuated the fort and retreated towards Cairo. Wittman considered it an excellent military post, and its merits were later taken into consideration during the British occupation.

⁴³ Nicol, *Experiences*, 27.

⁴⁴ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 323-324.

⁴⁵ Hill Diary, 131. See also: Auchmuty, 'Lachlan Macquarie' 104.

⁴⁶ Michael Greenhalgh, 'French Military Reconnaissance in the Ottoman Empire during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries as a Source for Our Knowledge of Ancient Monuments'. *The Journal of Military History* 66, no.2 (2002): 359-360; 386-387.

It possesses considerable strength, and its provided with a wet ditch, well palisaded. Sixteen guns appeared to have been mounted; and a part of these were found spiked....Within the fort is a mosque, the lofty minaret of which had served for a look-out. There had also been an excellent barracks, now in ruins, within the fortress: it appeared to me that they were capable of receiving a thousand men. Considering that it was built on a plain, this fortress is of a very extraordinary construction.⁴⁷

The evaluation of ancient structures for military purposes can also be seen in Robert Wilson's narrative. After the surrender of the French garrison at Alexandria, Wilson discussed how Egypt might be defended from a second French invasion. Having made a detailed survey of Alexandria's ancient defences, he considered the city key to the defence of Egypt. Its harbours and the nearby coast provided the most suitable landing conditions for an invading army "since in that harbour alone security can be found for shipping of any burthen throughout the year." However, if Alexandria could be successfully defended, "France dare not expose another armament to disaster in Aboukir Bay, which cannot be fortified against the entrance of hostile fleets. The importance therefore of rendering Alexandria superior to a coup de main is obvious".⁴⁸ To assist in the defence of Alexandria, Wilson suggested restoring the city's unique defensive advantages that had existed in antiquity. He recommended that lake Mareotis should be kept full of water throughout the year. The position of this lake meant that when full, Alexandria was positioned on a narrow, easily defensible isthmus. This had been the case in antiquity, but the lake dried up as the canals linking it to the Nile had not been maintained. In April 1801, the British had cut through the narrow isthmus between the lakebed and the sea to assist in defending themselves from the French garrison in Alexandria. This had only been a temporary expedient however, the lake was still likely to dry up, and Wilson proposed making this solution more permanent, as it had been in antiquity. "The complete insulation of the city by the sea would secure the proposed object, and is a plan against which very

⁴⁷ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 292. See also: 413.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *History*, 247. See also: Nicol, *Experiences*, 52-53.

few objections, if any, could be advanced...Any debarkation at Aboukir would then be of little advantage”⁴⁹

Reflecting on the ruined condition of these ancient structures, British servicemen offered different explanations for the decay of Egyptian civilization. Here, one can see a disparity between the accounts of the ranks and those of officers. The rank and file tended to see the state of Egypt as a consequence of Biblical punishment, and as confirmation of the predictions of Ezekiel and of the existence of the ten plagues of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. George Billanie, a private in the 92nd Highlanders, wrote:

We all agreed after we had marched through the country that the Scripture account of it was perfectly correct; and the universal remark was that a remnant of the plagues of Moses still existed in it... I saw in these ruins the fulfilments of Jehovah’s threatenings, and an evidence of the truth of the Scriptures... The prediction is now fully verified, that Egypt, once the first of nations, should become the basest of kingdoms: Ezek. Xxix. 15, 16. It is sunk so low in ignorance and wretchedness, that, if it were not for the many elegant and stupendous remains of antiquity existing in the country, the voice of history, strong as it is, could scarcely be credited, that it was one the *first* of nations and the *seat* of the arts and sciences. It is a land of pestilence and disease.⁵⁰

Officers, by contrast, interpreted Egyptian decay within a secular framework concerning the rise and fall of civilizations. In broad terms, there were two popular interpretations of history at the beginning of the nineteenth century: cyclical and

⁴⁹ Ibid. See also: Maule, *Memoirs*, 201.

⁵⁰ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 90, 121. See also: Nicol, *Experiences*, 45.

progressive. According to the traditional cyclical view of history, empires were subject to decay and degeneration as they lost their martial character under the corrupting influence of luxury and despotic government. The history of the Roman, Spanish and Ottoman Empires carried dire warnings for future civilizations. This was the implicit message of Edward Gibbon's famous work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and was made overtly clear in Adam Ferguson's *History of the Roman Republic*. Gibbon and Ferguson emphasized the melancholic and humbling lessons that could be learned from the ruined civilizations of history, in order to prevent modern empires from experiencing similar failure.⁵¹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the cyclical view of history remained prominent among classical republican thought in the Scottish enlightenment, and continued to provide a powerful language for understanding national differences.⁵² However, cyclical interpretations had begun to be replaced by more linear 'progressive' accounts, which emphasized constant progression. This idea was central to Condorcet's *Sketch of a historical table of the progress of the human spirit* (1793) and to Turgot's 1750 speech 'On the Successive Progress of the Human Spirit'. According to this paradigm, ancient civilizations had to be seen in ascending order as the human spirit progressed - more recent societies were better. Thus Egypt had initially been pioneering, but this spirit had been sapped by superstition and decadence. Viewed in this way, Egypt's great antiquity put it behind later civilizations; its long history, which had once been a source of admiration, now became a reason to despise it as static and sterile.⁵³

⁵¹ Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, vol.1 (London, 1783), 3, 278-279, quoted in P. J. Marshall, 'Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25, no.2 (1987): 106. See also: P. J. Marshall, 'A Free Though Conquering People': Britain and Asia in the Eighteenth Century' in *A Free though Conquering People*, *Eighteenth-Century Britain and its Empire*, ed. P.J. Marshall (Hampshire: Routledge, 2003), 8.

⁵² Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, 102; Marshall, 'Empire and Authority', 106.

⁵³ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece* (London: Free Association Books, 1987), 199-201. P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Dent, 1982), 133-134, 150. See also: Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), 64.

The reflections of the officers in Egypt on the ruins of antiquity suggest their views were more inclined to cyclical rather than progressive interpretations of history. They looked at the antiquity of Egypt with sadness and admiration, rather than hostility, and looked for lessons to be learned from the ruins of Egypt. Robert Wilson summarizes this chain of thought, as he viewed the Pyramids at Giza.

When... reflection directs the thought to the surprising works of genius and learning of those ages in which these were constructed, and contrasts the present abject race of their posterity, the mind cannot but lament the degradation of such a portion of human nature, and consider the Pyramids as a monument for melancholy instruction.⁵⁴

Reference to such sombre thoughts can also be found in soldiers' descriptions of Alexandria. By 1801, the once thriving ancient Egyptian port was little more than a backwater; the city had once boasted a population of over a quarter of a million, but had since fallen to an estimated 24,000 inhabitants. Its importance had long since been eclipsed by Rosetta and Damietta which were linked by navigable canals directly to Cairo.⁵⁵ Although the soldiers enjoyed viewing the various monuments of antiquity around Alexandria, their ruined condition provided powerful visual evidence that the prosperity the city had enjoyed had withered away. Thomas Walsh for instance, wrote:

Alexandria, once the capital of the commercial world, is now converted into a desolate heap of ruins... The remains of beautiful marble and granite pillars, mixed and confounded with the miserable ruins of Arab dwelling, present themselves at every step, and force upon the mind a melancholy comparison of the ancient

⁵⁴ Wilson, *History*, 138.

⁵⁵ Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, 'The Greatest Glory'* (London: Vintage, 2008), 66, 73.

splendour of the emporium of the world with its present degradation.⁵⁶

Feelings of melancholy were most conspicuous in Francis Maule's writings. They contained reminiscences on the vulnerability of even the most prosperous civilizations when subject to the decaying influence of time. In a description of the Egyptian capital, Maule wrote, "Grand Cairo, so renowned in history for the splendour of its palaces, its magnificent buildings, and its great extent, now present a very different aspect. Like the rest of the country, it has fallen into insignificance and decay, and is the abode of ignorance and barbarism."⁵⁷ Maule's expressions of sorrow were most intense during his visit to Memphis, one of the ancient capitals of Egypt. Although the foundations "give high ideas of its former splendour and magnificence", there was little other sign of the greatness of Egypt's former inhabitants:

One traces nothing very remarkable in the ruins of the city. Ages have rolled over them, and left nothing but confused and indescribable masses of stone and rubbish. Such is the fate of the once magnificent cities of the world. They are the work of man, and they perish like himself. Thebes, Memphis, Alexandria, which were once the glory and terror of the earth, are now no more.⁵⁸

Reflecting on the ruins in Egypt generally, Maule wrote: "One would imagine it to be a terrestrial paradise. To me, it appeared like its once celebrated cities – a country which had long been buried."⁵⁹ Interestingly, Maule included in his account an extract from Vivant Denon's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. A French artist and archaeologist, Denon took copious sketches and notes from Egyptian ruins during

⁵⁶ Walsh, *Journal*, 235-236. See also: Bengal Narrative; Williams, *Voyage*, 142-143.

⁵⁷ Maule, *Memoirs*, 165-170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-129, 132.

⁵⁹ Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, in Company with several divisions of the French Army under the Command of General Bonaparte* (London: 1802), quoted in Maule, *Memoirs*, 136.

General Desaix's campaign against Murad Bey in Upper Egypt in 1799 – sometimes even when under fire. The lively, heavily illustrated account that he published in 1802 was enormously popular, and is regarded as the chief stimulus behind 'Egyptomania' that took hold in Britain and France in the early nineteenth century. The extract Maule included reflected his own gloomy feelings on the ruins:

Nothing is so melancholy to the feelings as to march over these ruined villages, to tread under foot the roofs of houses, and the tops of the minarets; and to think that these were once cultivated fields, flourishing trees, and the habitations of man. Everything living has disappeared. Silence is within and around every wall; and the deserted villages are like the dead, whose skeletons strike with terror.⁶⁰

Such a reaction was heavily influenced by the melancholic reflections on ruined architecture that were common among the writings of Grand Tourists, particularly when their itineraries took them to Italy. The great Roman ruins and antiquities were less obvious than they are today, for in the eighteenth century much of Imperial Rome lay beneath crumbling medieval walls and buildings, and the rubble and rubbish that had accumulated over hundreds of years. The Palatine hill was overrun with gardens and weeds, and the Coliseum was left neglected, rented out to citizens who kept sheds for their animals there.⁶¹ The state of Rome's renowned gladiatorial area in 1764, supposedly inspired Edward Gibbon to write his great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁶² Grand Tourists wrote of the "pitiful contrast" between current

⁶⁰ Ibid., 130-131.

⁶¹ Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London: Spring Books, 1969), 141. An important influence on the writing of Grand Tourists, and possibly on the soldiers' melancholic language, may have been eighteenth century British 'graveyard poetry', such as Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1751), Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742), and Thomas Parnell's *Night Piece on Death* (1721). These works were characterized by gloomy meditations on mortality. See: Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque, Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 47.

⁶² Ibid.

conditions and the “former greatness of Rome... to which they felt themselves... the rightful and magnificent heirs.”⁶³ In the same year as Gibbon’s visit to the Coliseum, Oliver Goldsmith published his poem *The Traveller*, which directs the reader’s attention to:

those domes, where Caesars once bore sway,
Defac’d by time and tottering in decay,
There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,
The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed...⁶⁴

Clearly classical traditions and the preference for Greco-Roman designs played an important role in forming the British servicemen’s melancholic perceptions of Egyptian antiquities. Although Egypt was never as fashionable as Greece or Rome, there remained an excitement about their proximity to Egypt’s ancient past. The detail with which soldiers recorded Egypt’s ancient objects reflected the emerging interest in antiquarian studies and held a military significance: it allowed the British to appraise the military utility of these ancient structures.

Collecting antiquities

Another practice, common among tourists of this period, and widely adopted by the soldiers in Egypt, was the collection of antiquities. Soldiers sought small idols and sculptures, or chipped pieces from larger monuments, such as sarcophagi, columns and statues, sometimes smashing these relics to pieces in the process, in order to obtain a souvenir. Military personnel had always taken mementoes and trophies from campaigns and such habits were encouraged by cultures of collecting in late eighteenth-century Britain.⁶⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, this subject has been examined in the past decade by Holger Hock and Maya Jasanoff. Hock highlights that the pursuit of antiquities played a central role in promoting national and imperial prestige during the “cultural war” between Britain and France. Ancient antiquities of

⁶³ James Buzard, ‘The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.

⁶⁴ Oliver Goldsmith, ‘The Traveller; or, a Prospect of Society’, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Daly, ‘Plunder on the Peninsula’, 220. See also: Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*.

great empires were appropriated to aggrandize and legitimize the British empire.⁶⁶ However, Hoock's focus is on the collection of high-status objects which were passed onto state institutions, and as a result he is less concerned with the personal motives that drove individual collectors, or their collection of lower status items. A closer examination of the collection and appropriation of antiquities and monuments by soldiers during the Egyptian campaign reveals that these practices were not motivated solely by a patriotic desire to further national prestige. As Maya Jasanoff has emphasized, there was a combination of motives behind an individual's collection of artefacts. For the soldiers in Egypt, these motives included a genuine interest in antiquity, the prospect of financial reward, the opportunity for the collector to refashion or improve their social standing, and the desire for a memento to reward an individuals' personal endurance of hardships throughout the campaign.

If we look closely at the individual soldiers involved in the acquisition of the Rosetta stone, one can see that these men were less motivated by patriotism, and more by their own ambition. In 1810 Colonel Hilgrove Tomkyns Turner wrote an account to the Society of Antiquaries of London of how he had personally seized the Rosetta stone from the French. Turner had been a member of the Society of Antiquaries since 1798, and had published *A Short Account of Ancient Chivalry* a year later. One can assume this was why he was chosen for take charge of the captured antiquities. He arrived in Egypt on behalf of the Prince of Wales, looking for objects with which he could adorn the Prince's armoury in England. Although he would have welcomed this opportunity for advancement that the Rosetta stone had opened, he would also have felt pressure from his Society peers to retrieve the Rosetta stone for Britain.⁶⁷ He claimed that the French made his task exceedingly difficult. The stone had been "covered with soft cotton cloth and a double matting" when Turner had first seen it. However, when he arrived at General Menou's house to have it removed, "the covering of the stone was torn off and it was thrown upon its face, and the excellent wooden cases of the rest

⁶⁶ Hoock, 'The British State and the Anglo-French Wars Over Antiquities', 1–24; Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, 208, 216, 220–222.

⁶⁷ Jonathon Downs, 'Romancing the Stone', *History Today* 56, no.5 (2006): 50–51; Hilgrove Tomkyns Turner et al. 'XXVII. An Account of the Rosetta Stone, in three languages, which was brought to England in the year 1802', *Archaeologia* 17 (1812): 212–214.

were broken off”. Turner asked General Hutchinson for assistance, and was provided with a detachment of artillerymen and a gun-carriage or “devil-cart.” They successfully moved the stone “with some difficulty from the narrow streets to my house, amid the sarcasm of numbers of French officers and men”.⁶⁸ Once he had removed the stone, several of the savants came to his quarters and asked to take a plaster cast of the stone for posterity, which he allowed “provided the stone should receive no injury”. He accompanied the stone on board the *Egyptienne* frigate, and arrived at Portsmouth in February 1802.⁶⁹

Turner’s account would have its readers believe he had wrested the stone from the clutches of an embittered enemy, and an article by Jonathan Downs brings the accuracy of this report into doubt. Downs highlights that the renowned traveller and scholar, Edward Daniel Clarke, told a very different story in his memoirs, published shortly after Turner’s statement and apparently in direct response to his claims. Clarke and his two academic companions had arrived at Alexandria shortly after the French surrender. They had been well received by the French scholars who had cared for the Rosetta Stone up to this point. According to Clarke’s memoirs, the stone was not captured, but handed over secretly in the quiet backstreets of Alexandria by these same scholars to Clarke and his companions. Clarke was unequivocal that Turner had not been there. “...Mr Cripps, Mr Hamilton and myself being the only persons present to take possession of it.”⁷⁰

Downs believes Clarke’s story to be more plausible than Turner’s because he shares the credit with colleagues and portrays the French in a positive light, something that in 1810 when Clarke began to publish his multi-volume travel memoirs, would have been unpopular in some quarters. It seems reasonable to presume that the French scholar who had delivered the stone was happier to hand it over to three affable scholars, rather than giving it to the British army. Menou might have even ordered the clandestine hand-over himself, enabling him to lay the blame for its surrender on

⁶⁸ Arthur F. Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner 1764-1843 Soldier and Courtier under the Georges* (London: The Alkham Press, 1964), 45; Turner, ‘An Account of the Rosetta Stone’, 212-213.

⁶⁹ Turner, ‘An Account of the Rosetta Stone’, 213-214.

⁷⁰ Downs, ‘Romancing the Stone’, 48-49, 52-53.

the treachery of his subordinates. Clarke portrays a handover that was characterized by confusion and divided loyalties, with the stone delivered in a spirit of preservation from one scholar to another.⁷¹

If we assume Turner falsified his account, it seems he did so seeking the plaudits of his peers in the Society of Antiquaries. This is most apparent with regard to the savants' plaster cast, noting that it was done "leaving the stone well cleaned of the printing ink, which it had been covered with."⁷² Turner clearly aspired to pursue some sort of antiquarian career: he remained in Egypt at his own expense long after his regiment had left the country, in order to serve in an antiquarian capacity. His ambitions were at least partly realized. Although he may not have been directly responsible for the acquisition of the Rosetta Stone, he was involved in the collection of other antiquities and oriental manuscripts, the vast majority of which would end up in the British Museum. After his return to Britain, he made a lithograph of a Roman statue he found and published an inscription on Pompey's Pillar in *Archaeologia*, the publication of the Society of Antiquaries, in 1806. Turner's letters to the Prince of Wales, during the campaign in Egypt ensured him royal favour, and he held a succession of royal appointments at court. From 1803 he was groom of the bedchamber to George III, and was keeper of the king's collection of prints. He used this influence to make an appeal for some remuneration for his antiquarian services in Egypt, and – most important to him personally – tried to become a trustee of the British Museum. This appointment was refused, and there is no record whether he was successful in obtaining any recompense.⁷³

One can discern a blend of personal and patriotic motives in the records of other acquisitions, or attempted acquisitions. At the end of 1801 Lord Cavan, the major-general who succeeded to the command of the British army in Egypt when Hutchinson embarked for Britain in October, attempted to have one of Cleopatra's Needles, a trio of giant ornamental obelisks, transported to England. The efforts that were made to

⁷¹ Ibid., 53-54.

⁷² Turner, 'An Account of the Rosetta Stone', 213; Downs, 'Romancing the Stone', 52; Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 44-45.

⁷³ Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 46-47, 57.

remove one of the obelisks, which had fallen onto its side, were detailed by William Rae Wilson, a traveller, writer and fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, who visited the needles over a decade after Cavan's attempt to remove them:

several officers of rank proposed to convey the Obelisk, which lay horizontally, to England, in order to be exhibited in some proper situation, as a monument of British achievements, and which had evidently, at one time entered to the contemplation of Buonaparte to remove to France.⁷⁴

This quotation is significant for it clearly outlines several motivations behind the British attempts to acquire antiquities. Lying on its side, the British thought the needle should be presented in "some proper situation". This would be accomplished by removing it to Britain, where it would act as "a monument of British achievements". The knowledge that the obelisks had interested Napoleon increased their value to British prestige.

According to Charles Hill, Cavan directed a party of "Four Captains, 8 subalterns and 500 men" who were "daily given to work at the fallen Needle of Cleopatra" A pier was constructed approximately 100 feet into Aboukir Bay. The Needle, weighing "about 200 tons", was to "have been launched along this pier into a ship cut down for the purpose of receiving it, a false keel built on the Needle and jury mast strap'd in it." In the event, the party was barely able to move the needle, and much of the pier was destroyed by boisterous weather.⁷⁵ It was clear that removing the obelisk to Britain would be an expensive project. According to William Rae Wilson, "subscriptions were set on foot among the officers of the army and navy serving in Egypt, to raise a sum to transport it to London."⁷⁶ No monetary assistance was offered

⁷⁴ William Rae Wilson, *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land* (London: 1823), 31. See also: Maule, *Memoirs*, 203; Wilson, *History*, 218; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 48-51; Nothing Pertickler Happened: An Autobiography of William Billows, Queens Regiment, 1797-1817, National Army Museum, 11-10-7-1, p.79; Bengal Narrative.

⁷⁵ Hill Diary, 150-151. Bengal Narrative.

⁷⁶ Wilson, *Travels in Egypt*, 32; Bengal Narrative.

by the British state, and the funds raised for the project were from private sources. Cavan wrote a series of letters, principally to the naval commanders in the Mediterranean - Lord Keith and Sir Richard Bickerton - as well as General Fox at Malta. Copies were also sent to individuals further afield known to have an interest in the matter, such as John Hely-Hutchinson and Lord Nelson. In his letter to General Fox, written on 12 January 1802, Cavan explained his plans to have the needle moved, so that it may “perpetuate on British ground the memory of the late events in the country”, and outlined the progress made.

We have been for some days past busily employed about the fallen Needle stone of Cleopatra both in our minds and bodies, the former employed in planning schemes for its transportation, and the latter in constructing a wharf to launch it from, which is already advanced more than twenty yards into the sea.⁷⁷

Cavan asked Fox to “sanction and patronize the measure”, and requested that “you will make our intentions known to the officers under your command who have served in Egypt...At present one third of the total amount will be required and we most earnestly beg that it may be remitted without delay.” Cavan was optimistic, and reassured Fox that any contributions would be used wisely.⁷⁸ Along with this letter, Cavan sent Fox a list of men from the forces currently in Egypt who had subscribed to this scheme at a meeting of general officers on 8 January. 37 officers attended the meeting and 19 were recorded to have subscribed. In total the contributions amounted to £1045.⁷⁹ These private donations certainly give some sense of the interest of British

⁷⁷ Cavan to Gen. Fox, 12 January 1802, War Office (WO) 1/293, p.121, The National Archives.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁷⁹ Meeting of General Officers, 8 January 1802, War Office (WO) 1/293, pp.117-120. The names of the subscribers and the amount they contributed were as follows: Cavan - £200; Major Gen. David Baird - £150; Major John Hope - £100; Colonel W. C. Beresford - £100; Colonel L. Auchmuty - £100; Lt- Col John Thomas Layard - £50; Major J. Montresor - £50; Lt Col F. Canuthers - £25; Lt-Col R. Quane - £25; Lt Col. C. Holloway - £25; Captain Geo. Bowen - £25; Major L. Macquerie - £25; Major Geo. Cookson - £25; Major R. Hope - £25; Capt. Brice - £25; W. M. Wills - £15; Capt. Keane - £20; Lieut. Desade - £20; Capt. Popham - £20.

servicemen in acquiring Egyptian antiquities for national prestige, but it is likely that their career ambitions also influenced their generosity. The Needle possessed significant cultural capital, and had it been successfully moved to Britain, it would have promoted the reputation and standing of the subscribing officers in military and antiquarian circles. In the event, the contributions did not prove sufficient. On 20 January, eight days after his initial letter, Cavan wrote to Fox informing him that the project had been abandoned: “the subscription of the troops in Egypt, amounting to £4000 was nearly if not quite sufficient to cover every expense.”⁸⁰ Despite this, Cavan’s men “resolved that some memento should be left on the spot.” They hauled the obelisk onto a slab of white marble detailing the heroic actions of the British forces during the campaign in Egypt.⁸¹ This act may have been trivial, but it represents an attempt to appropriate the cultural capital intrinsic to the obelisk despite the failure to acquire it.

Another episode of cultural appropriation concerns Pompey’s Pillar. After the surrender of the French garrison, the British determined to remove the cap of liberty which French soldiers had fixed on a strong pole on top of the pillar earlier in 1798. In December 1801, Lieutenant George Meredith of the Royal Marines asked his commander for permission to “destroy so conspicuous a trophy of the Triumph of France”, and replace it with “our insignia more worthy so exalted a situation”. Whether his request was granted is unclear, nevertheless a few audacious soldiers, cleverly using a series of ropes, scaled the twenty-six metre high column. On reaching the top, they replaced the cap with a British flag, and, in an extraordinary scene, these men sat drinking a bowl of punch they had brought with them, enjoying the view and toasting to the king and their climbing skills. The soldiers’ act of substituting the cap of liberty with the British insignia, represents an attempt to appropriate from the French the cultural capital intrinsic to Pompey’s Pillar.⁸² One can argue however, this

⁸⁰ Cavan to Fox, 20 January 1801, War Office (WO) 1/293, pp.89-90.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Travels in Egypt*, 32; Bengal Narrative.

⁸² Wilson, *History*, 221; Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, 221. Later in February 1803, a second and third ascent of the Pillar was made. John Shortland, captain of HMS *Pandour*, flew a kite over Pompey’s Pillar, by which means he got over ropes, and fixed a rope ladder, and ascended on the top of the Pillar...” Accompanied by the ship’s master John White, “he displayed a union jack, drank a bumper of wine to the health of the sovereign, and gave three cheers.” Four days later the pair “ascended a second time, erected a

was not the only motive. Climbing the pillar was a physically difficult task, and required a head for heights. It was an achievement of which an individual could be proud, and provided a tale with which to amuse their friends and relatives.

Similar motives can be discerned in the collection of smaller personal items. After enduring the hazards of campaigning and combat, soldiers often looked for mementoes and trophies as a reward. For many soldiers, the collection of ancient objects fulfilled this role. Sergeant Robertson provides an example of this. During his visit to the Pyramids, some of Robertson's comrades "had provided themselves with a sledgehammer and some torches, with the design of exploring the interior." After creating an entrance, they reached a large room containing "a marble chest or coffin". The sledgehammer was used to smash the sarcophagus "as we all seemed determined to have something as a memorial of our visit to the pyramids.... I still retain my share of the spoil, which I am willing to show to those interested in antiquities."⁸³ The use of the term "spoil" is significant here. It suggests that Robertson thought of the piece of the sarcophagus he took as a reward for the British victory over the French, and for enduring the dangers of the campaign. This line of thought was far removed from the established cultures of civilian collecting. Civilians referred to antiquities they acquired as "souvenirs", "mementoes", "artefacts", "antiques", "relics" or simply "objects".⁸⁴ Hilgrove Turner, who accompanied the Rosetta Stone on its voyage from Alexandria to Deptford, wrote about the relic under his care with the same militaristic thinking adopted by Robertson. He wrote of the stone as "a proud trophy of the arms of Britain (I could almost say spolia opima), not plundered from defenceless inhabitants, but honourably acquired by the fortune of war."⁸⁵ Turner's use of the Latin phrase "spolia opima" is noteworthy: it denotes the "rich spoils" such as armour,

staff, and fixed a weather vane, ate a beef steak, and again drank wine, health and happiness to his Majesty King George." See: *Naval Chronicle: containing a general and biographical history of the royal navy of the United Kingdom with a variety of original papers on nautical subjects*. 27 (January-June 1812): 111.

⁸³ Robertson, *Journal*, 28-29.

⁸⁴ See: John Galt, *Voyages and travels in the years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (London: 1812), 142, 155, 205-206, 228, 253, 267, 270, 298, 337-338, 368; John Griffiths, *Travels in Europe, Asia Minor, and Arabia* (London: 1805), 14, 141-142; Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 225, 238, 258

⁸⁵ Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 46.

arms and personal effects that a Roman general stripped from the body of an opposing commander slain in single combat. The spolia opima were regarded as the most honourable form of war trophies that a Roman commander could possibly obtain.⁸⁶ Other soldiers commented on the use of antiquities as rewards or trophies. Describing the effect of the Pyramid tours on the morale of his men, Robert Thomas Wilson thought they “seemed to find a recompence for many of their toils, to exult more in their triumphs, and feel the enjoyment which travellers must experience on attaining the ultimate object of their research: their minds aggrandised with honest pride, and honourable reflections.”⁸⁷ The desire for a trophy also helps to explain why soldiers broke small pieces off Pompey’s Pillar for themselves. One private wrote: “Our soldiers were so very eager to have pieces of the stone, that they broke bits off it, and would I suppose, have half broken it down, but our Commander in Chief ordered a centinel over it, that no person whatever should touch it.”⁸⁸

Given this military approach to collecting, it is interesting that the British allowed the French savants to keep their natural specimens they had collected after the capitulation of the French garrison at Alexandria. According to Hilgrove Turner, the savants had been permitted to keep these items “on the consideration that the care in preserving the insects and animals had made the property in some degree private”.⁸⁹ One could argue that the status of these objects as private property had little bearing on the decision to allow the savants to retain them. The British had simply ignored French claims that the “artificial” antiquities, such as the Rosetta Stone, were also private property. This may indicate a lack of British interest in these natural artefacts, which were of scientific interest but did not have the trophy value of antiquities.

Despite their military understanding of collecting antiquities, British soldiers did at times adhere to the established civilian conventions for collecting. Such traditions were well entrenched in Britain by the end of the eighteenth century, thanks to Grand

⁸⁶ See: Lindsay Powell, *Eager for Glory, The Untold Story of Drusus the Elder, Conqueror of Germania* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011), 94-95. See also, for trophy taking in Egypt: Anon., *Faithful Journal*, 35; Walsh, *Journal*, 237; Wilson, *History*, 221.

⁸⁷ Wilson, *History*, 137-138. See also: Evans Diary, 155.

⁸⁸ Anon., *Faithful Journal*, 35. See also: Wilson, *History*, 221.

⁸⁹ Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 44-45.

Tourists, who often purchased antiquities and paintings from foreign lands which they displayed in their homes. It was a practice that had grown in the latter half of the century, encouraged by the excavations at Herculaneum, Pompeii and around Rome, to the extent that the souvenir trade became a crucial component of the economy in the Italian capital.⁹⁰ Although never as fashionable as Roman or Grecian objects, there was considerable demand for Egyptian antiquities and artwork in the ‘Egyptian style’. Long before the British and French campaigns in Egypt, wealthy collectors acquired items such as shabtis, scarabs, stelae and canopic jars. One of the pre-eminent connoisseurs of these objects was Sir Hans Sloane, who possessed approximately 150 Egyptian antiquities. His collection provided the foundation of the British Museum after his death in 1753.⁹¹ Contemporary artwork in the Egyptian style was also fashionable. Egyptian pottery was popularized by Josiah Wedgwood, who introduced into production a perfected style of stoneware “Egyptian black” vases. China makers of all kinds also appropriated Egyptian patterns and figures, such as lions and sphinxes in their designs.⁹²

The British soldiers were receptive to this culture of collecting, and it appears that Egypt provoked a genuine antiquarian passion among some individuals. A good example of this is Hilgrove Turner. He remained in Egypt at his own expense long after his regiment had left the country, in order to serve in an antiquarian capacity.⁹³ The British passion for antiquities proved a useful source of income for the local Egyptians. Some of the officers, who were unwilling to search for objects themselves, could employ local Arabs to do it for them. Discussing these Arab antiquity collectors, Robert Wilson wrote: “The curiosity of travellers is a considerable profit to them, and they are incessantly employed in collecting numerous little idols and broken fragments of statues and sculpture, which are found in immense quantities.”⁹⁴ William Wittman was one the Arabs’ customers. During the time he spent at Giza, Wittman busied himself with engraving his name on the Great Pyramid, and undertaking an

⁹⁰ Black, *The British Abroad*, 49, 281-283; Hibbert, *Grand Tour*, 159-160.

⁹¹ Conner, *The Inspiration of Egypt*, 3, 9-10.

⁹² Diego Saglia, ‘Consuming Egypt: Appropriation and the Cultural Modalities of Romantic Luxury’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24, no.3, (2002): 322.

⁹³ Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 47.

⁹⁴ Wilson, *History*, 143.

expedition to a variety of catacombs, in the search for a perfectly preserved mummy. He had little time to search for mementoes of his visit, and wanting souvenirs, he purchased a few “curious Egyptian idols” that had been found by the Arabs.⁹⁵

Although the British sailors of the blockading squadron in 1798 never landed on the Egyptian shore, they nevertheless engaged in the pursuit of antiquities. In November, the crew of the *Swiftsure* was ordered to careen some of the Ottoman gun boats attached to the blockade squadron. A makeshift dock was excavated on Nelson’s island, to allow the boats to be tilted onto their sides, exposing their hulls for cleaning and repair. The excavations uncovered “several Egyptian reliques of great antiquity”, and “Some copper coins... of very ancient date.” Cooper Williams displayed particular interest in these artefacts, making notes and sketches of them, which he included in his memoir.⁹⁶ One of these objects, an alabaster figure that appeared to have been worn as an amulet, Williams kept until he reached Palermo later in 1799. There, he presented it as a gift to Sir William Hamilton; the others he kept for himself.⁹⁷ Williams’ gift to Hamilton was likely an attempt to attain patronage and influence in antiquarian circles. Hamilton was a keen antiquarian, archaeologist and volcanologist; he was a member of the Society of Dilettanti and fellow of the Royal Society, from which he had received the Copley Medal in 1770. Williams’ desire to further his antiquarian prospects demonstrates that military personnel could develop a passionate interest in archaeology and antiquarianism despite their military priorities.

Clearly, there were a variety of motivations behind the military collection of antiquities. Soldiers were receptive to civilian cultures of collecting and there were some who displayed a genuine interest in ancient objects. Yet, aside from this, there was a distinctive military appreciation of ancient antiquities. They were considered

⁹⁵ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 322, 324, 337-341. See also, for engraving on monuments in Egypt: Nicol, *Experiences*, 76; Wilson, *History*, 221.

⁹⁶ See: Figure 6, Appendices; Lee, *Memoirs*, 131; Williams, *Voyage*, 134-135, 142. See also, for sketches of Egypt: Davis pocket book.

⁹⁷ Williams, *Voyage*, 135.

trophies or rewards for enduring the hazards of campaigning, and were employed in attempts to validate the soldiers' experiences, and promote their social standing.

Interestingly, the approach of soldiers to the antiquities in Egypt draws comparison with the habits of collecting in the Iberian Peninsula. Gavin Daly has examined this practice in a recent article. The weight of evidence suggested to him that plunder for necessity and opportunism became normalized in the Peninsula, but there was also a spirit of collecting, especially among officers. The British generally thought themselves to be in a backward Peninsular world, largely removed from what they considered civilization. This lack of respect, and at times loathing towards the local inhabitants, helped break down cultural restraints on plundering civilians.⁹⁸ A similar argument can be applied to the Egyptian campaign. Much like accounts of the Peninsular War, British soldiers made scathing remarks about the local inhabitants. They were primitive, dishevelled and predominantly Muslim. Robert Wilson described them as "the most timid and abject wretches in the world." Their manners were considered "brutishly obscene", and for Thomas Walsh, they presented a "miserable and calamitous sight".⁹⁹

Comparing ancient and contemporary Egypt

In British accounts of ancient ruins and antiquities in Egypt, one can detect an emphasis on the inferiority of the current inhabitants to their antique ancestors. This was made overtly clear by Lieutenant Thomas Evans, of the 8th Regiment. In his account of Rosetta, he argued that the numerous buildings in a state of disrepair demonstrated the inferiority of Egypt's present inhabitants to their fore-bearers.

...this City has principally arisen from the wrecks, and on the ruins of others, as, on examination, you discover in the greater part of their public buildings, Mosques in particular. Pillars with inscriptions almost defaced, and put to uses foreign to what they were first intended for,

⁹⁸ Daly, 'Plunder on the Peninsula', 211, 218-219, 222-223.

⁹⁹ Wilson, *History*, 96; Walsh, *Journal*, 204. See also: Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 120-121; Evans Diary, 130.

sculpture and the different works of the fine arts all mutilated and reversed, without the least attention having been paid to uniformity of size and place, but jumbled together in that kind of style, which at once demonstrates the ignorance and barbarity of the succeeding generation to that which originally inhabited and adorned this, once beautiful city.¹⁰⁰

It is possible to see these observations as responses to anxieties that arose concerning Britain's identity as a progressive, developing society in this period. As Christopher Bayly highlights, at the end of the eighteenth century Britain's identity and its sense of pre-eminence was very recent, fragile and contested. It was easily threatened. The new awareness of other cultures which accompanied the expansion of the British Empire brought with it potential challenges to Britain's sense of supremacy.¹⁰¹ Martin Bernal, in his controversial *Black Athena*, has outlined this challenge in detail. According to Bernal, the traditional view among Greeks in the classical ages stipulated that Greek culture had arisen as the result of colonization by Egyptians and Phoenicians, around 1500BC. For eighteenth and nineteenth century romantics and racial theorists, it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen as the embodiment of European civilisation, to have been created from a mixture of Europeans and colonizing Africans.¹⁰² The ruined splendour of ancient Egypt provided evidence for the existence of an Egyptian empire that had colonized Greece. The vast age of Egyptian monuments also questioned the legitimacy of the Biblical narrative. In response to these revelations, a new model for interpreting the origins of European civilization was needed, and the traditional view was replaced by one which emphasized the Aryan origins of Greek culture. European scholars sought to undermine ancient Greek sources that had indicated the importance of Egypt, while

¹⁰⁰ Evans Diary, 131-132. See also: Wilson, *History*, 151-156.

¹⁰¹ C.A. Bayly, 'The British and indigenous peoples, 1760-1860: power, perception and identity', in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 19; See also: Nigel Leask, 'Colonialism and the Exotic', in *Romantic Writings*, ed. S. Bygrave (London: Routledge, 1996), 233-234; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003).

¹⁰² Bernal, *Black Athena*, 1; 1-2, 29, 239.

emphasizing the independent creativity of Greece. John Potter, for instance, published four volumes on Greek political institutions in 1697, which, with numerous editions, remained a standard text on this subject until 1848. He asserted that Athens, unlike the rest of Greece, had never been conquered by the Africans, and that Greek culture and institutions had come from Athens. Thus he was able to detach Greece from Africa and the Near East without challenging the ancient authority of the invasions.¹⁰³

Perhaps the most influential figure on the origins of European civilization was Sir William Jones, whose research on Sanskrit proved instrumental in moving the origin of European civilization away from Egypt, towards India. In 1786, he revealed that Sanskrit bears a strong affinity to Greek and Latin. From this, Jones argued that Sanskrit and European languages probably had a common unknown ancestor, but it was generally thought that Sanskrit itself was the original Indo-European language. For Christian apologists who sought to defend the authority of the Bible, this was firm evidence for diffusionism: the theory of the dispersal of all cultures from a common source.¹⁰⁴ This resulted in an extraordinary enthusiasm for all aspects of Indian culture that raged from the 1790s to the 1820s, and India replaced Egypt as the exotic ancestor of Europe.¹⁰⁵ One of the most notable authors on this subject was Francis Wilford. The ten articles which he contributed to *Asiatic Researches* between 1799 and 1810 attempted to syncretize Sanskrit and Judeo-Christian universal history. He announced the putative discovery of a Sanskrit version of the Noah story, which corroborated the Biblical narrative and subordinated Egypt to India in terms of chronological priority with the presupposition that ‘later is better’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1; 27, 31, 195-196.

¹⁰⁴ Nigel Leask, ‘Mythology’, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, Kate Fullagar and Patsy Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 338-344.

¹⁰⁵ Bernal, *Black Athena*, 1; 224-225.

¹⁰⁶ Nigel Leask, ‘Francis Wilford and the Colonial construction of Hindu geography, 1799-1822’, in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of travel 1775-1844*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 206-207; Leask, ‘Mythology’. Wilford’s work conformed with that of Anglican mythographers and divines, such as Jacob Bryant, Thomas Maurice, and George Stanley Faber.

Much like Francis Wilford, it appears that some of the British soldiers in Egypt were keen to prove the superior ancestry of India over Egypt. This was most apparent among East India Company officers, as they visited the Ancient Egyptian temple of Dendera, located on the opposite bank of the Nile to Qena. When Captain John Budgen, one of General Baird's aides-de-camp, went to see the ruins of Dendara, he took two sepoys of the Brahmin caste with him. In one of the buildings Budgen deemed to be the oldest, "The Sepoys discerned effigies of their God Vishnu, very much mutilated, & they observed they had almost all the figures that were carved on the walls & pillars, in their temples in India."¹⁰⁷ Another company officer made a similar claim: "Some intelligent Hindoo [sic] Sepoys who were with us instantly recognized the figures on the walls, similar to those in their pagodas in India, and one of them who understood the sanscrite [sic] gave us a written description of them."¹⁰⁸ These two statements, asserting the presence of Hindu gods in an Egyptian temple, indicate the Indian origins of ancient Egypt.

One might argue that the British collection of Egyptian antiquities itself formed another psychological reaction to the doubts concerning Britain's identity as a progressive, developing society in this period. The inability of the Egyptians to maintain the antiquities, to the extent that it was necessary to acquire them for proper preservation, implied that Egypt had undergone moral and cultural decline. There are numerous British accounts of improper treatment of antiquities, and Hilgrove Turner provides one of the most extraordinary examples. He described a valuable sarcophagus that had been taken from a mosque destroyed by the French, and after the capitulation of Alexandria, had been taken by the Ottomans as a prize. It was placed on the captured French privateer *Corse*, which had also been given to the Ottomans. "The sarcophagus was considered by the Turks to be an especial antidote to all diseases and particularly to the plague, and a fee of six paras was paid to the Iman by those who touched it with their tongue in order to obtain a cure". The British

¹⁰⁷ Military Journal of John Budgen Esq- Captain 54th Regiment, aid du Camp on the Staff of General Sir David Baird, during Service at the Cape, India & Egypt from February 9th 1796- Feb. 14th 1802, The British Library, (BL) Mss Eur A103, p.98. It is possible that the sepoys mistook the Egyptian god Heru-pa-khered (Horus the Younger), for Vishnu, as both deities possess a similar physical appearance.

¹⁰⁸ Bengal Narrative.

had desired the sarcophagus and the unusual conditions in which it was stored encouraged them to make attempts to acquire it. Turner was sent to the Capitan Pasha, the Grand Admiral of the Ottoman navy, to demand its delivery, and it was reluctantly presented to the British.¹⁰⁹ Other soldiers' accounts accused the locals of vandalism: John Budgen and Charles Hill, who wrote of their visit to Dendera, blamed the ruined condition of the temple on the locals: "the Arabs have endeavoured to destroy this immense monument of ancient architecture by every means in their power, and have broken most of the figures that adorned the outside of the building."¹¹⁰ The faces of the statues, and columns, in particular, had "been defaced by the blind zeal of the Mussulmans."¹¹¹ On viewing Pompey's Pillar after the surrender at Alexandria, Thomas Walsh noted "The French have repaired the foundation supporting the pedestal, which had formerly been destroyed in part by the brutal rapacity of an Arab; who, imagining some treasure lay concealed under it, attempted, but happily in vain, to blow up this beautiful column."¹¹² During his stay at Haifa, Williams found an old monastery, "a large handsome building", that had been "occupied by a detachment of the Turkish army, who had miserably defaced it: part of the chapel was destroyed, and only the walls remained."¹¹³

Although racial thinking played a significant role in these British attitudes, one must be careful when referring to conceptions of race in this period. As Colin Kidd and Roxann Wheeler note, the British understanding of race at the beginning of the nineteenth century was more fluid than is the case today. Throughout the eighteenth century, conceptions of religion, civility, clothing and rank were more important to Briton's assessment of themselves and other people than physical attributes, such as skin colour. In explaining human variation, most eighteenth century Britons would have looked to the monogenic biblical account of creation and the common descent from Adam and Eve. The subsequent changes in complexion and culture sprang from

¹⁰⁹ Loveday, *Sir Hilgrove Turner*, 47.

¹¹⁰ Hill Diary, 90-91.

¹¹¹ Budgen Journal, 97. See also: Bengal Narrative.

¹¹² Walsh, *Journal*, 236-237.

¹¹³ Williams, *Voyage*, 160. See also: Maule, *Memoirs*, 54.

natural and climatic occurrences as people dispersed over the earth.¹¹⁴ The final decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a gradual change: Britons began to believe that human differences were less superficial, and were not altered by changes in the climate or education. Various causes for this shift have been discussed by scholars, such as the secularizing influence of the Enlightenment, the mounting public pressure to discuss the economic and moral viability of the slave trade, and the expansion of Britain's empire into territories populated by different races.¹¹⁵ One must emphasize the gradual nature of this change in racial ideology. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a confusing mix of interpretations on the causes of human difference, and the subject was becoming a popular strand of intellectual inquiry. Many of these ideas were expressed through the Scottish Enlightenment, in publications such as Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), John Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771) and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776).¹¹⁶ A popular topic at beginning of the nineteenth century, according to Colin Kidd, was how the growing conviction in racial difference might be reconciled with the monogenic Biblical narrative.¹¹⁷ As Roxann Wheeler observes, European academics at this time began to refer to the "four stages theory", in an attempt to categorize the variety of newly encountered peoples and societies. This was a hierarchical formula through which all societies could be compared. At the top of this hierarchy was commercial civilization, of which Britain was the prime example; at the bottom lay the most primitive hunter-gatherer societies, which were located in the orient, the Americas or the Pacific.¹¹⁸

The fluidity in ideas about race and civilization in Britain can be seen in the writing of soldiers in Egypt. The soldiers expressed their sense of superiority with reference to a diverse range of subjects. For many, the most important indicator of this was the

¹¹⁴ Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 5-7, 15.

¹¹⁵ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27, 80, 82, 92-93, 271; Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 9, 31-32, 37.

¹¹⁶ Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 101-102.

¹¹⁸ Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 35.

physical appearance of modern Egyptian society. Their damning accounts also allowed military personnel to demonstrate to their audiences their cultural refinement and sophistication. By stressing their disgust at Egyptian settlements, with adjectives such as “chaotic”, “unrefined”, “dirty” and “ugly”, the soldiers could identify themselves with opposing, more positive terms, such as order, refinement, hygiene and the picturesque. An abhorrence at the sight and stench of Egyptian dwellings is commonly emphasized; this was an age in which there was a growing intolerance of filth and foul odours that were considered a threat to health and morality.¹¹⁹ The accounts of Cooper Williams and John Lee, as they explored Haifa, provide an example of this.

This place had by far the most miserable collection of human habitations I ever beheld:... The streets exhibit a frightful specimen of human misery, being very narrow and full of mud; and to add to the disagreeable picture, dead carcasses of dogs, horses or camels, were suffered to rot in the public ways without being removed. The houses... are no better than hovels.¹²⁰

It is striking that the soldiers described these Egyptian dwellings in terms that were commonly used for animals. One of the first settlements the British forces encountered after landing at Aboukir, was Idku, a small village located on the coast roughly half way between Alexandria and Rosetta. Thomas Evans described it:

This is the first Village I have seen in Egypt and a miserable figure it cuts,... the streets are not more than two yards wide, without any pavement whatever, and

¹¹⁹ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant Odour and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 11, 13, 17, 58-60, 64; Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma, The Cultural history of smell*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 79, 88-89.

¹²⁰ Williams, *Voyage*, 152. See also: Lee, *Memoirs*, 139.

so filthy are they that the swine of other countries will bear a fair comparison to the wretched occupants.¹²¹

To Evans, the “odd manner in which the houses are built” resembled “in their appearance so many pigeon houses”.¹²² Another officer wrote:

By describing one village you describe all; invariably built...an assemblage of flat-roofed square mud-huts; few houses with upper stories or walls of brick; oval *kennels* of mud, without any window, and only a small hole, through which they creep... they are *beastly dirty*.¹²³

Equating Egyptian dwellings to those of animals reveals the soldiers’ conviction in racial, cultural and social superiority, but it also demonstrates the soldiers’ attempts to describe their unfamiliar, alien environment with familiar terminology. The use of terms such as “kennels” and “pigeon houses” conveyed an image that readers in Britain could recognize.

Robert Wilson provided one of the most interesting accounts of Egyptian abodes. He referred to the lodgings in terms often used for animals, but he also drew a contrast between Egyptian and Irish housing: “All language is insufficient to give a just idea of the misery of an Egyptian village; but those who have been in Ireland may best suppose the degree, when an Irish hut is described as a palace, in comparison to an Arab’s sty, for it can be called no other name.”¹²⁴ As Catriona Kennedy argues, the identification of similarities between Ireland and other foreign cultures and landscapes exposed the fault lines within the United Kingdom at this time. Ireland was one of the British army’s major garrisons; a large proportion of the soldiers in Egypt would have

¹²¹ Evans Diary, 126, 136.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 47-48.

¹²⁴ Wilson, *History*, 99-100. See also: Walsh, *Journal*, 202-205; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 291; Evans Diary, 130.

served there at some point. Ireland functioned as a synonym for squalor, poverty and backwardness. It served as the “other within”, and a point of reference for the “other without”. Comparisons with the proverbial Irish cabin can also be found in the Peninsular campaigns, as British soldiers commented on the housing of Portuguese peasantry.¹²⁵

The British soldiers’ criticism of Egyptian buildings was most noticeable in their accounts of Cairo. The Egyptian capital was enormous, consisting of an estimated 500,000 inhabitants, making it arguably larger than Paris, and second only to Constantinople as the most populous metropolitan centre in the Near East. It was a renowned trading centre, with large seasonal caravans, consisting of hundreds of camels from distant locations such as Aleppo, Mecca, Darfur and even Timbuktu, 2,000 miles away on the other side of the Sahara Desert. Within the precincts of Cairo there were over 300 mosques, whose minarets dominated the skyline.¹²⁶ Cairo boasted a long and famous history; it was heavily associated with the ancient Egyptians, the pyramid complex at Giza and Saladin. Dozens of military memoirists were anxious to visit the city, learn its history, and relate this knowledge to their readers. What they discovered failed to fulfil their expectations. There was little sign of the industrial or infrastructural development that had been taking place in Britain. By the late eighteenth century, many of the middle and upper classes had begun to commute daily into urban centres such as London, Bath and Glasgow after the establishment of regular coach services. Nothing of the sort existed in Cairo. Transport networks remained unchanged since the middle ages; the streets were narrow, winding, irregular, dirty, malodorous and hopelessly overcrowded, making travel through Cairo slow, unpleasant and only possible on foot. Traversing the city became a test of endurance, as the narrow congested streets became airless and swelteringly hot. The atmosphere was blighted by smog from thousands of household cooking fires, many of which used dried dung for fuel. This urban environment fitted well with the soldiers’ conviction that Levantine peoples lacked a capacity for organization and refinement.

¹²⁵ Kennedy, *Narratives*, 108-109.

¹²⁶ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 132-133.

By 1801, many British soldiers were aware of the numerous accounts of Cairo by the French forces that had occupied the city since 1798. Thousands of letters from French soldiers had been intercepted in the Mediterranean by Nelson's naval squadron; many of which, including Napoleon's private correspondence, were promptly published in Britain. They conveyed a sense of enormous disappointment that arose partly from a profound culture shock.¹²⁷ According to Robert Wilson, "The English, instructed by their error, expected little, yet did not reduce their ideas low enough."¹²⁸ The number of ugly structures, or buildings in a state of disrepair, was central to British criticism of Cairo. One officer in the Anglo-Indian expeditionary force, wrote "the Houses are lofty and the streets extremely narrow.... the European Traveller looks in vain for elegance or taste in any of the Buildings of this Capital."¹²⁹ Such a view arises partly from British ignorance. Although Cairo was certainly less economically developed than British conurbations, many of the damaged buildings bore scars from the numerous insurrections against the French occupation. During the most severe revolt in October 1798, the French bombarded the city. Napoleon's orders to General Bon, whose division cleared the streets of rebels, stated: "all houses which throw stones at you in the street are to be burnt to the ground".¹³⁰ Many British soldiers were aware that the French were at least partly responsible for the condition of Cairo. However, it would have been difficult to attribute the ruins to a particular cause, and the British may have underestimated the extent of the destruction wrought by the French.¹³¹

The combination of war-torn buildings and bustling, oppressive streets, meant that Cairo proved to be a nasty shock for the soldiers hoping to undertake a recreational

¹²⁷ Major Detroye of the engineers was a typical example: "On entering Cairo, what do you find? Narrow streets, unpaved and filthy, shadowy houses often in ruins, even the public buildings seem like dungeons, shops are nothing better than stables, the air is filled with dust and the reek of garbage.... Hideous smells come from the filthy interiors, and you choke on the risen dust together with the odour of food being fried in rancid oil in stuffy bazaars." See: Brigadier Detroye, *Journal* (unpublished) in, *Archives Historiques du ministère de la Guerre: Correspondence de l'armée d'Égypte: Mémoires Historiques*, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 133-134.

¹²⁸ Wilson, *History*, 150.

¹²⁹ Bengal Narrative. See also: Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 366; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 31.

¹³⁰ Napoleon, *Correspondence*, vol. 5, 88, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 242-245.

¹³¹ See: Walsh, *Journal*, 253-254, 259; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 390; Wilson, *History*, 152.

tour of the city. Daniel Nicol's narrative presents a good example of this. His curiosity was piqued by the huge citadel that loomed over the city, and he obtained permission to visit the ancient fortress after the capitulation of the French garrison. The castle seemed only a short distance from his bivouac in the British camp on the outskirts of Cairo, and he set out with orders to return to camp by nightfall. Unfortunately, Nicol failed to take into account the severe crowd congestion, a problem exacerbated by the forces of the Ottoman Grand Vizir, which had occupied the city.¹³² "The streets in Cairo are narrow and we were like to be choked with the dust or squeezed against the brick houses. At length the street got quite blocked up; there were so many animals, camels, mules, and asses, that no movement could be made out one way or other". What Nicol had anticipated to be a pleasant excursion turned out to be the opposite. It is obvious from the very little he wrote on the subject, that Nicol barely had time to inspect the citadel. After spending hours in the stiflingly hot, overcrowded streets, Nicol was "right glad when we got out of the confusion" and happy to leave behind Cairo, "with its narrow streets, brick and mud buildings, and its poor half-naked inhabitants."¹³³ Thomas Evans, who devoted the 13 and 14 July to exploring Cairo, was also caught in the dense crowds: "the streets from being narrow, and the population prodigious, renders them very difficult passage; in their crowded state it is a common thing, to observe a proportion of the people carried along with the torrent for a considerable distance".¹³⁴ Both Nicol and Evans invested considerable time and effort into these excursions, their cultural and recreational experience of Cairo was important to them. Yet despite this, these men could not move beyond the feelings of discomfort which derived from the unfamiliar environment the Egyptian capital presented to them.

Soldiers with experience of India tended to see Cairo differently. Lachlan Macquarie, the Deputy-Adjutant General to the Anglo-Indian army, was more familiar with the hot, bustling streets. In late August, he and Colonel Lloyd of the 86th Regiment

¹³² Hill Diary, 110.

¹³³ Nicol, *Experiences*, 77-78. See also: Robertson, *Journal*, 30; Evans Diary, 167; Walsh, *Journal*, 253-4. 259; Diary of Capt Exham Vincent, 54th and 39th Regiments, 1800-1813, National Army Museum, 06-05-69-1, pp.30-1; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 37-38.

¹³⁴ Evans Diary, 167.

...rode through all the squares, principal streets, and Public Markets within the City. We afterwards proceeded to the Ancient Citadel on the mountain close to the town. From the Citadel we had a very noble grand view of the whole of this immense extensive city, - The River Nile for a great distance above and below the Town, the Sea Port Town of Bulac, with its harbour full of shipping, the Island of Rhoda with the encampment of the Indian Army, the Town and Fortifications of Giza, and the distant view of the Pyramids and surrounding country, together with the grand immense Aqueduct that formerly conveyed the water from the River into the city, formed altogether such an assemblage of grand and beautiful objects of Nature and Art as I have never seen combined before.¹³⁵

Charles Hill, who had also served in India, shared Macquarie's opinion. He wrote that the citadel was "well worth seeing", and that "I am of opinion that this was formerly a very noble city".¹³⁶

The views of Macquarie and Hill were a minority; it was far more common for military narratives to express profound shock at the seemingly primitive state of Egypt. This response was not unique to military personnel; it was formed in part by prevailing values and practices in Britain at a time of rapid industrial development, and was a common theme among civilian travelogues. William Hunter, in his account published in 1796, wrote that the villages in Egypt "have a wretched appearance,.....the chief materials of which they are built, are mud and twigs." Their homes, he claimed had "more the appearance of a dungeon than a dwelling house."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Auchmuty, 'Lachlan Macquarie', 96.

¹³⁶ Hill Diary, 107-108.

¹³⁷ William Hunter, *Travels through France, Turkey, and Hungary, to Vienna, in 1792* (London: 1798), vol. 1, 265-266. See also: 312-314; vol. 2, 4-5.

Of all the travelogues of Egypt published in this period, the Comte de Volney's *Travels* stands out for its long, detailed and passionate denunciation of Egyptian abodes. He effectively conveyed both the disappointment he felt on encountering Cairo, and his conviction in the superiority of European capitals:

When we hear of Grand Cairo, we are led to imagine that it must be a capital, at least, like those of Europe; but if we reflect that, even among ourselves, towns have only begun to be rendered convenient and elegant within these hundred years, we shall easily believe that, in a country where nothing has been improved since the tenth century, they must partake of the common barbarism; and indeed, we shall find that Cairo contains none of those public or private edifices, those regular squares, or well-built streets, in which the architect displays his genius. Its environs are full of hills and dust, formed by the rubbish which is accumulating every day, while the multitude of tombs, and the stench of the common sewers, are at once offensive to the smell and the sight. Within the walls, the streets are winding and narrow; and as they are not paved, the crowds of the men, camels, asses, and dogs, which press against each other, raise a very disagreeable dust.¹³⁸

It is unsurprising then, given the popularity of Volney's and Hunter's travelogues, that the vicious criticism British servicemen levelled at Egyptian inhabitants was well

¹³⁸ Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785* (London: 1787), vol. 1, 190-191, 234-235. See also: 6-8, 189-190; W.G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798*, sec edn (London: 1806), 1-4, 51; Guillaume Antoine Olivier, *Travels in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Persia* (London: 1801), vol.1, 9-10; John Remmey, *An Account of the Present State of Egypt* (New York: 1799), 52; Savary, *Letters on Egypt*, vol. 1, 88-89, 101-102, 108-109; C. S. Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Undertaken by Order of the Old Government of France* (London: 1800), 8, 419.

received by readers in Britain. The *Critical Review*, for instance, praised one officer's journal for its description of the common people, which "conveys such a variety of wretchedness."¹³⁹

Conclusion

British servicemen looked at and responded to Egyptian ruins and antiquities in a number of different ways. Although soldiers came to Egypt to wage war, this did not prevent them from exploring ancient ruins; antiquarian pursuits were not at odds with the military occupation. One might even argue that antiquarianism in Egypt held a strategic importance, as it enabled Britain to maintain a low-level presence in the Levant after the campaign, and provided detailed information on ancient structures that might be used for military purposes. The variation in responses to antiquities is most discernible between the officers and the lower ranks. Without the classical education that officers possessed, the ordinary soldiers' experience of antiquities was surprising and revelatory. They relished exploring and learning about ruins, of which they had little or no knowledge, and looked to the Bible and the ten plagues of Egypt to explain the decayed state of Egyptian civilization. Officers, by contrast, were well read about classical antiquities, some had embarked on Grand Tours to Greco-Roman sites in their youth. The exploration of Egyptian ruins allowed these men to continue their cultural refinement. They explained the degenerated condition of Ancient Egypt with reference to secular interpretations of history; the cyclical view being the most popular.

The curiosity and excitement about antiquities frequently resulted in attempts to amass collections of these objects. Soldiers collected small objects, such as pieces of sarcophagi, primarily for themselves. The antiquities they acquired were considered mementoes, but were also thought of as trophies of their victory or rewards for enduring the hazards of campaigning. Personal, self-centred motives can be discerned in the procurement of larger objects. As Hilgrove Turner's account demonstrates, his 'acquisition' of the Rosetta stone was motivated more by personal ambition than patriotism. The collection of these antiquities was justified in part by the allegedly

¹³⁹ *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army*, by Anon. 34 (1803): 415-420.

uncivilized, undeveloped state of contemporary Egypt. The inability of the modern inhabitants to maintain the ruins from antiquity made it necessary for Britain to acquire them, to ensure their preservation and appreciation. Numerous soldiers implied that the inhabitants were responsible for the poor condition of Egypt's ancient structures. The dirty, smelly and crowded appearance of the modern cities of Egypt reinforced this view of Egyptian stagnation and decline, and pre-empted any challenge ancient Egypt may have posed to Britain's sense of its own pre-eminence.

3.

“Among the most savage nations”: British conceptions of identity and difference in Egypt

I always conform to the customs of the people amongst whom I live, as much as any man can do, and am the last person in the world to condemn manners..... because they differ from ours in England; but confess that it would be necessary I should live a little longer amongst... the Turks and Arabs, before I could adopt almost any one of their habits: every thing seems to be done diametrically opposite to the way we do it...¹

This quotation, written anonymously by an officer on General Abercromby's staff, encapsulates one of the defining features of British interaction with Near-Eastern peoples in Egypt between 1798 and 1801. The officer, like many of his comrades, was acutely aware that he had entered a very different country from his own. These conceptions of identity and difference that were expressed by British servicemen were complex, inconsistent and filled with ambiguities and contradictions. As highlighted by Colin Kidd, Roxann Wheeler and Dror Wahrman in the previous chapter, this was the result of the fluid perceptions of difference at this time. Throughout the eighteenth century, conceptions of religion, civility, clothing and class were more important to Briton's assessment of themselves and other people than physical attributes, such as skin colour, but in the final decades of the eighteenth century this began to gradually change. Britons began to believe that human differences were less superficial, and

¹ Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 14-15.

were not altered by changes in the climate or education.² This realignment towards more racial conceptions of difference only became fully visible a few decades into the nineteenth century, with the emergence of scientific racism.³

The influence of the religious divide between European nations and the Near East was also in flux throughout the eighteenth century. One of the most significant works on this topic has been written by Malcolm Yapp.⁴ He argues that Europe's sense of difference from the East dates from the medieval idea of Christendom as a single Christian community. Christians saw relations between Christianity and Islam in terms of religio-military confrontation, a view enhanced by the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Calls for Christian unity against the Islamic threat were led by the papacy, which became the theme for the next three centuries.⁵ As the Ottoman threat against Europe began to diminish after the siege of Vienna in 1683, European writers gradually dropped the language of Christianity, referring to themselves as Europe, rather than Christendom from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Although the religious divide had begun to fade, Yapp argues there was a "cultural entity at the core of Christianity" which prolonged the concept of 'Christendom' under the new term 'Europe'. New, seemingly secular, concepts were introduced to explain and maintain the differences that existed between Europe and the Near East since the Crusades. Montesquieu was fundamental in this regard. To explain why there were different types of government in Europe and the East in his *Spirit of Laws*, he referred not only to religion, but to various secular principles based on observation: the Ottoman Empire was a despotic government because it was too large, because its religion was

² Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27, 80, 82, 92-93, 271; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 9, 31-32, 37; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 86-87. See also: Mark Harrison, *Climates & Constitutions Health, Race, Environment and British imperialism in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 86-87.

⁴ See also: Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵ M. E. Yapp, 'Europe in the Turkish Mirror', *Past & Present* 137, no.1 (1992): 140.

conducive to despotism through the doctrine of fatalism, and the position it accorded to women, and because of the corrupting influence of the climate on the human mind.⁶

By 1801 therefore, there was a confused mix of both traditional and new conceptions of difference, which is reflected in the writing of the British army in Egypt. The objective of this chapter is to explore the different, sometimes ambiguous and contradictory ways in which British servicemen in Egypt conceived of their identity and a sense of their difference from Near Eastern culture as they described encounters with Egyptian and Ottoman peoples. Among the confused mix of images in the writing of servicemen, the one consistent theme which emerges is that the people encountered in Egypt were seen as polar opposites to Britons. This thinking owes much to Montesquieu's analysis, which was vital helping to shape the concept of Europe by outlining what it was not. The European traveller visiting the Near-East saw his own society in reverse – a distorted image which Malcolm Yapp calls the "Turkish Mirror". Over time, the features of the Near East persistently altered to reflect Europe's perceptions of itself.⁷ This was a feature of some of the most popular travelogues in the eighteenth century, such as Savary's *Letters from Egypt*, Volney's *Travels through Syria and Egypt*, and Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners of Nations*. British servicemen looked at the Egyptians and Ottomans in Egypt in similar ways to the travellers Yapp examines. The soldiers altered the features and characteristics of the Egyptians and the Ottomans to reflect their perception of themselves.

Religion in the British military

Although the religious distinction between Europe and the Near East had begun to fade from the beginning of the eighteenth century, religion remained one of the primary signifiers of difference between British soldiers and the Muslim inhabitants of Egypt. Thus, it is necessary to establish the extent of religiosity in the British forces at this time. Much has been written by scholars and contemporaries of the period about the soldiers' sordid and immoral habits, and their contempt for religious compulsion. Despite this, the evidence suggests that there were few convinced atheists in the ranks.

⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 359; Yapp, 'Turkish Mirror', 147.

⁷ Yapp, 'Turkish Mirror', 134-135, 142-145, 147, 152-153.

The British army of the eighteenth century was in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, a Protestant institution. Until 1774, when new dispensations were implemented, all new recruits were required, in theory, to declare their Protestantism upon enlistment.⁸ Only those who swore allegiance to the Protestant monarch and publically confessed to the Thirty-Nine Articles were eligible to serve.⁹ Churchgoing was compulsory, attendance at public worship on the Sabbath being required under the Articles of War. Army chaplains were attached to each regiment and were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the troops. Both the Articles of War for the British Government and the Articles of the East India Company regulated religion in their armed forces in a very similar manner. They employed many of the same words to emphasize the requirement for attendance at divine worship.¹⁰

One could argue that the army's regulations, intended to ensure at least a show of piety, were conducive to the promotion of personal faith. For soldiers who served abroad, army life could be extremely dangerous, particularly during garrison duty in India or the fever-ridden Caribbean. The fear of death took a considerable psychological toll. Combined with a lack of funds, isolation from local society and the boredom of garrison life, soldiers had plenty of time to dwell on the perils of their occupation. It is unsurprising therefore, that many turned to religion when coming to terms with their hazardous service.¹¹ Given the importance of the church in rural communities, religion may have also been a way of maintaining domestic ties and a civilian identity. Encouraging the soldiers' piety was thought to improve their discipline and efficiency as George Billanie, a former private in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, remembered. "On the whole, I passed comparatively easy and quietly through the army, and without a doubt, the remaining restraints of early instruction was one particular means of preserving me from many evils and dangers; and in this

⁸ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2005), 11, 18, 139, 240.

⁹ Hiliary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c.1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42.

¹⁰ Richard Holmes, *Sahib The British Soldier in India 1750-1914* (London: Harper Collins, 2006), 459.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

respect proved an invaluable blessing to me.”¹² It was partly for this reason that the armed forces were occasionally targeted by philanthropic groups who sought to encourage piety. The Naval and Military Bible society, which came under the patronage of the commander-in-chief, the Duke of York, was a charity established in 1780 with the specific purpose of distributing Bibles and prayer books throughout the military forces. It continued to do so during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars with great success.¹³ The enduring importance of Christianity to the British army throughout this period was encapsulated by the Duke, who combined his role as commander-in-chief with that of the lay Bishop of Osnabruck.¹⁴ The impact of the army’s distribution of Bibles and other religious literature is difficult to gauge, as the success of the project was dependent on the private attitudes of the soldiers themselves. There were several instances of soldiers adopting an indifferent attitude towards items of this nature, but there were some who undoubtedly were inspired by the texts they received. Billanie recalled that reading his Bible and “several religious books” given to him, led to a “hunger and thirst after personal holiness”.¹⁵

There were several openly pious soldiers and sailors who participated in the Egyptian campaign or fought at the battle of the Nile. It was relatively common for those who wrote letters or diaries during the wars, or memoirs after their discharge, to consider their experiences explicitly in religious terms.¹⁶ Soldiers’ writings contain numerous prayers to God as they recollected the dangers of combat in the Egyptian campaign. As the expeditionary force sailed to Egypt, Billanie told himself that God was wise

¹² Anon. [George Billanie?], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment of Foot* (Glasgow, 1820), 130.

¹³ Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 25, 94-95, 126-127, 147-150; Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 161. See also: Sir Charles Oman, *Wellington’s Army* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 320-324. In 1814, the Society boasted that it had handed out over the course of the years some 100,000 Bibles to sailors and soldiers.

¹⁴ Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 125. See also: David Gates, ‘The Transformation of the Army 1783-1815’, in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 144.

¹⁵ Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820), 24-25; Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 95-96. See also, 139.

¹⁶ Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 6.

and just, and took solace from his belief that God would not punish him more than he deserved for his sins.¹⁷ James Downing, an evangelical convert and former private who had been blinded during the campaign, wrote in verse how he had prayed during combat to prevent panic. “I know at first through fear of death, / You eagerly will say, / O Lord have mercy on my soul, And rescue me this day. / ... My brother soldiers, pray reflect / Upon your awful state, / Pray to the Lord for pard’ning grace, / Before it be too late.”¹⁸ Several army officers were well known for their religious qualities, such as Sir Rowland Hill, the nephew and namesake of a leading figure in the evangelical movement, the Anglican clergyman Rowland Hill. Sir Rowland was renowned for his humanitarian treatment of his men and for the mildness of his language and temper. He commanded the 90th regiment during the Egyptian campaign and was severely wounded by a musket ball to the head in the action on 13 March.¹⁹ Many of these pious servicemen assumed that non-believers, like all enemies of religion, were prone to meeting an unfavourable end. Foot guardsman John Stevenson thought it unsurprising that his sergeant-major, who had been “the greatest enemy to religious men that I ever knew in his rank”, was killed during the landings at Aboukir Bay in 1801, “while all those whom he had persecuted came home safe”.²⁰ The reverend Cooper Williams, who served on board HMS *Swiftsure*, maintained a similar outlook. He thought the British fleet at the battle of the Nile had acted as the instrument of God’s retribution against the secularist French foe. “The finger of

¹⁷ Anon. [Billanie] *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment*, 62-69.

¹⁸ James Downing, *A Narrative of the Life of James Downing (a Blind Man) Late a Private in His Majesty’s 20th Regiment of Foot. Containing Historical, Naval, Military, Moral, Religious and Entertaining Reflections. Composed by Himself in Easy Verse* (London: 1815), 89-90. See also: ‘Fortunes of Highlander Whimster’ - *Memoirs and letters of James Whimster, 79th Highlanders 1800-1811*, National Army Museum, 87-03-21, p.1; Benjamin Miller, *The Adventures of Serjeant Benjamin Miller whilst serving in the 4th Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Artillery. 1796-1815*. (Darlington, Heathfield: The Naval and Military Press, 1999), 2-3, 10-11.

¹⁹ Gordon L. Teffeteller, ‘Hill, Rowland, first Viscount Hill (1772–1842)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13298>.

²⁰ J. Stevenson, *A Soldier in Time of War* (London: 1841), 175, quoted in Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 139.

Providence has been visible from the entrance of the British fleet into the Mediterranean to the conclusion of the important action in the Bay of Aboukir.”²¹

Some of the religious regulations in place in the army were to some extent also present in the navy. On promotion to lieutenant, all naval officers were sworn in to the Test Act of 1673 which required all persons “to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper according to the rites of the Church of England, and subscribed to the declarations against transubstantiation.”²² This act excluded men of other religions, such as Catholics and Jews, from becoming officers unless they gave up their religion but it did not apply to common seamen. Non-Protestants were often pressed into the navy, and forced to tolerate compulsory attendance at church services aboard ship. The frequency of religious services could vary, and depended on the weather and the religious convictions of the captain. There were some who acquired a reputation for their devoutness, such as Captain James Gambier, whose command of HMS *Defence* in 1793 was criticized for letting his men not work on Sundays.²³ For Daniel Goodall, a sailor serving on board HMS *Temeraire* from 1801, the average seaman might not be outwardly pious, but possessed religious beliefs.

The comparative solitude of his life on shipboard, and the sublimity of the dangers he is often called upon to encounter, are not without their effects ... and hence it will be found by those who may take the trouble to look beneath the surface of that air of recklessness and dash so generally characteristic of Jack ashore, that there is underlying it a strong foundation of simple, honest faith... Vice and dissipation I have witnessed in large

²¹ Rev. Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty’s Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson... with a description of the battle of the Nile* (London: 1802), 61-62.

²² J. A. Gardner, *Recollections of James Gardner*, ed. R.V. Hamilton and K.K. Laughton (London: Naval Records Society, 1906), 178, quoted in Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jack Tar: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary Seamen in Nelson’s Navy* (London: Abacus, 2008), 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

measure..., but I never met an infidel among seamen – certainly not among those who had been afloat for any length of time.²⁴

The range of practicing Christians in the army and navy gives credence to Linda Colley's view in her seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation* that Protestantism was at the core of what it meant to be "British".²⁵ This form of Protestant, anti-Catholic nationalism smoothed over significant divisions between the different kinds of Protestantism within Britain, especially that which separated Nonconformity and the two established churches of England and Scotland. British anti-Catholicism reached a peak in the 1790s, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and with the onset of war, the Irish rebellion, and the lingering question of Catholic emancipation.²⁶ There is evidence to suggest that soldiers were central agents in the growth of anti-Catholicism. According to historian Colin Haydon, a noticeable number of soldiers were tried for their role in the 1780 Gordon riots.²⁷

Nevertheless, it is important not to overemphasize anti-Catholicism and the strength of piety within Britain's armed forces. The army was not aggressively Protestant, and soldiers who wrote on this subject, particularly evangelicals such as George Billanie and Francis Collins, probably did not represent the general level of spirituality in the army. Since the introduction of the oath of allegiance in 1774, ever-greater numbers of Catholics were recruited into the ranks, and a few Catholic gentlemen could gain commissions with the discretion and connivance of their fellow officers. Commissions for Catholic gentlemen became more frequent after the Irish Parliament's Catholic Relief and Militia Acts of 1793, and with the ever-greater demands for recruits as the Revolutionary war progressed. Furthermore, the East India

²⁴ Daniel Goodall, *Salt Water Sketches; being incidents in the life of Daniel Goodall, seaman and marine* (Inverness: 1860), 50-51, quoted in *Ibid.*, 34-35.

²⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons Forging a Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, repr., 2003); Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *The Journal of British Studies*, 31, no.4 (1992): 309-329, esp. 317.

²⁶ Carey, *God's Empire*, 41, 43-44. See also: Gavin Daly, 'A Dirty, Indolent, Priest-Ridden City: British Soldiers in Lisbon during the Peninsular War, 1808-13' *History* 94, no.4 (2009): 476-481.

²⁷ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 160.

Company was less concerned with the religious convictions of its recruits, and freely enlisted Catholics from the 1770s onwards. The presence of numerous Catholic soldiers within the army can be seen in the growth of Catholicism in Sheerness, Woolwich and Portsmouth - areas that contained a concentrated military presence. Nevertheless, Catholics were occasionally made unwelcome by their Protestant peers, and they remained a minority in both the ranks and the officer corps.²⁸ This growing religious diversity made individual servicemen more aware of their own religious status and principles. A sense of their spiritual identity became a point of comparison on encountering other peoples.

Clearly, the way in which the British army was organized was, in theory, conducive to the development of personal piety. In practice, this was not always the case. This is most apparent with regard to army chaplains. Their primary duties were to see to the soldiers' spiritual needs: they were to read public prayers every day and to administer Holy Communion at least four times a year. Besides this, chaplains were expected to keep a close eye on the conduct of officers and men, officiate at military marriages and funerals, and perform other pastoral duties such as visiting the sick and attending prisoners who had been condemned to death.²⁹ The 1790s were a period of major reforms for military chaplains. In 1796, regimental chaplains were abolished, and a new, all-embracing Chaplain's Department, consisting of commissioned and officiating chaplains, was created in their stead. These reforms were an attempt to tackle the habits of absenteeism and pluralism that were rife among chaplains and other regimental officers in the 1780s and early 1790s. Only one chaplain appears to have accompanied the Duke of York's expedition to Flanders in 1793, and not a single chaplain attended Sir Ralph Abercromby's 33,000 strong force to the Caribbean in 1795.³⁰ Notwithstanding the good intentions, the new Chaplain's department failed to

²⁸ Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 10-11, 123, 160-161, 163; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 160. See also: Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty, *The cross on the sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1996), 1.

²⁹ P. Kopperman, 'Religion and Religious Policy in the British Army c.1700-96', *Journal of Religious History* 14, no.4, (1987): 391; Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 21-22.

³⁰ Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 22-3; Johnstone and Hagerty, *The cross on the sword*, 1-2; Michael Duffy, 'The Caribbean campaigns of the British army 1793-1801', in *The Road to Waterloo: The British Army and the Struggle Against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, 1793-1815*, ed. A. J.

eliminate absenteeism and inadequate pastoral care for soldiers serving abroad. Several major expeditions went overseas with very few or no commissioned chaplains being present throughout the Napoleonic Wars.³¹ The frequent absence of commissioned chaplains meant that the spiritual care of soldiers was transferred to their superior officers. Although never formally authorized, some officers performed various religious functions when occasion demanded. They were, for instance, often required to lead burial services.³² The new system did, unfortunately, create fresh problems, as once in the field, it was often uncertain who commanded the chaplains.³³

Despite the lack of pastoral oversight in Egypt, there is evidence to suggest that unofficial religious gatherings took place regularly. According to Francis Collins, such meetings acquired an added importance due to the Biblical significance of Egypt.

Among the British soldiery were men of piety, who frequently experienced on those sands the application of these and similar promises; they held their meetings for divine worship at every opportunity, and in these deserts had such enjoyment of the favor of the love of God, as might be called “Joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It is a pleasing consideration to Christians, that by the late events in making Egypt a seat of war, the

Guy (London: Alan Sutton, 1990), 25; William Gibson, *Church, State and Society, 1760-1850* (London: Palgave, 1994), 23; G.A. Stepler, ‘The British Army on the Eve of War’, in *The Road to Waterloo: The British Army and the Struggle Against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, 1793-1815*, ed. A. J. Guy (London: Alan Sutton, 1990), 13.

³¹ Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains’ Department 1796-1953* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), 31-32; Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 89-90. In the summer of 1808, the Commissioners of Military Enquiry found that Arthur Wellesley had gone to Portugal with a force of nearly 9,000 men but without “any Clerical Officer of any description”.

³² Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 88.

³³ A telling example of this administrative confusion is the journal of D.P. Cosserat, who served as a brigade chaplain in Egypt in the 1801 campaign. See: Royal Army Chaplains’ Department Archive, Amport House, D. P. Cosserat, ‘Journal of a Voyage to Egypt’, entries 19 July, 24 July, 31 July, 2 August, 5 August, 30 August 1801 20 September, quoted in Snape, *Royal Army Chaplains’ Department*, 30-31.

knowledge of salvation, by the Lord Jesus, hath been in a wonderful manner conveyed to that memorable spot.³⁴

This practice followed a trend; there are records of prayer meetings among Methodist soldiers during the expedition to Holland in 1793-5,³⁵ and George Billanie recalled the foundation of a (non-Methodist) religious society in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders in 1799. Nevertheless, these groups could be fragile bodies, vulnerable to the changing circumstances of its members. In 1799, Billanie remembered that soldiers quickly became complacent in their attendance of the religious society shortly after its foundation. During the campaign in Holland that year it failed to meet at all.³⁶ According to Richard Holmes, this was especially the case in India, where regulations were more relaxed over religious matters. Captain Albert Hervey, of the 41st Madras Native Infantry, noted that no more than two or three of the officers in his regiment ever went to church.³⁷ There are indications that a similar relaxed attitude towards religious matters existed among General Baird's Anglo-Indian expeditionary force, as there was an apparent lack of religiously-minded commentators in this army.

An important factor in the development of British religious identity was the wars with secularist France, which undoubtedly increased sensitivity towards irreligion. Historians Callum Brown and Michael Snape have highlighted the significant impact of the wars on Britain in a religious context. With the demise of the Catholic Church in France, Snape argues that the traditional Protestant-Catholic divide that had characterized the wars between Britain and France throughout the eighteenth century was, to some extent, transformed into a Christian-heathen divide.³⁸ The result of all

³⁴ Francis Collins, *Voyages to Portugal, Spain, Sicily, Malta, Asia-Minor, Egypt, &c. From 1796 to 1801* (London: 1807), 286-287.

³⁵ R. Huston, *The Life of Faith in the Son of God Illustrated by the Memoirs of Mr. James Field* (London: 1851), 10-11, quoted in Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 146.

³⁶ Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 25 33, 54. See, for analysis of this source, Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 145-146.

³⁷ Hervey, *Soldier of the Company*, 44, quoted in Holmes, *Sahib*, 459-460.

³⁸ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2009), 20-21; Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 217. See also: Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain*,

this was that religion became one of the central factors with which Britons defined themselves when traversing foreign lands.

Identity and difference

As the British soldiers entered Muslim Egypt, some appear to have become more attuned to their Christian identity. This is apparent in an account written by one of Abercromby's staff officers. He expressed feelings of both sympathy and disgust towards the Coptic Christians in Egypt, who were greatly oppressed throughout the country, and had adopted the appearance and customs of indigenous Muslims.

These poor Christians, from the constant terror in which they live and the system of tyranny and oppression exercised upon them by the *true believers*, (Mussulmen,) have dwindled into a race of the most despicable slaves, abject liars, hypocritical knaves and cheats, that exist upon the face of the earth... their style of dress is like that of the native, distinguished principally by the difference of turban; their manners and customs of smoaking, drinking coffee, lounging crossed legs upon sophas... are those of the Arabs, so that, except in religion, they differ not from the natives.³⁹

The officer found it “degrading” and “preposterous” that the Copts were almost indistinguishable from Arabs. “Human nature revolts at their melancholy state of subjection and cannot help pitying while she must despise them!”⁴⁰ Two conclusions can be taken from this statement. Firstly, it is possible that the officer who wrote these comments experienced a “crisis of images” similar to that described by Zeinab Abul-

Empire and the World, 1600-1850 (London: Pimlico, 2003), 269-328; Snape, *Redcoat and Religion*, 217; Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind* (London: Serif, 1995). 318; Peter Gottschalk, *Religion, Science and Empire Classifying Hinduism and Islam in British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

³⁹ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 10-11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-16, 38.

Magd, in his examination of the French occupation of Egypt. This occurred when late eighteenth century travellers, such as Claude-Étienne Savary and C. S. Sonnini, as well as the savants who accompanied the French expedition, forged a false image of the Copts and the Egyptian inhabitants. They portrayed the natives as inferior and oppressed, waiting for an enlightened nation to liberate them. This image clashed with the reality of physical encounters, which revealed a people who were not desiring liberation.⁴¹ One could argue that a “crisis of images” can be discerned in the British officer’s comments. His sympathy for the Copts indicates that he considered them as oppressed fellow Christians in need of liberation: throughout his narrative he had frequently cited travelogues which conveyed this image, such as Savary’s *Letters from Egypt*. However, the image of the Copts as Christians could not be easily reconciled with the realities of their Muslim appearance, and this clearly unsettled the officer.

Secondly, these comments suggest that there were limits to Christianity as a shared identity, as religious affinity was undermined by a sense of cultural differences. The officer regarded superficial features such as clothing, as more important than skin colour in signifying difference between peoples. One must place the officer’s comment in the context of the time. As highlighted by the work of Colin Kidd, Roxann Wheeler and Dror Wahrman, conceptions of difference were fluid in this period. Religion, civility, clothing and class were gradually being replaced as the primary signifiers of human difference by perceptions of race.⁴² Therefore, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a confusing mix of interpretations on human variation, and this can be seen in the soldiers’ accounts. One can discern the importance of clothing in Cooper Williams’ account, who expressed horror when, in preparation for an excursion to Jerusalem, he was advised to lose his European appearance, “I had provided a Turkish habit, and suffered my mustachios to grow...”⁴³ However, a shift towards more racial understandings of difference can be seen in the writing of another officer, who described “an unfortunate Frenchman” who

⁴¹ Zeinab Abul-Magd, ‘Crisis of Images: The French, Jihad, and the Plague in Upper Egypt, 1798-1801’, *Journal of World History* 23, no.2 (2012): 332-335.

⁴² Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 27, 80, 82, 92-93, 271; Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 9, 31-32, 37; Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 86-7. See also: Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions*.

⁴³ Williams, *Voyage*, 158-159. Unfortunately for Williams, his sufferings were in vain as he was prevented from travelling with the British party to Jerusalem. See: 163-164.

had appeared at Alexandria after “living 14 months in the Desert”: “The poor unhappy fellow, almost starved to death, had in truth scarcely the appearance of a human creature; his unshaved chin and Arab garments, ill according with a European white skin, that shone brilliantly through his rags.” Evident from these comments is the belief that the Frenchman was unable to change his skin or race, in spite of his Arab dress and mode of living.⁴⁴

The growth of racial understandings of difference help to explain why British attitudes towards the French appear largely unaffected by Napoleon’s Islamic policy during the French occupation of Egypt. The French general made heavy-handed efforts to underscore his position as a pro-Islamic ruler of a Muslim country, and ingratiate his army with the locals. Before the end of 1798, many Britons were aware of Napoleon’s July proclamation to the Egyptians, in which he declared:

The French are true Mussulmen. Not long since they marched to Rome, and overthrew the Throne of the Pope, who excited the Christians against the professors of Islamicism (the Mahometan religion). Afterward they directed their course to Malta, and drove out the unbelievers, who make war on Musselmen. The French have at all times been true and sincere friends of the Ottoman Emperors, and the enemies of their enemies.⁴⁵

Although sources are contradictory, it appears at one point that Napoleon planned to attend the ceremony of the Prophet’s Birth in Arab dress. Earlier, at dinner with his staff, he had appeared in this attire, but was greeted with bursts of laughter which prompted him to remove it.⁴⁶ Despite his best efforts, the embarrassing failure of Napoleon’s Islamic policy probably helped allay British concerns about the French

⁴⁴ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 83.

⁴⁵ *Copies of Original Letters from the Army of General Bonaparte in Egypt, intercepted by the Fleet under the command of Admiral Nelson* [trans anon.] (London: 1798), 236; Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670-1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 127.

⁴⁶ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourienne, *Mémoires*, vol.1-2, 292, quoted in Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, ‘The Greatest Glory’* (London: Vintage, 2008), 182.

association with Islam. Napoleon's chief obstacle was that he and his army were not Muslim. Negotiations between Napoleon and the Egyptian sheikhs, about the conversion of his army to Islam, broke down over circumcision and the abstinence from alcohol. Although they imprisoned the Pope and respected Islam, the French remained infidels in the eyes of Egyptian Muslims.⁴⁷ One exception to this was the French general Jacques-François Menou. He converted to Islam, participated in a full Muslim marriage ceremony, and even adopted the name of Abdullah. Menou's correspondence with fellow officers indicates that he learned to speak Arabic, and could converse at length with his wife.⁴⁸ Menou was very much an anomaly, even in the eyes of his own men. The thousands of letters from French soldiers intercepted in the Mediterranean by Nelson's naval squadron in 1798 conveyed a sense of immense disappointment at what Egypt had to offer, and exposed the falsehoods behind Napoleon's Islamic policies. By 1801 therefore, the British understood most Frenchmen had an intolerant attitude towards the Egyptian population. Some of the French soldiers were under the impression that Napoleon's overtures towards the Egyptians were simply a cynical ruse, to mask his aggressive, imperial intentions. General Dupuis in Cairo wrote to a merchant of Toulouse, "We celebrate here with enthusiasm the festivals of Muhammad. We fool the Egyptians with our affected attachment to their religion, in which Bonaparte and we no more believe than we do in that of Pius the Defunct."⁴⁹ According to Juan Cole in his analysis of this passage, Dupuis' dismissive reference to the Pope and Roman Catholicism reveal a vigorous anticlericalism and militant secularism. They produced in Egypt not open disdain for Islam but a calculated and cynical willingness to pretend respect for it as a means of deceiving the Egyptian public. "You won't believe it", Dupuis continued, "but I assure you that we are as fervent as the most fanatical pilgrims".⁵⁰ Other French officers made similar comments, "Nothing was forgotten in persuading the Egyptians that the army had the greatest veneration for the Prophet. The soldiers were politic in their expressions; when they returned to their quarters, they laughed at the comedy."⁵¹

⁴⁷ J. Christopher Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2005 repr.), 142, 185.

⁴⁸ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 209.

⁴⁹ Paul Guitry, *L'Armée de Bonaparte en Égypte* (Paris: 1898), 152, quoted in Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 132.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Pierre de Pelleport, *Souvenirs militaires et intimes* (Paris: 1857), 429, quoted in *Ibid.*, 126.

Interestingly, the British did not share French cynicism towards the festivals of the Nile and the Prophet's birth. In fact, the celebrations attracted very little comment from British observers. It is possible that the British simply failed to notice the festivities; they were probably muted, given the unwillingness of the inhabitants to celebrate under infidel rule, and the British army was camped outside Cairo, hence only a minority could closely observe any of the festivities. Another important factor was the different objectives of the two opposing forces: whereas the French had planned for the permanent possession of Egypt, the British occupation was intended to be temporary. Therefore, there was little need for the British to make attempts to ingratiate themselves with the locals as the French had done. Perhaps most significantly however, British servicemen who had previous experience in India, may have been familiar with similar festivals held by the Indian inhabitants. Charles Hill, a captain in the East India Company who accompanied the expedition from Bombay, wrote a few short lines on the festival of the Nile on 9 August: "The natives making a great noise all last night, firing guns and small arms, fireworks, music, singing, (in short exactly like the Indian rejoicing.)"⁵²

The sense of difference between Christianity and Islam was sometimes expressed in a gendered language. Christianity, regarded as "manly" was contrasted with "effeminate" Islam. This case was often made with reference to the Mamluks, the former rulers of Egypt, who allegedly partook in homosexual acts. Robert Wilson, for example, considered the habits and customs of the Mamluks as "degrading to manhood."⁵³ Another officer, described them as "so base, and so lost to manly feeling, ... for they subject themselves not only to everything that is *humiliating*, but *disgraceful* to *human nature*."⁵⁴ Thomas Walsh wrote that they were "addicted to the most detestable and unnatural crimes, which is extremely prevalent in parts of the Turkish empire."⁵⁵ Such accusations were not completely unfounded; there had been

⁵² Diary of Captain C. Fitzmaurice Hill, The British Library, (BL) MSS Eur D108, p.102.

⁵³ Sir Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 246-247.

⁵⁴ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 82.

⁵⁵ Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt: Including Descriptions of that Country, and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmorice and Macri* (London: 1803), 172.

a prevalence of same-gender sex without moral censure in the Mamluk military system in medieval Egypt. It is difficult to judge how widespread this practice was, as Europeans tended to represent non-European enemies as depraved. According to Patricia Owens, the “sin of sodomy” had often been attributed to Europe’s enemies during the Crusades. As the military and political situation evolved, so did the discourse about sexuality. With the Ottoman expansion into the Near East and eastern Europe, same-gender sex became seen as a “Turkish vice”. Civilian writers had referred to Near Eastern peoples in this way throughout the eighteenth century. Joseph Pitts, author of *A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohametans*, noted in 1704 that “it is common for men there to fall in love with boys as ‘tis in England to be in love with women”.⁵⁶ In 1787, Volney wrote in his travels that the Mamluks were:

above all, addicted to that abominable wickedness which was at all times the vice of the Greeks and of the Tartars, and is the first lesson they receive from their masters. It is difficult to account of this taste, when we consider that they all have women, unless we suppose they seek in one sex, that poignancy of refusal which they do not permit the other.⁵⁷

One can argue that accusations of effeminacy contributed towards Britain’s imperial rationale. As Matthew McCormack has observed, gender was central to determining who should participate in political life. An involvement in politics required an individual to act and think in appropriate ways. Alleged effeminacy or femininity was politically disempowering; men who were poor, non-English or homosexual were

⁵⁶ Patricia Owens, ‘Torture, Sex and Military Orientalism’, *Third World Quarterly* 31, no.7 (2010): 1042, 1049. Patricia Owens has highlighted that the stereotypes of the sexual vulnerability and perversion of the Muslim man remains in western militaries to this day, and the discourse on sexuality as a marker of civilization continues.

⁵⁷ Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785* (London: 1787), vol. 1, 185.

disadvantaged in political arenas.⁵⁸ This image of effeminacy was used in British representations of other ‘eastern’ religions and cultures, such as India. Colonization was considered an emasculating process for those colonized, thus oriental civilizations were given female qualities. However, these gendered images of different peoples could be complex: Not all Hindu or Muslim peoples were subjected to this gendered stereotype. Sikhs, Gurkhas and Muslims could be exempted because of their martial traditions and history of aggression.⁵⁹ As we shall see in far greater detail in the succeeding chapters, some of the Ottoman troops were described as “a fine manly race”, who possessed a “warlike disposition” and boasted a “reputation of being very courageous”.⁶⁰ In other observations, the Mamluks were thought of as “brave men”, who “deserve to be spoken of”.⁶¹

Another central point of contrast between British and Egyptian society in the soldiers’ minds, was the status and appearance of women. The condition of women in the Near East had always piqued European interest and imagination, but Billie Melman, in her acclaimed work on orientalism and gender, suggests that from the latter half of the eighteenth century, writing about oriental women became a mode by which Britons could evaluate their own approach to gender and domesticity. Generally, the condition of Muslim women was characterized in the European imagination by the denial of their public freedom, their servile status and polygamy.⁶² The visual impact of women clad in burkhas, and the exposure to Islamic domestic practices proved to be a jarring

⁵⁸ Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 4-5.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 88; Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 83-84, 87-89, 95-96, 98. See also: Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man!: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London: 1803), 237-238; J.P. Morier, *Memoir of a Campaign with the Ottoman Army in Egypt, from February to July 1800* (London: 1801), 12-15.

⁶¹ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 76.

⁶² Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 Sexuality Religion and Work* (London: Palgrave, 1995), 59-60, 62-68. See also: Yapp, ‘Turkish Mirror’, 149-150.

experience for British soldiers, and was at odds with their sense of gender identities in Britain. It is unsurprising therefore, that the soldiers' portrayals of Muslim women focused on their lack of freedom. One British staff officer provides a noteworthy comment on this topic. During his stay in Egypt, he visited a "Syrian family", and made numerous observations on Muslim domestic life. His account explained that a Muslim woman covered her face, and was at the mercy of her husband, who jealously guarded her, and forbade her to visit or receive friends. She "inhabits the top of the house, seldom or ever descends to the rooms below her own, nor dare she sit at meals with her husband, but attends like a servant, and does all the dirty and drudging work."⁶³ The immoral conditions in which Muslim women lived meant that they became callous, debauched and ignorant.

They are the only women I ever saw of any country who have not *naturally* a little *manner*. These poor, stupid, ignorant *animals* have none;... they hardly know *how to speak*: indeed, conversation is neither very brilliant or customary here, nor can it be, where every body is so closely confined and consequently so ignorant.⁶⁴

Such women, "whenever an opportunity offers, give full swing to their vicious inclinations." After the French invasion, "A vast number of them lived with the French soldiers, and almost invariably destroyed by medicine, before birth, the creatures that would otherwise have seen the light, but would have been the children of christians! such is the influence of false religion upon their minds!"⁶⁵ These observations provide a stark comparison with comments on gender ideology in Britain. The secluded, sly, ignorant, obtuse and promiscuous Muslim contrasted with the free-spirited, virtuous character of the British woman.⁶⁶ Thomas Evans offered a similar portrayal of the status of Muslim women to the staff officer. He wrote:

⁶³ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 19. See also: Hill Diary, 109.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32. See also: Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 23-24, 373.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31. See also: Wilson, *History*, 175.

⁶⁶ Aslı Çırakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe" European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002): 163.

...melancholy indeed is the state of the female in this country, doomed to a perpetual bondage from her earliest infancy, she has no other alternative than in a perfect resignation to the tyrannic will of the male for no purpose, ... these monsters in the shape of men, acting under the influence of a religion, as inconsistent with reason, as it is barbarous in its tenets, deny that the women possess souls and consequently consign the wretched mortals, from the moment of their birth, to drudgery, pain and labour...

Like the staff officer, Evans glorified British ideals of gender and domesticity, and compared the status of Muslim women unfavourably with that of British women. He concluded “what a happy contrast does the state of the female (the brightest part of the creation) in all civilized nations, exhibit”.⁶⁷ For many of the British soldiers, the physical appearance of Muslim women reinforced their degenerate image. Often covered from head to toe in a loose dress and a veil, female attire was unnerving to British observers. Francis Maule thought they resembled “so many spectres”, Benjamin Miller described them as “quite frightful”, and William Wittman thought their appearance rendered them “very disgusting.”⁶⁸ Thomas Walsh was most uncomplimentary. Muslim women were “so muffled up and concealed in long vestments as to leave nothing perceptible but their eyes, which are so ugly as to suppress any desire of seeing the rest of their persons.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Diary of Lt (later Gen) Thomas Evans, 8th Regiment of Foot, 1 May 1799 to 3 Sep 1801, National Army Museum, 95-09-101-1, pp.132-133.

⁶⁸ Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), 205; Miller, *Adventures*, 21; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 140.

⁶⁹ Walsh, in Miller, *Adventures*, 21. See also: Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 30; Nothing Pertickler Happened: An Autobiography of William Billows, Queens Regiment, 1797-1817, National Army Museum, 11-10-7-1, p.76; Lieut. Aeneas Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs, in April 1800...* (London: 1802), 190, 277-278; Anon. [Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment*, 114-115.

It is clear British soldiers failed to notice the important role women played in Islamic society. Despite the upper-class norms of veiling and seclusion, behind the scenes Muslim noblewomen were political and economic powerhouses; many owned sizable properties and estates. In contrast to Britain, Muslim women did not lose control of their property when they married, and often owned important buildings for religious and charitable purposes. Thus, Muslim women left their mark on the architecture and physical character of the city in which they lived. Those who held great estates even engaged in trade through male agents. The custom of secluding females, was itself designed as a declaration of wealth. It was usually practiced only by the richest families, to show that the man of the house was so wealthy that he could afford servants to provide everything his household required.⁷⁰

Interestingly, the ways in which British soldiers encountered Muslim women differed significantly from those of French soldiers. The French occupation of Egypt, which lasted over three years, inevitably led to attempts by soldiers to find romance and a respectable social life. Many of the lower ranks resorted to local prostitutes, who were smuggled into the barracks. Their presence became a recurring problem for the military authorities, for they facilitated the spread of venereal disease. As a result, French officers purchased slaves, maintaining them for domestic service or sexual favours. Buying slaves was forbidden, but in practice the authorities turned a blind eye.⁷¹ Eugène Beauharnais, Napoleon's teenage stepson, had bought a female slave from the market in Cairo, and he discussed her merits at length with François Bernoyer, a French civilian in charge of the design and production of uniforms in Egypt.

...I assure you Monsieur Bernoyer, that I have never made such good use of my money. I have already spent 6,000 francs to make her as beautiful as a queen. I love her to madness, for her spiritual and vivacious

⁷⁰ Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, 79-80 134.

⁷¹ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 212-213; Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, 176.

personality has opened for me a source of inexhaustible pleasures.⁷²

Officers who purchased female slaves often commented on a kind of mystical bond between them, to which Beauharnais referred. The purchase of slaves was not limited to officers, the common ranks would pool their resources together to buy a slave, whom they employed to perform menial tasks in the barracks.⁷³ There are no records of these kinds of relations between Egyptian women and British soldiers. Presumably the short duration of the British presence in Egypt, combined with the strict regulations which isolated them from the local population, limited the opportunities for soldiers to purchase slaves or fraternize with the local women.

French soldiers justified their purchase of slaves by pointing out that in Egypt, slaves were better treated than domestic servants. General Doguereau argued “The slavery of blacks is a very happy estate in Egypt. Women are bought to keep women company or to busy themselves with housework.” He concluded “Their lot is much happier than that of poor Egyptians.”⁷⁴ Saint-Hilaire concurred, “Slavery is different here than in America. It is a veritable option. My two slaves never call me anything but their father and I am so satisfied with their services that I dedicate to them the same amity.”⁷⁵ Although Egypt’s household slaves were admittedly better treated than those on the plantations in America, it was still a form of forced labour that denied human beings their liberty. This became clear when the surrendered French garrison of Cairo embarked for repatriation at the docks of Alexandria.⁷⁶ According to Daniel Nicol, many of these Frenchmen were unable to bring their charges with them to France; only those who could prove they were lawfully married were allowed to embark.⁷⁷ As

⁷² Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt*, 178.

⁷³ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 212.

⁷⁴ Jean-Pierre Doguereau, *Guns in the Desert: General Jean-Pierre Doguereau’s Journal of Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 70-77, quoted in Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt*, 178.

⁷⁵ Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt*, 178-179.

⁷⁶ Evans Diary, 174.

⁷⁷ Daniel Nicol, *Sergeant Nicol: The Experiences of a Gordon Highlander During the Napoleonic Wars in Egypt, the Peninsula and France* (Milton Keynes: Lenaur, 2007, repr.), 79.

the French gradually boarded the transports between 31 July and 9 August, “the two contending Christian powers were employed in the traffic of women”. One British officer commented on the peculiar scene:

there was a regular sale, on the part of the French, to our army, of the women of the country who had lived with them. Several of our soldiers bought very pretty ones for a dollar! and it was ridiculous enough to see them parading through the streets with their dingy *properties* under their arms.⁷⁸

The officer failed to notice, or perhaps chose to ignore, the irony of the soldiers partaking in a practice they had previously condemned. Instead, like many of the French soldiers, he considered it an act of sympathy, and an expression of masculine virtue of sorts.

To the credit of both parties it was in general a transfer rather than sale of property, in order that the poor unfortunate wretches should have protection from the barbarity of the merciless Turks, who threatened and seemed determined to put to death every Arab woman who had been connected with a Christian.⁷⁹

The portrayal of such purchases as noble acts, coming to the aid of women in need, smoothed over any implicit accusations of hypocrisy. Article 12 of the capitulation of Alexandria tells a different story from that recorded by the soldiers. It stipulated that every inhabitant of Egypt, whatever their nationality, would be free to follow the departing French army without fear for their family or property. This enabled the Mamluk corps to embark for France with their entire families without hindrance.⁸⁰ It appears that the French soldiers would have been able to embark with their Egyptian

⁷⁸ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 33-34. See also: Evans Diary, 174.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ronald Pawly, *Napoleon's Mamelukes* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 9.

mistresses had they been willing to do so. Instead, many tried to sell their women to the British. It is also possible – although not mentioned in any British account - that in some instances the British persuaded the French to sell.

Views of Islam

Following the literary trend established by a range of enlightened philosophes throughout the eighteenth century such as Voltaire, Diderot and especially Montesquieu, Islamic society in the Near East provided British servicemen with a negative identity, a mirror image, with which their societal norms could be juxtaposed.⁸¹ One of the ways British soldiers did this was by comparing the seemingly irrational and ridiculous Islamic practices with the coherence of Christianity or the logic of secularism. For instance, gaming and gambling were forbidden by Islamic law, but William Wittman observed instances of this practice as he accompanied the Ottoman army. If caught, the perpetrators he claimed were promptly decapitated, and such a harsh punishment may have contributed towards the large numbers of deserters that Wittman reported.⁸² Another principle frequently mentioned by British observers was the abstinence from alcohol. To some it seemed bizarre because, as the artilleryman Benjamin Miller claimed, there was a range of other ways Muslims could intoxicate themselves if they so wished. The coffee house, Miller argued, was the Ottoman equivalent of the British inn or tavern.

The Turks frequent these houses in the same manner as we do our inns but instead of liquors, wine or beer, they sit on mats in groups and drink coffee, and smoke themselves drunk by mixing opium with their tobacco, and you will frequently see a dozen of them lying quite senseless on the floor.⁸³

⁸¹ Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), 10, 16; Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 35-37; Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenburg, *Islamophobia Making Muslims the Enemy* (Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield, 2008), 15.

⁸² William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London, 1803), 191.

⁸³ Miller, *Adventures*, 22. See also: Nicol, *Experiences*, 73; Billows Autobiography, 71.

The British soldiers' opposition to the Islamic prohibition of alcohol may have been influenced by their own reliance on drink. The rum ration, typically distributed every day before breakfast, was essential in placating the men, with their inadequate food, poor pay and rigid discipline. With a steady supply of alcohol, soldiers developed drinking cultures and alcoholism became a problem; teetotalers were frequently ostracized by their comrades.⁸⁴ When this steady supply was cut, the soldiers quickly grew frustrated. On 17 May, General Eyre Coote, in command of the besieging force at Alexandria, complained to the Duke of Gloucester that the long awaited supply convoy had arrived, but "not one drop of wine have they brought".⁸⁵ Despite the Muslims' access to alternative methods of intoxication, Cooper Williams asserted that there were individuals who drank alcohol in private. During an excursion to collect water from the Nile during the blockade of Alexandria in 1798, Williams was invited by one of the Ottoman captains for refreshment aboard his vessel. Dinner proved to be a curious affair, for the Ottoman captain, "in defiance of the laws of Mahomet, set before us some excellent Candiotte [sic] wine, of which he swallowed such large portions as plainly indicated his contempt for the ordinances of his prophet."⁸⁶ The numerous accounts of Muslims violating Islamic law, conveyed a sense that the principles of Islam were difficult to follow, impossible to enforce, and frequently violated.

Another point of contrast and criticism for the British soldiers was the superstitious beliefs the local inhabitants allegedly possessed. A focal point of British censure were the Sufi mystics. They were a type of sage, who followed a pious form of Islam, and were venerated by the Egyptian inhabitants. Their method of worship required a destitute - or even naked - appearance, and included contortions of the body that European observers regarded outlandish. To the British, these mystics were no more than madmen, who ruthlessly abused their false claims to divinity. One British officer

⁸⁴ Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle, From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 55-56.

⁸⁵ Coote to Gloucester, 17 May, Letters and dispatches, by Gen Sir Eyre Coote, 1800-1801, National Army Museum, 88-06-28-5.

⁸⁶ Williams, *Voyage*, 133.

thought they were “Unfortunate persons who have lost their senses; idiots, and people subject to fits”, who “are all looked upon as saints, and respected as such.”⁸⁷ French observers thought similarly. Étienne-Louis Malus, a French officer and member of the mathematics section of the *Institut d’Égypte*, wrote “These are the saints of the country; their life is a continual ecstasy and everything is permitted to them; many circulate through the streets at various times of the year naked as apes. They only live on alms from the public.”⁸⁸ The engineer Édouard de Villiers du Terrage wrote that they “are a kind of madmen, extremely venerated, to whom everything is permitted, whose insults are an honour, even to the women who surrender themselves to them.”⁸⁹

Aside from superstition, the Islamic conviction in predestination was thought to be inimical to the general progress of Near Eastern societies. William Wittman believed this to be one of the principal causes for the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Having allegedly spoken to Ottoman Muslims on the subject, he claimed that “They declare themselves sensible of the approaching decay of their empire; but at the same time received assurance from the Koran, that it is to rise again in greater splendour than ever.... In each adverse trial they express themselves by saying ‘it is the will of Heaven.’” For many British observers, Wittman included, predestination was a foolish superstition, one of many held by the Ottomans. In April 1800, he witnessed the launching of a newly constructed 74-gun ship-of-the-line. To Wittman’s astonishment, the ship had been ready for launch for some time, but “it had been deemed expedient to delay the launch until a favourable report should be made by the *astrologers* and *dealers in magic*, who at length predicted that the 2nd of April would be a favourable day.” To delay the launch at a time when the Ottoman navy was in dire need, seemed detrimental to their military fortunes. Wittman concluded “It is scarcely credible that such folly should exist... at the close of the eighteenth century. Can such people be formidable?”⁹⁰ One might argue that Wittman’s comments were hypocritical. Although he perceived a contrast between the fatalism of the Ottoman military and his own beliefs, British Protestants could in fact be just as deterministic.

⁸⁷ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 107. See also: Wilson, *History*, 119.

⁸⁸ Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 125.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 57, 96-97.

Many British Protestants adhered to a belief in divine providence guiding and protecting the British nation – yet Wittman criticized the Ottomans for similar beliefs. As Tony Claydon and Ian McBride argue, British Protestants saw themselves as fortunate that they had escaped Catholicism which plagued the European continent, and as a result, they came to feel that they alone were blessed, and had been favoured by God.⁹¹

Some of the soldiers who held such views on Islam had strong ties to prominent missionaries. Evangelicalism was a prominent movement at the turn of the nineteenth century; as Britons became increasingly aware of the sheer number of non-Europeans living under their imperial rule, many British Christians developed a sense of responsibility to spread the Gospel to those without it.⁹² Apart from the appointment of chaplains, the British government did little to promote religion in the colonies. By contrast, voluntary missionary societies were quick to embrace the religious opportunities opened up by imperial expansion. The East India Company's consolidation of its position in India in the late eighteenth century, presented the evangelical missionaries, they felt providentially, with the prospect of saving the souls of Hindu and Muslim peoples.⁹³ The evangelical missionary impulse reached a peak around the turn of the nineteenth century; a wave of new missionary societies were founded in the 1790s, including the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the (London) Missionary Society (1795), the Edinburgh (Scottish) and Glasgow Missionary Societies (1796) and in 1799 the Society for Missions to Africa and the East (known as the Church Missionary Society from 1812). Yet the evangelical societies were

⁹¹ Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, 'The trials of the chosen peoples: recent interpretations of Protestantism and national identity in Britain and Ireland', in *Protestantism and National Identity, Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9-11. See also: Colley, *Britons*, 53.

⁹² Andrew Porter, *Religion versus empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 39-40.

⁹³ Carey, *God's Empire*, 48, 54; Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond: Psychology Press, 1993), 76-77; Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire c.1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 134, 152; Allan K. Davidson, *Evangelicals & Attitudes to India 1786-1813* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay, 1990), 50; Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 40. See also: Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 81; Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 35.

unable to arouse more than cursory interest in spreading the Gospel in India. Their projects were limited by the confining of evangelical policy to British settlers and residents. Attempts to extend missionary preaching to Indians were unsuccessful; when the East India Company's charter came up for renewal in 1793, the proposed clause enabling missionaries to preach to Indians was rejected. For a period of twenty years, until this decision was reversed, missionary societies in India were largely forced into inactivity. Petitions and letters to the East India Company requesting them to permit missionaries were ignored.⁹⁴ Despite the missionaries' assertions that they were purely interested in religious matters, many were politically suspect. There were men among them who had been, and a few still were, thought of as political radicals.⁹⁵

By 1800, the missionary movement had little to show for its efforts, but it was widespread, well-organized and growing; it was increasingly able to wield a significant influence over the general public. Although Bernard Porter has recently questioned whether there was any large scale imperial concern domestically in Britain⁹⁶, and it is probably true that an active religious interest in the empire was confined to a minority of Anglican and evangelical missionaries, it is likely that the publications written by this minority had some sway over the general public. According to Allan Davidson, who has examined the attitudes of evangelical societies

⁹⁴ Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 40; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 61, 99; Gottschalk, *Religion, Science and Empire*, 110; Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 128-129, 141-142, 175. See also: Andrew Porter, 'Religion and Empire: British expansion in the long nineteenth century, 1780-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20, no.3 (1992): 371-372; Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 92. See also: Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 42; Davidson, *Evangelicals & Attitudes to India*, 48-50, 56-57; Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 79-80; Carey, *God's Empire*, 63.

⁹⁵ Davidson, *Evangelicals & Attitudes to India*, 84, 90-93. Fears that evangelicals may be radicals and republicans who sympathized with France were exaggerated, but they were not entirely without foundation. Of the Baptist Missionary Society's ministers in India, John Foundation was acknowledged as harbouring republican views whilst William War had been involved in a corresponding societies devoted to political reform and radical journalism in Derby and Hull. See: Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, 98-99.

⁹⁶ See: Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

towards India from 1786 to 1813, missionary propaganda “exercised an incalculable effect on shaping men’s attitudes and opinions”. For many people, he argues, the only source of information about non-European cultures and different religious practices came via the “missionary media”. Periodical publications, meetings for prayer, annual meetings with sermons, itinerant preachers, tracts, pamphlets, books, hymns and poetry, all contributed to keeping the missionary cause in the religious public’s attention.⁹⁷ Such writing could have a significant political impact, and evangelicals across the Protestant churches formed a powerful lobby group; a point demonstrated by the evangelical movement for the abolition of slavery.⁹⁸

These evangelical missionaries undoubtedly played a role in validating imperial expansion. Evangelicals such as Charles Grant, Claudius Buchanan, William Wilberforce and John Owen were viciously critical of Indian religion and culture in their writing and preaching. For instance, in a lengthy tract written in 1792, Grant wrote of the total degradation of Hinduism and Islam in India. “Discord, hatred, abuse, selfishness unrestrained by principles, prevail to a surprising degree.”⁹⁹ While this helped justify their own expansionist religious policy, it also provided moral backing to British imperial expansion. Ironically, they had little interest in supporting or furthering imperial policy; their thinking was dominated by an eagerness to promote Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Historian Brian Stanley summarized that “the Bible and the flag” went hand in hand in the history of Western imperial expansion. Although Stanley’s book, by his own admission, is now showing its age, the core of his thesis remains valid, so much so that Andrew Porter, in a more recent work, considers Stanley’s overarching argument to be “fast becoming established as one of the unquestioned orthodoxies of general historical knowledge.”¹⁰¹ Other more recent scholars concur with the essence of Stanley’s discourse. Rowan Strong, who conducted a sizeable literature review in

⁹⁷ Davidson, *Evangelicals & Attitudes to India*, 96-97, 100 105-106. The *Missionary Magazine* noted in 1797 that there were more than 30,000 religious periodicals printed every month in Britain, a greater number than ever before.

⁹⁸ Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 34.

⁹⁹ Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 156-157. For quotation, see: Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, 11-32; Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 58-59, 371.

¹⁰¹ Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, 12; Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 6-7.

her work, believes the prevailing view of historians remains that British Christianity in all its variations, was generally supportive of empire while, at times, criticising some colonial practices as immoral or unjust.¹⁰²

Whatever their motivations, the actions and writings of missionary societies, ensured that spreading the Gospel to non-Europeans was being noticed by an increasing number of Britons in the decade prior to the Egyptian campaign. For evangelicals such as Wilberforce, Buchanan and Grant, Britain's religious and moral dominance over all other nations meant it had a duty to civilize Indian peoples. The promotion of Christianity was also seen as the only course of action which provided the empire with long term security from internal dissention. British rulers and Indian subjects were thought to be dangerously divided by their different religions, and the spread of the Christian Gospel would draw both Britons and Indians into a wider Christian identity.¹⁰³

Francis Collins is a notable example of a soldier with evangelical connections. The preface to the first edition of his *Voyages* was written by the Scottish missionary John Campbell, who had been involved in the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society and, at the time of publication, was a director of the London Missionary Society.¹⁰⁴ Collins' affiliation with the missionaries is obvious in his writing.

What melancholy and dreadful picture of human degeneray [sic] is here! that a nation, the most refined and polite, which boasted of its antiquity and superiority over all others, in invention, discoveries, wisdom, and learning, should exceed all others in their

¹⁰² Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 31.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 160, 163-166.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew C. Ross, 'Campbell, John (1766–1840)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4519>. The preface to the third edition of Collins' *Voyages*, published in 1819, was written by the missionary Richard Marks. See: Roald Kverndal, 'Marks, Richard (1778–1847)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/59229>.

gross, absurd and cruel superstitions and idolatries...
 What a necessity for a divine revelation and what an
 unspeakable blessing then is the gift of the Bible, which
 clearly reveals that Saviour who abolished death, and
 brought life and immortality to light by his Gospel.¹⁰⁵

Collins believed the promotion of Christianity would be a reciprocal act of charity. Before the introduction of Christianity from the Holy Land, Collins argued Britain was “among the most savage nations”, and its people were the “most stupid and cruel idolaters.” He contrasted “this gross ignorance, cruelty, and idolatry with the present state and circumstances of Great Britain”. Ignorance of the Christian faith meant society had no hope of health and prosperity. Therefore, Collins proclaimed, “May Great Britain return the unspeakable blessing of the Gospel to these once highly favoured countries, from whence it proceeded to her, when in a state of ignorance, superstition, idolatry, and barbarism.”¹⁰⁶ By using the terms “cruel” and “gross” to describe indigenous “idolatries”, Collins portrayed an image of religious suffering. It was clear to him that Islam posed an obstacle to national development; the decrepitude of Islamic civilizations such as the Ottoman Empire appeared to confirm this. Therefore, the promotion of Christianity, which implied the extension of British imperial aspirations in Egypt, would be a sympathetic response to the misery of the people. This act was also a form of spiritual repayment. The Holy Land had introduced Christianity into Britain, and now the favour could be returned.

In part because of the supposed incoherency of Islam, Francis Collins thought that the conversion of great numbers of Muslims to Christianity was achievable. He claimed to have met one Ottoman, who

...displayed an unusual openness and freedom, and
 expressed much respect for his English friends... He
 expressed his veneration for the Bible, which he
 considered the only written book of God.... His

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *Voyages*, 293.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 216, 299, 304.

suspicious of the truth of the Mahomedan religion, that his mind was impressed with the prospect of its fall, and the necessity of his countrymen being taught the true religion; a desire to be instructed more fully on the subject, and a wish for the more general instruction of his countrymen, many of the most intelligent of which were of similar sentiments.¹⁰⁷

Collins declared that this man was not an oddity. Some of the British soldiers had

...formed a little society for the purpose of reading the Scriptures, and engaging in sacred worship... it is a fact, however strange, that many of the Mussulmen occasionally attended those meetings. And who shall say what blessed events may not the Lord accomplish by such slender means, who not unfrequently is pleased to choose weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty.¹⁰⁸

Collins hoped “that these reflecting Turks, and others, will soon hail that instruction so many of them desire, by the diffusion of the Christian religion, in these benighted countries”.¹⁰⁹ Reflecting on these comments, it is important to remember that Collins had evangelical connections, and was committed to depicting the Ottomans as sympathetic to Christianity, to win support for a more committed conversion effort in Egypt. Referring to the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Collins appealed for the distribution of translations of the Bible to the Ottomans.

Their desire for the Bible (many mutilated parts of which are to be found in their Alcoran,) points out the desirableness of giving them a translation of its genuine

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 213-215.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 287.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 215.

contents, in the Turkish language; also their doubts of the truth of many parts of their Alcoran, and that desire, so prevalent in many of them to attain the true knowledge of God.¹¹⁰

The success which Collins reported in the Christian conversion of Muslims, naturally conveys a sense of overwhelming Christian superiority. No Muslim would convert to a different religion unless they thought it was inherently superior, righteous, coherent, and fulfilling.¹¹¹

Collins was certainly the most outspoken evangelical soldier in Egypt, but his views were not totally exceptional. Several soldiers reported a sense of enmity towards them by their Ottoman allies and the Egyptian inhabitants. They implied that European colonization and the conversion to Christianity would civilize these people and prevent such behaviour. As the British fleet from India to Kossier approached Jeddah at the end of April 1801, where they had intended to resupply, Charles Hill claimed to hear a report “that the Sheriff of Mecca is our Enemy and had threatened to put to death any Arab person that shall take an English sheikh [officer] into Jeddah.”¹¹² Hill thought “It is the intent of the Sheriff of Mecca to make this unfavourable report of the Red Sea to prevent Europeans from exploring it”. He reassured himself that “it appears to me highly probable that the time is not far distant when Mecca itself nay even Constantinople as well as Egypt must succumb to European Government.”¹¹³

Another interesting example of unprovoked Muslim hostility towards the British was noted by one of General Abercromby’s staff officers. Discussing the Ottoman soldier with whom they were allied, the officer wrote:

...he thinks of nought – but – *coffee – pipe – pipe and coffee*. The maxim of this brute seems to be, let the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 215-217.

¹¹¹ Gottschalk and Greenburg, *Islamophobia*, 30.

¹¹² Hill Diary, 44-45.

¹¹³ Ibid., 50.

morrow take care of itself – sufficient to the day is the evil thereof. Ignorant, superstitious, intolerant and supercilious is the character of this self-sufficient being, *our Noble Ally*, whose haughty pride, vanity, and consummate arrogance, added to the immoveable detestation with which he looks upon us, and the inveterate horror in which he holds us as Christian dogs and infidels, places him in such a point of view, in such a light to the eye of a civilized being, that one is almost tempted to wish a partition of the Turkish empire between *Christian* powers, to teach these Mussulmen that we are at least human beings, and creatures of the same maker.¹¹⁴

The staff officer entertained the possibility that modern civilization in Egypt might be possible with “the greater influx of *Christians*”,¹¹⁵ but unlike Francis Collins, it seems he did not support the foundation of an evangelical imperial mission in Egypt. He had no doubt that an attempt to convert the inhabitants would be a long and bloody process, due to their fanatical hatred of Christians. Although the British received “every possible mark of attention, hospitality and attachment” and were looked upon “as a wonderful race” after the defeat of the French, the officer thought it “very possible, nay probable, that if the French were out of this country to-morrow, they would rejoice to see us follow them, *for we are Christians!*”¹¹⁶ Some of the Coptic Christians were seen to have cooperated with the French during the occupation of Egypt, and the officer suspected “that the moment our backs are turned very many will be massacred”. This, he asserted, was “the fate which all Christians in Egypt seem to await”. “With inhabitants like these”, the officer declared, “how difficult to civilize a country! Hard indeed that task in Egypt, where so many obstacles present themselves. The insurmountable one would be the *fanaticism* of the natives which

¹¹⁴Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 42. See also 4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 93-94, 96.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 86-87. See also: Williams, *Voyage*, 108.

would produce constant assassination...”¹¹⁷ He concluded his argument with a favourable view of the French occupation:

I confess that were it not for political reasons, ... I could almost lament that the French, for the benefit of mankind, have not remained here; with the sea open to them, they might have brought about, after some time, such a change, that the country would have put on a new appearance, or more properly should I say, *its old appearance*; it is certainly to be made one of the finest countries in the world. I had rather the French should have the pleasure of making it so, than it should be our lot, thousands would fall in the attempt, *and I doubt if success would be quite ensured*.¹¹⁸

By emphasizing the potential benefits of the French occupation, the staff officer’s comments shed important light on British images of the French enemy. Clearly the officer did not regard the French as the Catholic “other”, nor were they considered unchristian heathens as they had been during the years of the Jacobin Republic. Instead, the French were seen to some extent as a positive force and, in relative terms at least, were thought of as equals in social, cultural and technological refinement. This argument offers a revision of Linda Colley’s seminal *Britons*, in which she asserts that the common investment in Protestantism, and the threat of France as “the haunting embodiment of that Catholic Other” forged a common identity of Britishness over the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ The argument that British and French soldiers were drawn culturally closer together in opposition to Islam in Egypt complicates Colley’s assertion that the French consistently embodied the Catholic ‘other’. This identification with the French also chimes with Gavin Daly’s research

¹¹⁷ Ibid. The officer’s concern for the safety of the Christians was well founded, although the Ottoman army proved a greater threat to Christians than Egypt’s Muslim inhabitants. When the Grand Vizir’s army occupied Cairo, he ordered the execution of all Coptic Christians who had cooperated with the French.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 96-97.

¹¹⁹ Colley, *Britons*, 5-6, 368-369. See also: Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness’, 311, 316-317.

on British soldiers in the Spanish Peninsular. Much as in Egypt, British criticism of the local religion – Catholicism – led to a level of sympathy for the French occupation. The British saw the Catholic Church as the greatest obstacle to progress in Peninsular society, and the French were seen, to some extent, as progressive liberators, at war with the Catholic church of the old regime. As a result, the French conflict with the Spanish and Portuguese drew a mixture of responses from British soldiers. The British were shocked and horrified at the appalling torture and murder committed by French soldiers against civilians and guerrillas, yet at times, they praised the French occupation for its impact on local Catholicism.¹²⁰

Other similarities between the treatment of Catholicism in the Spanish Peninsular and Islam in Egypt can be discerned. As Daly and Catriona Kennedy highlight, soldiers did not necessarily strongly identify themselves as Protestant prior to their arrival in the Peninsular, but as the campaign progressed they developed a keener sense of their Protestant identity, and a latent predilection for anti-Catholicism. This became one of the key foundations of the arrogant derision that the soldiers expressed towards the local Spanish and Portuguese, and distinctions were rarely drawn between Catholicism in Spain and Portugal.¹²¹ Similarly, the condemnation of Islam formed the basis for much of the criticism of the Ottomans and Egyptians, and the soldiers failed to distinguish between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, or between the range of national and ethnic groups in the Levant. The commanders of British forces in both Egypt and the Peninsula recognized the difficulties that could be produced by the hostility of their men to the local religion. Abercromby in Egypt, and Wellington in the Peninsular, both stressed to their men the importance of respecting the locals' religious practices and not causing offence.¹²²

¹²⁰ Daly, 'Soldiers in Lisbon', 477; Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 165-170.

¹²¹ Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 156-158, 162 168-169; Daly, 'Soldiers in Lisbon', 476-477; Kennedy, 'John Bull into Battle', 139-140.

¹²² Daly, *British Soldier in the Peninsular War*, 156-158, 162. For orders relating to respecting religion in Egypt, see: Report on the Egyptian Campaign by Capt. Alexander Bryce, Royal Engineers, National Army Museum, 03-12-13-1. David Baird, in command of the expeditionary force from Bombay, expressed the same message to his men. See: Hill Diary, 61-62.

There was, however, one crucial difference between the attitudes of British soldiers in Egypt and the Peninsular. In Egypt, the British and French also identified with one another as members of Christian nations. Despite the recent downfall of the Catholic church in Revolutionary France, British soldiers continued to refer to the French as Christian or the French nation as a “Christian power”.¹²³ This indicates that culture and customs were more important than religion in creating a shared identity. On the one hand, a similar culture reinforced a sense of ‘Christian’ affinity with France, but on the other hand, as we have seen, the Coptic Christians, despite their shared religion, were seen as lying outside this shared identity because of their adoption of Muslim customs and costume. One must be careful drawing this conclusion however, for it is possible that the traditional image of the French as Catholic continued for some time after the secularization in the 1790s. However, for some Britons, it seems that ‘Christian’ could act as a synonym for ‘European’, or more specifically ‘Western European’.

Although Islamic customs and culture were often regarded as the negative reflection of Europe, for a minority of British soldiers they were not always seen in negative terms. A few British servicemen expressed genuine curiosity about the “Muhammadian” manners and customs. This interest came predominantly from the lower ranks. Presumably without the education and ready access to literature that officers enjoyed, the lower ranks were less exposed to the work of authors that were hostile towards Islam and Near Eastern society. One of the most inquisitive was Sergeant William Billows. During the siege of Cairo in June, the British and Ottoman armies camped alongside one another, allowing Billows to inspect the Ottoman camp.

I used to like to walk through the Turks’ camp to see their dress and ways, you would see the officers sitting cross legged on a fine carpet or cushion, several together drinking coffee and smoked out of their beautiful pipes most of them 2 yards long or more, they would invite us into their tent or marque and sit down and take coffee with them – merely to hear us talk but

¹²³ See, for example, Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 31, 33, 42.

as they used no sugar we but seldom stopped any time at their invitation.¹²⁴

Daniel Nicol expressed a similar curiosity. On arriving at Itko with his regiment, Nicol wrote “This being the first town I was in in this country I was curious in examining it...” He

visited a school and looked attentively at some boys receiving instruction from one of the lower mufti or clergy, a fine fatherly looking man. He showed us the books they were using, but we could make nothing of them, we supposed they might be some parts of the Koran. In writing, this was unaccountable to us, they began the line to the right and wrote towards the left of the line, then began at the right again and so on... The teacher was at great pains to explain things to us, and in return for his civility I showed him as I best could how we wrote and our method of teaching from a book I had in my pocket. He seemed to understand me and we parted good friends.¹²⁵

Given the intense curiosity that Billows and Nicol expressed, it is unlikely that their comments were intended as a critical commentary on their own religion. There was, however, a developing tendency in Britain at this time to use an admiration for Islam and the career of Muhammad as an indirect way of criticizing Christianity. Although Muhammad continued to be portrayed as an example of excessive ambition, he could also be seen as preaching a more rational, natural faith than Christianity. Joseph White, Professor of Arabic at Oxford, discussed this subject in the Bampton Lectures in 1784. He claimed Muhammad was “an extraordinary character [of] splendid talents and profound artifice... endowed with greatness of mind which could brave the storms

¹²⁴ Billows Autobiography, 76-77.

¹²⁵ Nicol, *Experiences*, 57.

of adversity [by] ... the sheer force of a bold and fertile genius.¹²⁶ Chapter 50 of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is devoted to Muhammad and the rise of Islam. Muhammad, Gibbon believed, had "an original and superior genius" formed in solitude, as it must be: "conversation enriches the understanding, but solitude is the school of genius".¹²⁷

For some observers, this admiration for Muhammad threatened to subvert Christianity. One evangelical-minded British official remarked that Islam was:

...the only undisguised and formidable antagonist of Christianity... an active and powerful enemy... It is just because Muhammadanism acknowledges the divine original, and has borrowed so many of the weapons of Christianity, that it is so dangerous an adversary.¹²⁸

Despite being widely regarded as a false religion, Islam and Muhammad captured the political imagination of several late eighteenth-century writers, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Edmund Burke. This was especially the case after the French Revolution. Humberto Garcia, in his study of sympathetic representations of Islam, emphasizes that the concept of an Islamic republic, with an enlightened Muhammad at its head, became a means for certain political groups in Britain to defend the French Revolution. In their support of French Jacobinism, English deists, such as Thomas Chubb, upheld Islam as tolerant in contrast to Christianity's persecuting spirit, and believed that Muslims were closer to "the standard of reason" than Christians.¹²⁹ The association between the new French Republic and Islam in British minds, heightened the sense of threat Islam posed, especially once Napoleon's Islamic policy during the French occupation of Egypt

¹²⁶ Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 12-15.

¹²⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 50, quoted in *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹²⁸ William Miur, quoted in Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 19; Gottschalk and Greenburg, *Islamophobia*, 30.

¹²⁹ Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment*, xi, 10.

became known. Although Napoleon's talk of conversion to Islam may have been fraudulent, his admiration for the Prophet Muhammad was genuine. He criticized the bloodthirsty doctrinal wars of early Christianity, with squabbles over the nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and said admiringly,

Muhammad was a prince; he rallied compatriots around him. In a few years, his Muslims conquered half the world. He rescued more souls from false gods, overturned more idols, and pulled down more pagan temples in fifteen years than the adherents of Moses and Jesus Christ had in fifteen centuries.¹³⁰

This admiration for the Prophet and Islam had been expressed in a minority of French works throughout the eighteenth century. The vast *Encyclopédie*, the first modern attempt to encompass all knowledge in a single work, made the occasional reference to Islam as a code for criticism of the popular superstition and the dogmatism they saw in Catholicism. Other writers of the articles in this encyclopaedia saw the virtues of Arab Muslim science, and contrasted its achievements with European religious obscurantism.¹³¹

Conclusion

The British military's portrayals of Egyptian customs and culture demonstrate the confused mix of both traditional and new conceptions of difference at this time. Among the variety of descriptions, it is clear that the exposure to Egyptian customs and practices appears to have been a jarring experience for many soldiers. The practices of the people the British encountered were almost uniformly treated negatively, as a mirror reflection of British society. In this regard British servicemen probably based much of their arguments on earlier travel works, who saw the Near East through a negative lens which Malcolm Yapp has labelled the "Turkish Mirror". These critical arguments made by the soldiers were frequently ambiguous or hypocritical. William Wittman's criticism of Islamic predestination is one example,

¹³⁰ Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, 129-130.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

as he failed to appreciate the similarities between the fatalistic beliefs of Islam and the conviction of many British Protestants in divine providence guiding and protecting the British nation. Moreover, those who partook in the trade of slaves failed to notice, or perhaps chose to ignore, the irony of participating in a practice they had preciousy condemned.

The bewildering experience of Near Eastern customs and practices led several soldiers to support the foundation of a British imperial mission in Egypt. The Egyptian campaign took place at a time when the evangelical missionary impulse reached a peak in Britain, and there is a range of evidence which suggests that religion was an important element in British servicemen's lives. It is unsurprising that some of the soldiers, such as Francis Collins, held ties with prominent evangelicals, but not all British servicemen thought this way. As the author of *A Non-military Journal* claimed, the attempt to convert Muslims would be a long and bloody process, due to the fanatical hatred of Christians. In his comments on this topic, the officer remarked on the potential benefits of the French occupation, which indicates a common cultural identity with the French in opposition to Near Eastern Muslim culture. Despite the demise of the French Catholic church during the Revolution, British soldiers continued to refer to the French as Christian or the French nation as a "Christian power".¹³² There is an apparent lack of the traditional Protestant-Catholic divide between Britain and France during the Egyptian campaign, which, according to Linda Colley, dominated British thinking of the French throughout the long eighteenth century. This attitude draws comparison with the view of the French during the Peninsular campaigns, examined by Gavin Daly. In their writing, the soldiers in the Peninsular criticized the Catholic Church in similar ways to their observations on Islam in Egypt. In both Egypt and the Peninsular, British opposition to the local religion and culture led to a level of sympathy for the French occupation, who were seen, to some extent, as progressive liberators. There was however, a contradiction in attitudes in Egypt that was not present in the Peninsula. On the one hand, a similar culture reinforced a sense of 'Christian' affinity with France, but on the other hand, the Coptic Christians, despite their shared religion, were seen as lying outside this shared identity because of their adoption of Muslim customs and costume. For some

¹³² See, for example, Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 31, 33, 42.

Britons, even though France destroyed the power of its church, its people retained Christian manners, refinement and culture. Those outside Europe without European manners could not be considered Christian.

4.

“Rather out of our way of doing business”: British military appraisals of the Anglo-Ottoman alliance

They are in general a stout, active, and hardy people, and are allowed to be individually brave. They are certainly material of which excellent soldiers might be formed; but under a Turkish Government everything becomes debased.¹

This passage, written by Major-General John Moore in his diary during his inspection of the Ottoman army in January 1801, effectively summarizes the British servicemen’s appraisal of their Ottoman allies during the Egyptian campaign. In the eyes of British military personnel, the Ottomans had great martial potential, but this promise was wasted by the corrupted and decayed state of their society and their inferior mode of warfare. As Moore alludes to in the quotation, military considerations were a crucial influence on British soldiers’ perceptions of the Ottomans. This was a distinctive feature of soldiers’ accounts that was not present in contemporary civilian-authored travelogues or orientalist literature. Indeed, as Patrick Porter highlights, war is a crucial point of comparison through which military personnel can judge other civilizations.² Although civilian travel authors and orientalists influenced the style and content of military literature, they were not subject to the same pressures and circumstances as military men. Therefore, the primary objective of this chapter is to explore the ways in which military writings about Ottoman military bodies in Egypt

¹ Sir John Moore, *The Diary of John Moore*, ed. Sir J. F. Maurice, vol.1 (London: E. Arnold, 1904), 396.

² Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).

were distinct from other forms of contemporary literature published about the Ottomans in Britain.

A study of British perceptions of the Ottomans, at a time when these two nations were engaged in a military alliance against the French, provides an interesting avenue of investigation. The possibility must be addressed that British perceptions of the Ottomans were principally influenced by various problems that were inherent to combined operations between allied powers. By 1801, Britain had considerable experience working with and subsidizing a variety of allies. These military encounters followed a consistent pattern, whereby the British placed a great deal of reliance on overly optimistic estimations of the capability and commitment of their allies. In this regard, the Egyptian campaign was no exception. However, it was one of few operations in which British forces worked with a non-western, non-European power, and British servicemen became acutely aware of a divide between Ottoman methods of waging war, and their own. For this reason, the Ottomans came to be seen in a very different light from Britain's other military allies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. A fundamental misunderstanding of the organizational structure of the Ottoman army, and the seeming lack of 'western' features within Ottoman forces, were vital in shaping the British military's appraisal of Ottoman people. The second objective of this chapter is to explore how and why Anglo-Ottoman relations differed from Britain's previous experience in military alliances.

Martial images of the Ottomans

Although British military servicemen considered the Ottomans primarily in negative terms, there were features in Ottoman society, and in the appearance of Ottoman soldiers, that were praised. British servicemen often considered the Ottomans to possess martial qualities, and admired these characteristics. William Wittman, the surgeon to the British military mission attached to the Ottoman army from July 1800 to the conclusion of the Egyptian campaign in October 1801, thought the Albanian contingent, or "Arnauts", possessed "very turbulent and indocile qualities", and a "warlike disposition.... Being inured from their infancy to laborious exercises, they are hardy and vigorous; and the pursuits to which they are engaged give them an air

of savage fierceness well suited to their character.”³ John Phillip Morier, private secretary to the Earl of Elgin, who accompanied the Ottoman army on a special service mission from January to July 1800, described the light cavalry from Georgia and Circassia as “a fine manly race, extremely handsome, fair and well-shaped. They are inured to war from the constant hostile state in which they live... and from the frequent skirmishes which they have with the Russian troops on their frontiers.” The Albanians Morier considered “a warlike people” who “have the reputation of being very courageous”, but the bravest of all were a tribe of volunteer light cavalry named the Delhis, a title “which signifies madmen”. It was a term “well applied to them” as they “boast of never refusing to undertake the most hazardous enterprizes...”⁴

The appearance of these Ottoman soldiers complemented their alleged warlike nature, and led the British to emphasize their physical prowess. Major Hudson Lowe, commander of a corps of 200 Corsican royalists in Egypt, and who later acquired fame as Napoleon’s “gaoler” during his governorship of St Helena, depicted the Ottomans as “invariably men of large stature”.⁵ Major Francis Maule wrote: “Strength and gravity are displayed in their gestures.... The Turkish janissary walks with a firm and manly step, and looks around with the dignity of a Colossus.” He described the Ottoman soldier as “perhaps the finest in the world in form and regularity of beauty.”⁶ Sir Robert Wilson depicted the appearance of the Capitan Pasha, the Grand Admiral of the Ottoman navy, in similar terms, when the latter visited the British camp at the beginning of April: “His appearance was striking, his dark eye was expressive... and although he seemed to have bad health, he did not look more than 35 years of age: his

³ William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London: 1803), 237-238. Although the term ‘Arnauts’ was used to denote Albanians, it was also used to refer to mercenaries from all areas of the Ottoman Empire.

⁴ J.P. Morier, *Memoir of a Campaign with the Ottoman Army in Egypt, from February to July 1800* (London: 1801), 12-16. See also: Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 148-149.

⁵ Quoted in Piers Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt, The End of Napoleon’s Conquest* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks repr., 2010), 21.

⁶ Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), 194-195.

face was handsome, and his fine black beard beautiful". The Pasha was in fact 44 years old.⁷

The nature and extent of these 'martial' characteristics was one of the distinctive ways by which British military servicemen judged Ottoman peoples. This conviction in the existence of martial qualities in Ottoman soldiers adds credence to recent research conducted on the concept of martial races in the British Empire, especially the work of Heather Streets. She examines the development of martial races over the nineteenth century, and claims that certain indigenous populations within the British Empire became seen to be culturally and biologically predisposed to war.⁸ After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, Streets contends that concepts of martial race became an influential factor on the British Empire's recruitment policy towards Indian Sepoys, Punjabi Sikhs and Nepalese Ghurkhas.⁹ Although martial race theory had no direct influence on British imperial thinking before 1857, British appraisals of the Ottomans during the Egyptian campaign show that certain peoples were beginning to be considered 'martial' at the start of the nineteenth century.

Of the men who commended the appearance and warlike nature of Ottoman soldiers, Francis Maule stands out as the most admiring. He used his positive appraisal to implicitly critique various aspects of British society. According to Bernard Lewis, this was fairly common in the more positive surveys of the Ottoman Empire by European writers, who used it as a means for social commentary on the west.¹⁰ This is most apparent in Maule's observations on the physical appearance of the Ottoman ranks. Their admirable figure he considered "in great measure" to result from "the climate which they inhabit, the food which they subsist, and the nature of their occupations." The Ottomans, he wrote,

⁷ Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 51.

⁸ Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 41.

⁹ Heather Streets, *Martial races, The Military race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3; John Mackenzie, 'General Editor's Introduction', in Streets, *Martial races*, viii-ix. See also: 2, 8-9, 11.

¹⁰ Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 116-117.

live on plain and healthy food; this, together with the purity of the air which he breathes, invigorates his muscular powers... He owes no hereditary disease to the intemperance, gluttony, or irregularity of his progenitors; no pernicious habits, the offspring of indolence and luxury, to which the more refined Christian is subject.¹¹

Maule argued that the physical prowess the current generation of Ottomans possessed, derived in part from the abstinence and harmonious lifestyle of their predecessors. This he contrasted with the “Christian” or European, who is subject to the “intemperance, gluttony, or irregularity” of his forbearers.¹² By drawing this comparison, Maule suggests that although the Ottomans lived in a rudimentary and ignorant society, their primitive nature endowed them with an honourable simplicity, in which they were untainted by the corruption of commerce. Europeans, who enjoyed the luxury of a commercialized society, damaged their health and physical form. For Maule, Ottoman society may have been considered less civilized, but in some ways it could show how Britain might regenerate the more disreputable aspects of its society.¹³

Maule’s comments demonstrate one of the ways in which images of the Near East and its people were filtered through the lens of classical republicanism: to expose the enervating and corrupting effects of a developing commercial society. Several Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, such as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, had written on this subject. Commercial expansion was considered to some extent, a positive force but, for Ferguson in particular, it violated the moral character and

¹¹ Maule, *Memoirs*, 194-195, 197-198.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Streets, *Martial races*, 225; Hew Strachan, ‘A General Typology of Transcultural Wars – The Modern Ages’, in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 89; Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 31, 41; Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind, European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (London: Serif, 1995), 22.

structure of society. He was concerned that civilization might degenerate, that manners and government might be corrupted as citizens put their private, material interests before the public good. The old martial virtues and character of the Scottish, Celtic past would be irrecoverably lost. Of this process there was no surer indication than a willingness among citizens to entrust their defence to mercenary soldiers. Citizens who allowed others to be paid to fight for them lost a vital element of their virtue.¹⁴ While his name is of Scottish origin, Maule does not state his national lineage which leaves some doubt over the influence of classical republicanism on his writing. As a soldier, writing after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, it is possible that Maule did not share Ferguson's concerns about the decline in martial virtue, but was more concerned with a general degradation in the moral character of society.

Although certainly not as outspoken as Maule, other British soldiers made similar remarks about the potential benefits of the supposedly primitive Ottoman society. Morier believed they could subsist on bread and onions, which allowed them to resist diseases that plagued Europeans. Wittman argued that "Having been accustomed from an early age to an abstemious mode of living, and inured to hardships", Ottomans "of the inferior classes are well calculated for a military life."¹⁵ Such comments suggest that the harsh environment, and the absence of luxury and commerce were thought to produce superior human forms. The implied criticism of British society within these memoirs was a fashion adopted from other forms of oriental literature available in Britain. The use of fictional and factual travelogues and romantic poetry as devices to

¹⁴ John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1985), 11, 203. See also: Bruce Buchan, 'Enlightened Histories: Civilization, War and the Scottish Enlightenment', *The European Legacy* 10, no.2, (2005): 183-185, 187; J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Machiavellian Moment' *Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 499; Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 102.

¹⁵ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 48, 245.

criticize domestic, social and political norms was well established by the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁶

For Maule, Ottoman modes of dress set another example from which the British might learn. In a description of Ottoman clothing, he suggested that it contributed to their muscular prowess:

They walk with bare legs; and when their cloaks are held up, their muscles appear to swell with boldness. Their arms are robust like those of a wrestlers. Their necks being never constrained with bandages, assume the fine proportion which nature has designed for them. . . . In a word, all their limbs being unembarrassed by those bands which impede our motions, and which nothing but habit could make us endure, preserve each its natural form, and display those admirable proportions, the perfection of which constitutes the summit of human beauty.¹⁷

Maule's observations highlight some of the faults he perceived in European clothing and fashion. The comment on "necks never being constrained with bandages" seems to be an observation on the restrictiveness of the neck cloth or cravat, which was worn by most eighteenth century gentlemen, and a forerunner to the necktie. Maule might also have meant to criticize the neck stock, the most hated article in the British soldiers' inventory. The stock was a collar made of thick leather, which kept the wearer's head in the proper soldierly posture. It locked the head in place, preventing it from turning and cut into the neck. This clamping of the head gave the soldier a healthy looking appearance, even if the wearer was malnourished. However,

¹⁶ C.C. Barfoot, 'English Romantic Poets and the "Free-Floating Orient"', in C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen (eds.), *Oriental Prospects Western Literature and the Lure of the East* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 71-73.

¹⁷ Maule, *Memoirs*, 195-196.

prolonged wearing of the stock could provoke a series of health problems.¹⁸ Only the rank and file were obliged to wear the neck stock, and as an officer, Maule probably wore some form of cravat. However, he would have observed the discomfort of the rankers serving under him who were required to wear stocks.

The neck stock was not the only article of clothing that caused problems for the soldiers. According to Scott Hughes Myerly, in his noteworthy examination of dress and discipline in the British military, the army's obsession with proper appearances forced soldiers to wear numerous articles of clothing that could be detrimental to their comfort, health and fighting effectiveness. Maule's statement "their limbs being unembarrassed by those bands that impede our motions" was probably intended as a broad critique of British clothing conventions, but it is possible that he meant to emphasize the problems with the traditional redcoats of the British infantry. They were unpleasantly warm, and the tight fit that was so important for appearances, restricted movement and made the coat uncomfortable to wear.¹⁹ Taken together, Maule's comments expose the possibility that without the constraints of British clothing customs, soldiers could be stronger, and "the summit of human beauty".²⁰

The importance of dress in Maule's description indicates that the traditional conceptions of difference, such as clothing, religion, civility and class, remained an important factor in Britons' assessment of themselves and other people. As noted in the previous chapters, according to Colin Kidd, Roxann Wheeler and Dror Wahrman, these traditional conceptions of difference, which had been dominant throughout much of the eighteenth century, had gradually begun to be replaced by racial

¹⁸ Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle, From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 25-26. In his order of 1810, the Duke of York complained that wearing neck stocks injured soldiers "by pressing on the glands of the neck, and by that means exciting scrophulous swellings in constitutions where there is a tendency to that disorder."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 14, 25-26. In 1810, the Duke of York issued a circular complaining that the coats "diminish the power of action in a mode highly prejudicial to the health and vigour of the soldier, drawing the body together, and checking that freedom and alacrity of motion in the body, and arms, that are so conducive to the growth and expansion of the young, and to the comfort and health of all."

²⁰ Maule, *Memoirs*, 195-196.

understandings of human difference.²¹ However, the realignment towards racial conceptions only became fully visible a few decades into the nineteenth century, with the emergence of scientific racism. Therefore, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a confusing mix of interpretations of human variation. The significance of clothing in Maule's account implies that the traditional criteria for evaluating different peoples still held some sway at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Anglo-Ottoman alliance

Although the British widely believed that the martial qualities of the Ottomans endowed them with great military capabilities, this potential was unfulfilled. Ottoman martial vigour was thought to be poorly managed, thus they constituted an ineffective military force. This posed a problem for the British, who were aware they had to fight a highly trained and experienced French army, which was both larger and better supplied. They relied on the Ottomans to counter these disadvantages. In this way, the Anglo-Ottoman coalition was very similar to a range of alliances the British had participated in throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. With a significantly smaller population than many of the continental powers, Britain had limited disposable land forces, and consistently adopted the practice of subsidizing allies to take the leading role in campaigns. These allies would suffer the brunt of the inevitable human cost, in exchange for gold. In some cases, this had worked well: in Canada and India, the British were assisted by substantial sections of the native population, many of whom, in the case of India, fought directly under the British. Such cooperation would also prove instrumental in the Peninsular War in Portugal and Spain.²² The original plan for the Egyptian campaign followed this pattern. The British intended

²¹ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27, 80, 82, 92-93, 271; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 9, 31-32, 37; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 86-87.

²² Jeremy Black, *War for America, The Fight for Independence 1775-1783* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1991), 245-246.

for the Ottomans to lead the offensive, with their own forces playing a supporting role.

Therefore, the British servicemen's negative perception of the Ottomans could at least partly be attributed to the friction that often arose between allied forces in combined military operations. This had certainly been a problem in recent British alliances. On several occasions throughout the late eighteenth century, the British had become dissatisfied with various allied groups, having overestimated their capabilities, resources or commitment to the operation in question. During the War for American Independence, the British developed unrealistic expectations of American loyalists. Although there were areas in the colonies where loyalism was strong and revolutionary activity relatively weak, loyalists were a minority of the population, and lacked the capacity to fulfil British requirements.²³ Similar problems beset the Anglo-Russian expedition sent to Holland in August 1799. The British believed that once they landed in Holland, the Dutch would rise in support of their liberators, and welcome the return of the exiled Prince of Orange, William V. Although many Dutch hated the French, they had no desire to see the return of the Prince. Instead of provoking an uprising, the campaign had the opposite effect, and united the divided Dutch Republic against the British. Dutch soldiers made up over half of the defending troops, and the predicted insurrection utterly failed to materialize.²⁴ Moreover, considerable difficulties were encountered cooperating with the Russians. At Castricum, near Alkmaar on 6 October, the Russians attacked the French positions too soon, and then retreated unnecessarily, throwing the British into disarray. Twelve days later, an armistice was agreed, and by November the Anglo-Russian forces had evacuated Holland.²⁵

²³ Piers Mackesy, *The War for America 1775-1783* (Cambridge: Mass.: Bison Books, 1993), 511-512; *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁴ T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787-1802* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1996), 255-256; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (London: Harper Perennial, 1977), 394-397.

²⁵ A. B. Rodger, *The War of the Second Coalition, 1798 to 1801 A Strategic Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 176, 187-189, 194; Blanning, *Revolutionary Wars*, 255; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 396.

Following this trend, Britain possessed overly optimistic expectations for the Anglo-Ottoman alliance. Although widely accepted as declining, the British seemed to believe that the Ottoman Empire remained an imperial power with substantial resources at its disposal. They wildly overestimated Ottoman attachment to Egypt and assumed the Ottomans were fully committed to the removal of the French.²⁶ Prior to the French invasion, the Ottomans were masters of Egypt only in name; they had no control over the country and obtained little from it. At this time, the reach of the Ottoman government in Istanbul rarely extended beyond the central provinces of Turkey, and then only weakly.²⁷ The Ottomans had, with British assistance, successfully repulsed Napoleon at the siege of Acre in March 1799, but since then two offensive campaigns against the French had both ended in disaster at Aboukir in July 1799, and Heliopolis in March 1800.²⁸ They were understandably reluctant to launch a third offensive. Unlike the conservative monarchies in Europe, the Porte was not ideologically opposed to the French, and with reports of Russian troops massing on Turkey's borders, they saw little reason to send more troops to Egypt. Recent British conduct had done little to inspire confidence in an Anglo-Ottoman alliance. During the peace negotiations at the Convention of El-Arish in January 1800, the British cabinet refused the terms of the French surrender, which led directly to the resumption of hostilities and the Ottoman defeat at Heliopolis.²⁹

²⁶ Edward Ingram, 'The geopolitics of the first British expedition to Egypt – I: the cabinet crisis of September 1800', *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no.3 (1994), 453. The Ottomans had done their part to encourage these mistaken beliefs. After victory at the Nile, Sultan Selim III rewarded Nelson with a Chelengk, or Plume of Triumph, an ostentatious diamond encrusted aigrette, which he wore in his hat. See: *HMS Vanguard at the Nile – the men, the ship, the battle*, ed. Eric Tushingham (London: The Nelson Society, 1998), 108; Oliver Warner, *The Battle of the Nile* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 145.

²⁷ M. Sükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History Of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 6.

²⁸ Ingram, 'Geopolitics – Cabinet crisis', 452; Edward Ingram, 'The geopolitics of the first British expedition to Egypt – II The Mediterranean Campaign, 1800-1', *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no.4, 702-703.

²⁹ Ingram, 'Geopolitics – Cabinet crisis', 452; Ingram, 'Geopolitics - Mediterranean Campaign', 713-714; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 19-20, 48 148-153; John Marlowe, *Perfidious Albion: The Origins of Anglo-French Rivalry in the Levant* (London: Elek, 1971), 74.

The British expeditionary force that sailed to the Levant in December 1800 was totally unaware that the Ottomans were unprepared to supply their needs. Sir Ralph Abercromby, the commander of the British expedition, had sent his quartermaster-general, Colonel Robert Anstruther, five weeks ahead of the army to arrange the purchase of supplies.³⁰ Abercromby intended to land at Marmaris Bay on the southern coast of Turkey, spend a few days loading up everything needed for the coming invasion – horses, horse transports, landing craft and provisions – and sail for Egypt immediately. Five weeks later, as the army's flotilla sailed into Marmaris on New Year's Eve 1800, John Moore wrote optimistically: "The Turkish Government is friendly, and promises every assistance".³¹ He was to be greatly disappointed. It was soon discovered that Anstruther had been unable to acquire anything from the Ottomans. Instead of a few days, the army spent seven weeks at Marmaris, acquiring the needed supplies. The passing weeks were not spent idly, the men were put to work training for the planned amphibious landing in Egypt, but they were nevertheless tortuously frustrating for Abercromby. Time was of the essence, he had hoped to land in Egypt and surprise the French before they could entrench themselves. The longer the British stayed on the Turkish coast, the greater the chance that the French would learn of their presence and prepare their defences.³²

All Abercromby could do was make the best of the situation. Commissaries were sent to forage and purchase locally, and provisions of food soon built up, but the landing craft and horses were still missing. The cavalry required 1,200 horses, and had none. Purchasing parties were sent inland, and enough horses were eventually bought to mount 450 dragoons, but even these were small in size and were not suitable for a cavalry charge.³³ Many of these shortages were never resolved. Although the horse transports were eventually received, the draught animals promised never arrived.

³⁰ Wilson, *History*, 4; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 15.

³¹ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 389.

³² Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 14, 17.

³³ Elgin to Abercromby 13 January and 6 February 1801, Foreign Office (FO) 78/31, pp.71-74, 183-185, The National Archives; Abercromby to Dundas, 11 Jan 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.11-12, The National Archives; Abercromby to Elgin, 21 January 1801, Foreign Office (FO) 78/31, pp.181-182. See also: Lieut. Aeneas Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs, in April 1800...* (London: 1802), 53.

After intelligence had confirmed that two French frigates had slipped the British blockade and docked in Alexandria, Abercromby could wait no longer; the risk of more reinforcements reaching the French was simply too great, and the army set sail for Egypt on 22 February.³⁴ The lack of draught animals forced the men to improvise; hand carts and rope slings were constructed which allowed them to carry ammunition boxes or musket cartridges in pairs.³⁵ With few horses, the movement of the guns was especially difficult. The most common cannon used by the British at this time were light and medium 6-pounders, and 5 ½ inch howitzers. A single light 6-pounder artillery piece weighed approximately 230kg, and, combined with its limbers and ammunition carriage, weighed over a tonne. The British also had some 12 and 24 pounders to be used as siege artillery. A single 12-pounder with its limbers and ammunition carriage weighed more than two tonnes. In ideal circumstances, six to eight horses would be used to move each artillery piece, but in Egypt, much of this work had to be done by the men. There were simply not enough men in the artillery to move the guns, and two detachments of foot companies were sent from the line to assist them.³⁶

Outnumbered, ill-equipped and doubtful that any support would be received, British officers became pessimistic about the outcome of the campaign. Abercromby expressed his concerns in a series of letters written on 16 February. To David Dundas, half-cousin of Viscount Melville and author of the 1792 army regulations, Abercromby wrote “The enterprise... is arduous, and perhaps doubtful.... I do not wish you to consider this a desponding letter. I certainly however am not confident of success.”³⁷ Abercromby’s subordinates shared his concerns. His second in command,

³⁴ Abercromby to Dundas, 16 February 1801. War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.79-80; Abercromby to Dundas, 16 March, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.94; Wilson, *History*, 6; Walsh, *Journal*, 68-70.

³⁵ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 27, 49. See also: Walsh, *Journal*, 66.

³⁶ Michael Barthrop, *Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaigns 1798-1801* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 21. For the weight of artillery pieces, see: Stephen Summerfield, ‘Comparison of Foot Artillery Weights’, *Smoothbore Ordinance Journal* 7, no.16 (2013): 76-77.

³⁷ Abercromby to Dundas, 16 February 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.79-80. Abercromby expressed similar concerns in letters to Henry Dundas, William Huskisson and Admiral Keith, written on the same day. In his letter to Keith, Abercromby made a direct comparison with the Dutch Campaign: “I never went on any service entertaining graver doubts of success, at the same time with the determination to encounter

John Hely-Hutchinson, confessed that he was strongly opposed to the operation and saw no reasonable grounds to expect success.³⁸ John Moore was furious. In his view:

We have lost two months and the advantage of a surprise... Had we sailed straight from Malta to Alexandria, or after staying here a few days to water, we should certainly have taken the French unawares. They have now had time to prepare and to digest their mode of defence.³⁹

He concluded, “I cannot but think the enterprise in which we are about to engage extremely hazardous and doubtful in its event.” He did not believe that the French would offer a pitched battle, and instead feared they would use their superiority in cavalry to constantly harass the British communications during the assault on Alexandria.⁴⁰

Although some of these problems that arose in the Anglo-Ottoman alliance were typical of combined operations in this period, many were not. The lack of ‘western’ features in the Ottoman army – such as full-time regularly drilled infantry – was the most important factor in shaping Britain’s appraisal. This can be discerned before the Egyptian campaign. In 1791, William Pitt attempted to curb Russian expansion into Ottoman lands. Pitt declared that unless the fortress of Ochakov, seized by the Russians in 1788, was restored to the Ottomans, Britain would attack with the aid of 80,000 Prussians, Ottomans and Poles. The threat provoked a huge outcry around

difficulties... The Dutch expedition was walking on velvet in comparison with this.” See: Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 48. See also: Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 54; Wilson, *History*, 2; Christopher Lloyd, ed., *The Keith Papers* (London: Naval Records Society, 1950-1951), 229.

³⁸ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 47-48.

³⁹ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 398-399; Beatrice Brownrigg, *The Life & Letters of Sir John Moore* (Oxford:1923), 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Britain. Most of the public had never heard of Ochakov, and supported Christian Russia over the Muslim Ottoman Empire.⁴¹

British attitudes during other alliances in the 1790s provides an important point of comparison. During the disastrous Dutch campaign in 1799, there was a certain degree of affinity in customs, culture and religion between British and Russian officers, many of whom conversed with one another in French. Perhaps for this reason, the British regarded the Russian troops in far more positive terms during this failed campaign, than the Ottomans during the successful operation in Egypt two years later. Some British officers were disappointed by the Russians. John Moore, who commanded a brigade in the Low Countries, wrote that the Russian troops “from the very beginning preserved no order... Their retreat was precipitous and as undersoldierlike as their advance.”⁴² Generally however, the British had a more mixed opinion of the Russians. Henry Bunbury, a lieutenant who served on the Duke of York’s personal staff, recalled that the Russians proved themselves brave, if somewhat reckless:

...the Russians pushed forwards in one solid mass, overturning everything that stood in their way, ... the fearless mass burst into the midst of the French,... If there had been a reserve, fresh and in good order, the battle was won. But there was nothing but the one mass of confused men. Such people were not to expect victory over the active and intelligent Frenchmen on their own ground.⁴³

Others were more positive in their appraisal. As a column of recently disembarked Russian infantry passed him in early September, Francis Maule noted they:

⁴¹ Robert Harvey, *The War of Wars the epic struggle between Britain and France 1789-1815* (London: Constable, 2007), 111-112.

⁴² Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 350, 352-353.

⁴³ Sir Henry Bunbury, *Narrative of the Campaign in North Holland 1799* (London: 1849), 12-13, 19.

...were well appointed, and made a fine and imposing appearance. I was delighted by their firm and noble gait, their healthy and bronzed countenance, and that general appearance of hardihood, the result of exercise and temperate habits, which fully denoted them fit for the field, and the privations incident to warfare. The appearance of such an ally naturally gave rise to high expectations. The great character which the Russians have always maintained in war, which every year manifests itself still more conspicuously, and the known bravery of their nation in general, filled everyone with confidence.⁴⁴

Maule's high opinion of the Russian troops continued after the campaign turned against them. Watching the Russian retreat after the battle of Castricum on 6 October 1799, Maule saw many of the wounded on the carts "rolled up in blankets drenched with rain, and disfigured with the marks of their blood. Still these noble and hardy soldiers appeared unmindful of their lot, and bore not in their stern and manly countenance the marks either of grief or of dismay."⁴⁵

This preference for European allies, such as the Russians, among the British military, was also noticeable during a small operation conducted at Aboukir Bay shortly after the Battle of the Nile in 1798. Following the destruction of the French navy, a portion of Nelson's fleet remained off the coast of Alexandria to maintain a blockade. On 21 October, the British were joined by a squadron of Russian and Ottoman frigates and gunboats. The arrival of this small squadron provided an opportunity for offensive operations. The following day, Commodore Hood ordered Benjamin Hallowell, captain of HMS *Swiftsure*, to proceed to Aboukir with the Ottoman gunboats and a Russian frigate. The intention was to attack the Castle of Aboukir, a French held fort that jutted into Aboukir Bay.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Maule, *Memoirs*, 14-16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁶ Rev. Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the*

Within a few days, Hallowell had everything prepared, and chose the Ottoman gun boats as the main instrument of attack. John Lee, a young midshipman, and Cooper Williams, the reverend on board the *Swiftsure*, described the assault. Hallowell “resolved to put the courage of the Turks to the test”⁴⁷, but “having no very high opinion of their zeal he took the precaution to put five British seamen into each boat: yet, notwithstanding their example and exertions, it was impossible to make the Turks do their duty.” Hallowell had himself

rowed from gun-boat to gun-boat, in vain endeavouring to instil some ardour into their minds, and, at length, by occasional coaxings and threatenings, he drew them near enough to batter the castle; and it would have been with more effect, but the motion of the vessels prevented certain aim.⁴⁸

Describing this episode, Williams was less than complimentary towards the Ottomans. He claimed their cannon were inadequate: there was no way to lock the guns for better aim, nor did they have breechings, a thick rope used to secure the carriages of the cannon to absorb the force of the recoil. When fired, the cannon “frequently recoiled with great force from the stem to the main-mast.”⁴⁹ Interestingly, Lee and Williams repeatedly highlighted the cowardliness of the Ottoman seamen, and especially their commanders. On the first day of bombardment, Williams writes “Whenever the Turks heard the whistling of a shot, down they fell, or sneaked below into the hold.” A few days later, a second bombardment was attempted. To “prevent a repetition of past evils”, Hallowell put fifteen British sailors and five Russians on board each Ottoman gun-boat to work the guns, while the Ottomans kept at the oars. These oarsmen, Lee wrote,

squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson... with a description of the battle of the Nile (London: 1802), 120-122; John Theophilus Lee, *Memoirs of the Life and Services of Sir J. Theophilus Lee, of the Elms, Hampshire* (London: 1836), 126.

⁴⁷ Lee, *Memoirs*, 126-127.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Voyage*, 122-123.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

were so slack in rowing into action, that the boats were eventually obliged to tow them in. It was truly laughable to observe the captain of one of the Turkish frigates, assisting in towing the gun boats into action cast off his tow line, on the first shot being fired from the fort, [and] row rapidly out of gun shot [range].⁵⁰

A third attempt on the castle ended farcically. This time, the Ottoman gun boats came so close to the castle that the men on board were able to use their muskets. “The business was beginning to grow very serious”, when the Ottomans in one of the boats, “made desperate by their fears, rose upon our unarmed people, and with sabres began to cut them down.” British and Russian boats nearby rushed to help the British sailors, and Captain Hallowell boarded the rebellious gunboat to “put an end to the fray”. However, “the dastardly conduct” of the Ottomans had thrown “the rest into confusion”, and “the action was obliged to be discontinued.” British officers struggled to discourage their sailors from seeking revenge for the death of their compatriots. “An Englishman seeing one of his comrades cut down by a Turk, instantly attacked the Mussulman with wooden handspike and beat out his brains”.⁵¹

The conduct of the Russian sailors, by contrast, was described as superior to that of the Ottomans. Williams wrote they were “neat in their persons and remarkably patient of fatigue and hardship. They were entirely obedient to command and fearless of danger.”⁵² It is evident from these appraisals that the British favoured what they deemed westernized, disciplined Russian sailors, over their Ottoman counterparts, yet this peculiar operation raises many questions. If the Ottoman gunboats were so ineffectual in the initial assault, why were they repeatedly used in subsequent attacks? Commodore Hood, who ordered the assault, had other resources at his disposal; namely two Russian and two Ottoman frigates, as well as the larger ships of the line

⁵⁰ Lee, *Memoirs*, 128; *Ibid.*, 122-124.

⁵¹ Williams, *Voyage*, 126-127; Lee, *Memoirs*, 129.

⁵² Williams, *Voyage*, 124.

in the British blockading force.⁵³ These larger ships could conceivably close in to fire on the fort; gunboats were not necessarily required. Aboukir castle was surrounded by shoals, into which HMS *Culloden* had run aground in the initial phases of the Battle of the Nile. As a result of this, the British had developed some idea of the water depth around the fortifications. Moreover, Nelson's squadron had come under fire from Aboukir castle during the battle; it was certainly in range of the larger cannon the British had available. One suspects that the British persisted with the Ottoman gunboats because they were known to be of poor quality and an expendable force; the British were less willing to risk the lives of their own or the Russian sailors in a hazardous and impulsive amphibious assault.

The criticism of the lack of 'western' features in the Ottoman military continued in the Egyptian campaign. Discipline and organization were the crucial dividing factors; the unorganized masses of the Ottoman military were considered inferior to the disciplined ranks of the British army. This view arose from a misconception. The British totally misunderstood the fundamental differences in organization between the Ottoman army and their own. The Ottoman government had to control a larger area and a greater variety of ethnic and religious groups than either the Habsburg or French Empires at their respective heights. Hence it was incapable of enforcing the same level of control over the individuals who fought for it. From 1650, the Porte increasingly resorted to recruiting militias and hiring private armies for temporary use, instead of attempting to maintain a professional standing army.⁵⁴ In this way, Karen Barkey argues, the Ottoman government established an informal agreement with the rural peasants. The peasantry provided "disposable, bargain recruitment", and in return, the government allowed raiding and plunder as a reward.⁵⁵ This preference for temporary recruitment of militias allowed the Ottomans to recruit great numbers of men cheaply and rapidly, giving the military a greater flexibility to respond to different problems.

⁵³ Ibid., 120-121.

⁵⁴ Virginia Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott: Reframing the Question of Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1760-1830', *The International History Review* 20, no.2 (2002): 271.

⁵⁵ Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 236-237; Virginia H. Aksan, 'Whatever Happened to the Janissaries?', unpublished article, http://www.academia.edu/222295/Whatever_Happened_to_the_Janissaries, 23-36; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 271-272.

Such flexibility came at the expense of the discipline and organization familiar to European armies. The troops required constant bribes during campaigns, and Ottoman commanders doled out money in return for dangerous service, for trophies such as heads, ears or noses of slain enemies, and as compensation for wounds graded according to severity. Such practices were designed to strengthen what was never more than temporary allegiance to Ottoman commanders, and could not be easily transformed into European-style discipline. The hierarchy of military rank and the obligation to obey orders and perform them as instructed, was alien to the traditional military bodies in the Ottoman Empire. Among these groups, particularly the Janissaries, individual martial prowess was an asset to be prized and bought. Loyalty rarely went beyond fellow soldiers in a battalion, and command depended on negotiation, not automatic compliance. While the Ottoman government did its best to attract as many men as it could, there was little to prevent these soldiers from returning to their homes should the campaign turn against them.⁵⁶ The difficulty in establishing a semblance of order was exacerbated by the diversity of the men who constituted the Ottoman military. It was a melting pot of various nationalities and races, many of whom possessed different languages. William Wittman was struck by the ethnic variety of the Ottoman army: “complexions of every hue, black, copper-colour, olive, tawny, yellow, and white, are to be found.... Which result from so motley a compound of so many different nations indiscriminately brought together.”⁵⁷ With no measures in place to prevent these temporary troops from deserting, the army was in constant flux: irregular levies deserted in large bands, but new recruits also poured in.⁵⁸

The Ottoman forces provided a stark contrast to the mechanical-like discipline espoused by the British army. Heavily influenced by the European school of military tactics, British soldiers frequently referred to the army as a machine, and mechanical-like movements were exhibited in soldiers' posture and motion. When at drill, on

⁵⁶ Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Routledge, 2007), 205-206; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 273.

⁵⁷ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 229. See also: Morier, *Memoir*, 7.

⁵⁸ Koehler to Grenville 29 October 1800, Foreign Office (FO) 78/27, p.127. See also: Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 76; Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 393-394; Brownrigg, *Letters of Moore*, 112-113; Walsh, *Journal*, 155.

parade, or on the march, the movements of a soldiers' body were precisely regulated; they were not allowed to step out of line to avoid mud or water that might soil their dress.⁵⁹ Strict discipline and mechanical-like manoeuvres were considered essential in an army that relied upon the volleyed firing of smooth-bore muskets, to obtain the greatest effect from their limited range and complicated loading procedure. It moulded soldiers so that they would respond automatically by instinct, which allowed commanders to move large numbers of men in an orderly manner, and could make the difference between life and death. Moreover, it helped officers maintain total control over their men, many of whom were ill-treated, underfed and did not want to be there.⁶⁰

The criticism of Ottoman indiscipline and disorder was also motivated by the British army's sense of professionalism. By 1801, the reputation of the British army had plummeted after a series of failed campaigns and aborted expeditions in the 1790s, leading it to become, in the mind of Lord Cornwallis, "the scorn and laughing stock of friends and foes."⁶¹ Many of the men in Abercromby's expeditionary force were amateurs. Of the twenty-six battalions under his command, only ten had combat experience.⁶² Despite this, Abercromby had been given several months to train his army into a respectable force, as they prepared for the campaign. The aging general was mild mannered and affable, but he was a strong disciplinarian and considered an exceptional trainer of men. His subordinate, John Moore, was a huge asset in this

⁵⁹ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 74. See also: J. A. Houlding, *Fit For Service The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 235-241, 251; Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795-1809* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 114, 118, 124.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-77.

⁶¹ Lord Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, (London: 1859), vol.3, 300, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 3.

⁶² Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 33; Piers Mackesy, *War without Victory: The Downfall of Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 165. Six battalions suffered from diverse levels of training and fluctuating strengths, thus many of their men were at best mediocre. The worst battalions were those with a high proportion of Irish recruits, who had not been given the opportunity to train their men properly. The 23rd Royal Welch Fusiliers, a regiment with a high reputation, had lost 265 men in a shipwreck returning from Holland in 1799. Their losses were replaced with Irish militiamen. These men were largely unfit for service at the time, and performed poorly in Egypt.

regard, and has been described as one of the best instructors in the history of the British army.⁶³ The rigorous training and preparation of the men instilled a confidence in their own abilities. Abercromby reflected on the marked improvement of his army as their flotilla came in sight of Egypt on 1 March 1801. “Most of the regiments”, he wrote, “are amongst the best in the service; the general officers men of high honour, with the advantage of vigorous health joined to experience.”⁶⁴

One can argue that the British expeditionary force was not, in the strictest sense, a professional military body, but under Abercromby’s tutelage, his men acquired a confidence in their own abilities and professionalism. Used to their own system, and unaware that the Ottoman military was organized around the temporary recruitment of irregulars, British soldiers were appalled at the unruly disorder of the Ottoman troops.⁶⁵ The contrast between British and Ottoman styles of warfare became obvious to the British soldiers as an Ottoman infantry detachment joined their army, under the command of the Capitan Pasha, the High Admiral of the Ottoman navy. They marched, camped and fought alongside the British throughout the campaign. The first of the Pasha’s men landed at Aboukir on 19 March - a small detachment of 500

⁶³ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 31-34

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 37; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 55.

⁶⁵ This sense of the superiority of western warfare continues in scholarship to this day. Numerous researchers have given merit to the idea that ‘oriental’ methods of war were totally unlike those of Europeans. Paul Bracken, Robert Cassidy, Christopher Coker, John Jandora and John Poole argue that westerners have historically preferred direct battle, whereas the Levantine way of war was “inherently more irregular, unorthodox, and asymmetric”, with a focus on the use of standoff weapons, deceit and attacking enemy cohesion. Most of these authors declare the innate superiority of western warfare over its eastern counterpart. These stereotypes did not always fit: western armies often sought for opportunities to deceive their enemy, and European commanders utilized many elements that could be classified as ‘oriental’, such as diversions, strategic concealment, light infantry, guerrilla warfare and provocateurs. See: Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 130; Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 3; Christopher Coker, *Waging War Without Warriors? The Changing Culture of Military Conflict* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2002), 144-148; John Jandora, ‘War and Culture: A Neglected Relation’, *Armed Forces and Society*, 25 no.4 (1999), 541-556; John Poole, *Tactics of the Crescent Moon* (Emerald Isle: Posterity Press, 2001), xxviii, 5.

irregulars - and was followed by a larger force of approximately 3,600 a week later.⁶⁶ Aeneas Anderson, a lieutenant in the 40th Regiment, assessed the men of the first detachment as they disembarked: “they had little better than the appearance of a rabble, with somewhat of a gaudy flutter about them, from a great number of their colours.” Abercromby was unwilling to test the Ottomans’ abilities, and ordered them to “encamp three miles in the rear of the army, to be out of the way, as it seemed, in case of attack.”⁶⁷ General Hutchinson, who succeeded to command after Abercromby’s death, shared the concerns of his predecessor. Only a few days after taking command he wrote to Henry Dundas complaining about the Ottomans attached to the British army: “The Turks are in a deplorable state... you cannot place the smallest reliance on them.”⁶⁸

Unaware of the differences in organization, British observers often drew unfavourable comparisons between the ordinary Ottoman and British soldiers. The contrast in their discipline was most apparent during the marches. Captain Wyvill of the 79th Regiment, bluntly described the Ottoman march as “a most laughable procession”, that trailed behind the ordered British infantry columns.⁶⁹ Another officer wrote to a friend: “I must tell you that they will, even if marching to an enemy, halt of their own accord, not wishing to lose time by waiting for leave from their commander, seat themselves, light their fires and pipes, make and drink their coffee”. The British supposed that the disobedient nature of these Ottoman soldiers was a consequence of the lack of control and discipline in the Ottoman military. The troops were seen as lazy, ignorant, and entirely self-interested: “This creature thinks of nought – but - *coffee – pipe – pipe and coffee.*”⁷⁰ More seriously from a British strategic perspective, the Ottoman troops were thought to lack *esprit de corps* and were reluctant to follow, or even disobeyed orders. They were, in William Wittman’s judgement, “unruly and

⁶⁶ Hutchinson to Dundas, 3 April 1801, War Office (WO), 1/345, p.151; Anderson, *Journal*, 252.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Journal*, 252.

⁶⁸ Hutchinson to Dundas, 3 April 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.151, 158.

⁶⁹ Wyvill, *Sketch*, 432-434, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 166. See also: D. Robertson, *The Journal of Sergeant D. Robertson, Late 92d Foot: Comprising the different Campaigns between the years 1797 and 1818* (Perth: 1842), 24-25.

⁷⁰ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 41-42.

intemperate in their passions, which they cannot govern,... they frequently commit assassinations among one another.”⁷¹

Interestingly, both the British and Ottoman ranks were depicted as criminals or lowlifes, devoid of the finer qualities of mind. Through a combination of meagre wages, poor food, harsh, squalid living conditions, the length of the term of service and the likelihood of invalidity or death, there was a widespread belief in Britain that self-respecting men never signed up. Only the most despicable individuals were thought to join the military, whose crimes and failings of character meant the army was the only occupation left open to them.⁷² The British appear to have applied this thinking to the ranks of other armies, but there was however, a crucial difference between the perception of Ottoman and British rank-and-file. Both were depicted as mindless killers, but in the British army, soldiers were rigidly controlled by a single commander for a practical purpose, through the enforcement of discipline. To the British soldiers, used to their own strict military system, the problems Ottoman commanders experienced with their troops resulted from their inability to properly control them.

⁷¹ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 235-239. See also: Morier, *Memoir*, 15-16. The reverend Sydney Smith, in his review of Wittman’s work, published in the *Edinburgh Review*, pitied the lot of Wittman and the British military mission attached to the Ottoman army. “Nothing can be conceived more dreadful than was the situation of the military mission in the Turkish camp; exposed to a mutinous Turkish soldiery, to infection, famine, and a scene of the most abominable filth and putrefaction and this they endured for a year and a half, with the patience of apostles of peace, rather than war. Their occupation was to teach diseased barbarians, who despised them, and thought it no small favour that they should be permitted to exist in their neighbourhood. They had to witness the cruelties of despotism, and the passions of armed and ignorant multitudes; and all this embellished with the fair probability of being swept off, in some grand engagement, by the superior tactics and activity of the enemy to whom the Turks were opposed.” See: Sydney Smith, *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith* (New York:1873), 363.

⁷² Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 3-4; Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 160. See also: Edward J. Coss, *All for the King’s Shilling The British Soldier under Wellington, 1808-1814* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 50-85, 252-256; Kevin Linch, *Britain and Wellington’s Army: Recruitment, Society and Tradition, 1807-15* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 90.

The conduct of the Ottomans soldiers, as they marched alongside the British was considered “proof of their subordination”, and was accompanied by concern. The acts of indiscipline the British witnessed had occurred “in their best disciplined army, the Pacha’s. If such irregularity and confusion exists among them at a moment of comparative peace and quiet, what must be their state in battle?”⁷³ The answer to this question presented itself during the attack at Rahmanieh on 9 May, as the British and Ottomans engaged the French alongside one another. Seeing the Ottomans waver on coming under fire, the French pressed their attack, and the Ottoman retreat required the rapid deployment of a British brigade on the left to stabilise the advance.⁷⁴ In short, the underwhelming performance reinforced British conviction in Ottoman military defectiveness. Sergeant Robertson, of the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, who was part of the division that engaged the French alongside the Ottomans, wrote “The Turkish mode of warfare was rather out of our way of doing business.”⁷⁵ Wilson was more candid: “The Turks were five thousand... yet from the want of discipline, their strength cannot be rated as equal to more than fifteen hundred Europeans.”⁷⁶ Such crude attempts to estimate how many European troops would be able to match the Ottoman army was a recurring theme among the British. After reviewing the Grand Vizir’s army in October 1800, Brigadier-General George Koehler, who commanded the military mission attached to the Ottoman forces, declared: “I am certain that 2,000 European troops are more than enough to put to rout, in an instant, all the grand army.... of 15,000.”⁷⁷ Such valuations show how poorly the British rated their Ottoman allies, but more importantly, they demonstrate the British conviction in the strategic importance of European style discipline and organization. Lieutenant Thomas Evans provided one of the most interesting appraisals on this subject, for he considered the fanatical bravery of the Ottomans a contributing factor towards their indiscipline and military ineffectiveness.

⁷³ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 72.

⁷⁴ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 171; Walsh, *Journal*, 128-129.

⁷⁵ Robertson, *Journal*, 23.

⁷⁶ Wilson, *History*, 92. See also: James Downing, *A Narrative of the Life of James Downing (a Blind Man) Late a Private in His Majesty’s 20th Regiment of Foot. Containing Historical, Naval, Military, Moral, Religious and Entertaining Reflections. Composed by Himself in Easy Verse* (London 1815), 77.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Walsh, *Journal*, 7, Appendix.

I am persuaded that, in considerable bodies, an English force would have a striking advantage over six times their number... not that I am accusing the Turks of a want of courage, far otherwise, for it is the possession of this very courage, spur'd on by religion, teaching the doctrine of predestination, that makes them so vulnerable to the attacks of veteran soldiers, brought up and perfected in the European system of tactics; as it requires no great depth of thought or foresight to discover that the greater the bravery possessed by Troops fighting (without order or system), and utter strangers to the art of War, against so steady and wily a foe, which no danger, much less noise or appearances, can intimidate, the greater, in proportion to that bravery, must be their loss.⁷⁸

Another officer gave a similar evaluation of the impact of religious fanaticism on military effectiveness:

Amongst them is certainly to be found that description of person who, firmly believing in the picture of paradise... drawn in wondrous glowing colours by his prophet, and consequently expecting his every wish, while living, will be gratified when he quits this world, rushes headlong into eternity with a frantic zeal unknown to Christians... an army thus composed and thus organized should be beaten by an European force of not more than one-third its number.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Diary of Lt (later Gen) Thomas Evans, 8th Regiment of Foot, 1 May 1799 to 3 Sep 1801, National Army Museum, 95-09-101-1, pp.147-149.

⁷⁹ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 71-73.

The British aversion to ‘non-western’ methods of warfare is perhaps most obvious in the contrasting opinions of the two Ottoman commanders: the Grand Vizir, the commander of the Ottoman army, and the Capitan Pasha, the High Admiral of the Ottoman navy. The Grand Vizir was not only the commander in chief of the army; as the Sultan’s prime minister he wielded a great deal of political power and influence. In 1801, this post was held by Kōr Yusuf Ziyaüddin Pasha. At sixty-six years old, with white hair and one eye, the aging commander had a striking appearance. He was a competent general and known for his piety and fatalism.⁸⁰ In British accounts however, the Vizir was often regarded as a buffoon, for he was totally ignorant of European politics and western knowledge. He had “an inclination to attribute every circumstance to the course of fate, which, whether it conduct to good or evil, he thinks is irresistible”.⁸¹ In one meeting with George Koehler, the Ottoman commander-in-chief asked for a map of the world to be sketched out for him. The request was complied with, and the Vizir was astonished to hear that the earth was round. “If” he observed, “the earth is round, how can the people, and other detached objects on the half beneath, be prevented from falling off?”⁸² His ignorance Koehler found shocking; he was “so weak, so frivolous and childish that an infant three years old would have more foresight.”⁸³ His most serious fault, however, was his limited knowledge of his own army. After multiple conferences with the Ottoman commander, a frustrated Koehler wrote of the Vizir’s casual dismissal of military matters:

He is always very polite and, provided you will talk about his fine horses, the great superiority of the Turks on horseback, about his little fountain of water with a child’s boat in it, nothing can be more satisfactory than our conferences, but directly I touch upon anything which relates to military operations... he waives the conversation.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 238.

⁸¹ Walsh, *Journal*, 149.

⁸² Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 133.

⁸³ Koehler to Lord Grenville, 11 July 1800, Foreign Office (FO) 78/27, p.87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

John Moore formed a similar opinion during his discussions with the Vizir in January 1801. The Vizir told him that he had sufficient supplies to reach the Nile, he only needed barley for the horses and cart animals. Moore's own investigation however, found that the Ottomans did not have sufficient food to reach Egypt, and his figures for various resources were inaccurate. He concluded that the Vizir "was a weak-minded old man, without talent, or any military knowledge."⁸⁵ Unknown to Koehler and Moore, it was impossible for the Vizir to attain accurate information on his resources due to constant fluctuations in the availability of supplies and in the number of the irregular militia attached to his army.

An undoubtedly important contributing factor towards these critical appraisals of the Grand Vizir, was the poor state of his forces. The Vizir had set out from Jaffa for Egypt at the conclusion of Ramadan on 25 February. He crossed the desert and advanced on Cairo, hoping to cooperate with the British as he approached the Egyptian capital. British servicemen in contact with this force ridiculed its confused and irregular nature. John Phillip Morier thought it "resembled a large fair" rather than an army.⁸⁶ Their method of communication and movement he considered "truly ridiculous when compared with our ideas of a military system".⁸⁷ George Koehler described it as "an irregular mob... without order or discipline... who will not even defend their own lives and property without presents."⁸⁸ He added, "if any should say, that these people have made any progress in the art of war, or have any notion of order in battle, they are egregiously misinformed, for their exercises constitute nothing but a scene of confusion of one line upon another..."⁸⁹ One of the most popular anecdotes conveyed in descriptions of the Vizir's forces, was the violent opposition of Ottoman regiments to his orders. They supposedly fired into the Vizir's tent if they were unwilling to fulfil his commands, "a thing which frequently occurs if they have any

⁸⁵ Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 395-396; Brownrigg, *Letters of Moore*, 112-113; Abercromby to Dundas 21 Jan 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.19.

⁸⁶ Morier, *Memoir*, 22-24.

⁸⁷ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 72; Morier, *Memoir*, 48-49.

⁸⁸ Koehler to Smith, 3 August 1800, quoted in Ingram, 'Geopolitics - Mediterranean Campaign', 712. See also: Koehler to Grenville, 2 September 1800, War Office (WO) 1/344, pp.319-321.

⁸⁹ Koehler quoted in Walsh, *Journal*, 7 Appendix.

grievance". This became a popular form of opposition to orders for the mustering of regiments or breaking camp.⁹⁰ Again, such views arise from the British failure to appreciate the fundamental difference in the command structure of the Ottoman army. The hierarchy of military rank and the obligation to obey orders was alien to the irregular bodies of troops that served the Ottomans on a temporary basis. Command of troops was not based on automatic compliance, and relied on the ability of the commander to negotiate and compromise. The violent reaction of the troops to the Vizir was often the consequence of his attempts to coerce them into action.⁹¹ Unaware of these differences, John Moore provided the most damning conclusion on the Vizir's army. Moore's opinion was highly respected, and it was for this reason that he was sent to inspect the Ottoman camp at Jaffa during the preparations for the campaign in winter 1800-1. He concluded they were "a wild ungovernable mob, incapable of being directed to any useful purpose; and, as they were destitute of everything that is required in an army."⁹²

Moore's appraisal of the Ottomans had a significant impact on the course of the campaign. Abercromby had originally intended to land his army at Damietta, to allow for better cooperation with the Vizir, although the British would be operating on a wide front, exposed to French cavalry. This plan was scrapped when Moore returned from the Vizir's camp in early February. It was obvious that cooperation with the Vizir did not outweigh the strategic disadvantages of landing at Damietta: "it was" Moore wrote, "vain to expect any co-operation from them."⁹³ Instead, Abercromby resolved to land at Aboukir Bay. It put greater distance between the British and Ottoman armies, but the topography of the bay would allow the British to defend their

⁹⁰ For other examples of Ottoman soldiers opposing the Vizir's orders, see: Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 75; Morier, *Memoir*, 20-21; Walsh, *Journal*, 2-3 Appendix; Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 147.

⁹¹ Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*, 236-237; Aksan, 'Whatever Happened to the Janissaries?', 23-36; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 271-272; Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 205-206.

⁹² Moore, *Diary*, vol.1, 395; Brownrigg, *Letters of Moore*, 112-113.

⁹³ Ibid. See also: George Baldwin, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt, with a Narrative of the Ever-Memorable British Campaign in the spring of 1801* (London: 1802), 81-82. Walsh, *Journal*, 54; Anderson, *Journal*, 199; Wilson, *History*, 6.

beachhead more easily.⁹⁴ Little was heard of the Vizir's army after it advanced from Jaffa on 25 February, and once the British landed at Aboukir on 8 March, many were sceptical whether it would participate at all in the campaign. Abercromby's adjutant-general, John Hope, wrote "A Turkish army exactly resembles one of our old feudal armies – a machine of so little consistency that it cannot keep the field long for any useful purpose, and probably never will be brought across the desert."⁹⁵

One can detect a sense of frustration in Hope's comments and he was not alone. Many found the indiscipline of the Ottomans irritating, in part because their martial potential was going to waste. Wittman claimed that the Ottoman Empire:

...has produced men not deficient in judgement and acute penetration, who, with minds better cultivated, would be the boast and ornament of any nation whatever... it is therefore to be lamented, that this quality should be rendered useless, or even pernicious, by... the radical vices of their government.⁹⁶

John Phillip Morier thought:

...if they are considered in regard to their personal courage, their bodily strength, or their military habits, they will be found to equal, if not to surpass, any other body of men.... Discipline would certainly make men who are possessed of such natural advantages very formidable; whereas, from a want of it, they are despicable enemies.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Abercromby to Dundas, 16 March, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.93.

⁹⁵ John Hope to Alexander Hope, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 102-103. See also: H. M. Chichester, 'Hope, John, fourth earl of Hopetoun (1765–1823)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13731>.

⁹⁶ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 108, 245.

⁹⁷ Morier, *Memoir*, 17-19.

General Hutchinson's judgment was just as striking. In late May, he visited the Ottoman camp to discuss with the Vizir plans for the siege of Cairo, and was appalled by what he saw. In a despondent letter to Lord Hobart, the new Secretary for War and the Colonies, he wrote, "It was the worst army that ever existed."⁹⁸

Küçük Hüseyin Pasha, the Capitan Pasha, was seen by the British in a very different light from the Grand Vizir. The High Admiral of the Ottoman navy was singled out as energetic, competent, generous and indefatigable, "with a taste for everything European and a desire to better the condition of those around him". He had taken command of the navy in the wake of defeat against Russia in 1792, and his tireless efforts to introduce "every innovation which could lead to improvement" were applauded.⁹⁹ As a consequence, "there is not one Turkish commander, except himself, who has disciplined his troops with any degree of regularity."¹⁰⁰ The Pasha's determination to introduce European inventions, policies and tactics was the fundamental reason why he attracted British admirers. Although respected, the Pasha remained in British eyes the product of a corrupt and inferior regime. Captain Thomas Walsh argued that thanks to "his education in the seraglio", the Pasha possessed an "opposite and dark side of his character, profound dissimulation, and a deep spirit of intrigue." Moreover, his talents may have "obtained him high renown in this country, but... dwindle away when put in competition with the talents of an European commander."¹⁰¹ Although he possessed some 'oriental vices', Robert Wilson thought that:

The character of the Captain Pacha sanctions the hope
that those prejudices and abuses which have occasioned

⁹⁸ Hutchinson to Dundas, 1 June 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.239-243, 255-256, 259-60, 270-1. As the commander of the British forces, Hutchinson was treated with considerable deference during his visit. He was presented with various gifts, including a magnificent tent, a diamond snuffbox, and two fine horses. It is evident that these trinkets did little to influence his opinion. See also: Walsh, *Journal*, 155-156. Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 121; Wilson, *History*, 116.

⁹⁹ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Walsh, *Journal*, 152.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

an unnatural weakness, may very soon be extirpated. He seems to be born in this age of splendid talents, to retrieve the fortunes of the Ottoman empire, and refix the crescent in the sphere from which it has wandered.¹⁰²

Wilson's praise of the Ottoman commanders is noteworthy, for he offered a different view to the majority, who emphasized their inherent lack of ability. Most significantly, Wilson highlighted their supposedly harmonious nature. Describing the Pasha, he wrote, "his manners were remarkably elegant and at the same time dignified." He portrayed the Grand Vizir in a similar manner, claiming the commander possessed "a very expressive and engaging countenance" and "a remarkable cleanliness in person", which "gave him a majestic and pleasing appearance whilst the affability and particular elegance of his manners operated irresistibly in his favour; nor was this impression ever diminished by a more intimate knowledge of his character; brave, loyal, and humane".¹⁰³ Wilson's description of Ottoman commanders contrasts with the unfavourable portrayals by other British soldiers. Indeed, admiration for the Pasha among the British had very little impact on the prevailing negative appraisal of the Ottomans. He remained "an honourable exception" to the inferior Ottoman people.¹⁰⁴

It is possible that Wilson's comments were intended to highlight the lack of admirable traits among British officers. Throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the purchasing of commissions allowed a number of unsuitable and incompetent men to rise rapidly, which had lamentable repercussions. Regimental officers enjoyed a great deal of authority over their men, and punishments were meted out at their discretion. According to Scott Hughes Myerly, these conditions rendered military life attractive to sadistic officers who enjoyed inflicting pain.¹⁰⁵ That said, far from all the officers who dealt out harsh punishments to their men were sadistic; such penalties were

¹⁰² Wilson, *History*, 250-251.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51, 113.

¹⁰⁴ Hutchinson to Dundas, 3 April 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.151, 158.

¹⁰⁵ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 2, 81-82.

undoubtedly influenced by the popular image of the ranks as unruly vagabonds who needed the lash to keep them in line. The use of flogging to punish trivial offences reached its peak in the first decade of the nineteenth century, as a number of tyrannical colonels used it to excess. In 1813 Colonel Archdall of the 40th Foot was dismissed from the service after having men flogged without establishing a proper regimental court, and for “piling up” sentences on soldiers for minor offences, in order to inflict several separate punishments at the same time.¹⁰⁶ Another officer who possessed a seemingly perverse nature was General Sir Eyre Coote, who commanded the force that besieged Alexandria in 1801. He acquired a reputation throughout his career for erratic and eccentric behavior, and was charged in November 1815 with indecent conduct, having allegedly paid boys from Christ’s Hospital to allow him to flog them. Although Coote escaped court proceedings by being declared insane, a separate military inquiry concluded his behavior was not caused by mental illness, and he was dismissed from the army in April 1816.¹⁰⁷

Wilson’s reformist background suggests that he was capable of looking with a less prejudiced eye at the structure and character of non-British armies. One of his primary areas of concern was the plight of the common soldier. His work *The History of the British Expedition to Egypt* went through several editions and achieved exceptional popularity because of its accusations against Napoleon for cruelty to prisoners at Jaffa, and his own men in Egypt.¹⁰⁸ Later, in 1804, he published an *Inquiry into the present state of the military force of the British empire with a view to its reorganization*, in which he made his first public protest against corporal punishment in the army. Throughout his active career, Wilson proved himself an efficient and fearless commander, but one who was unconcerned with carrying out orders. His tendency to criticize his own superiors provoked disapproval among his readers. An article in the

¹⁰⁶ Barney White-Spunner, *Of Living Valour: The story of the soldiers of Waterloo* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 102-103.

¹⁰⁷ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 82-83, 236-7; Stanley D. M. Carpenter, ‘Coote, Eyre (*bp.* 1759, *d.* 1823)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6244>.

¹⁰⁸ R. H. Vetch, ‘Wilson, Sir Robert Thomas (1777–1849)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 13 April 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29686>.

Critical Review, discussing the merits of Wilson's work, claimed: "We have had occasion... to reprehend our writer, who, we find is a young man, for assuming too often the character of a judge on the conduct of the ablest generals."¹⁰⁹ As a result of this, the government treated Wilson as an unpredictable entity, a view summarized by Wellington, who described him as "a very slippery fellow". Wilson served with Russian, Prussian and Austrian forces, in addition to those of his own country during his career. He received numerous distinctions from foreign sovereigns, and it is telling he received none from his own.¹¹⁰

The failure to understand how the Ottoman forces were organized seems to have blinded the British soldiers to the considerable efforts that had been made to restructure the Ottoman military along European lines, and the moderate success achieved in this area. In an ambitious programme of reform, Ottoman Sultan Selim III undertook a series of reorganization programmes, the most significant of these was the formation of a new army, the Nizâm-ı Cedid, or New Order, in March 1793. This army was organized along European lines, dressed in European uniforms and followed European drill.¹¹¹ Although the Nizâm-ı Cedid grew far more slowly than the government's projected target, by 1806, 22,685 men and 1,590 officers had been recruited. 700 Nizâm-ı Cedid troops helped defend Acre against the French in March 1799, and a further 1,000, trained by "German renegades", constituted part of the Capitan Pasha's infantry detachment during the Egyptian campaign. These men could "move and form relatively well", and "use the bayonet which no other Turkish soldiers do." They were considered by the British to be the best Ottoman troops.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. review of History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, by Robert Thomas Wilson. 36 (1802): 380.

¹¹⁰ Vetch, 'Wilson, Sir Robert Thomas'.

¹¹¹ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 184-185, 197.

¹¹² Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 10, 122, 127-135; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 49; Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 195-197, 230, 238; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 267-268. Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 73; Anderson, *Journal*, 271-272. Although short of their target, the mere attempt to reform the military was in itself an achievement. Effectively bankrupt upon his accession, Selim had to first reorganize the treasury and taxation system in order to be able to finance military reform.

Mixed among the new recruits of the Nizâm-ı Cedid army were a significant number of foreign, mostly French, advisors. Many were veterans of wars in Europe and overseas, and Selim relied heavily on them for the technical expertise required to modernize the Ottoman military. Standford Shaw estimates that about 600 foreign technicians were in the pay of the Porte at any one time.¹¹³ To further this process, Selim established permanent Ottoman embassies in European capitals from 1793: London, Vienna, Berlin and later Paris. These ambassadors were not merely instruments of negotiation; they sent reports to Selim describing the military, bureaucratic and political affairs of their host nation.¹¹⁴ In spite of his efforts, most of Selim's reforms were only partially successful. They were hindered by a lack of finances and the constant threat of war with various European nations. Reforming the old military institutions could have been disastrous if undertaken at a time when foreign enemies were waiting to take advantage of every weakness.¹¹⁵ Most significantly, the reforms encountered severe and violent opposition from multiple groups, particularly the Janissaries. This opposition proved fatal to Selim personally in 1808, yet the attempts at reform demonstrate that the Ottomans were aware of the limitations of their military system, and the need for change. Many of Selim's initiatives were carried through by his successor, Mahmud II, with greater success.¹¹⁶

The conviction in the total inferiority of Ottoman troops led to a complete reversal of Britain's traditional policy of encouraging their allies to commit their men and suffer losses against the French. Hutchinson, upon taking command on Abercromby's death on 28 March, was determined to keep Ottoman forces out of harm's way. He was

¹¹³ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 121-144, 154-161, 181-183, 196-197; Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 194-195, 198-202. See also: Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 267; Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55; Jonathan Grant, 'Rethinking Ottoman "Decline": Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of World History* 10, no.1 (1999), 189, 193-194, 198.

¹¹⁴ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 224-226; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 95-98; 185-190.

¹¹⁵ Grant, 'Rethinking the Ottoman Decline', 181; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 263-264; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 71-72.

¹¹⁶ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 180, 185; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 84-85, 180.

certain that should the Ottomans engage a sizeable French force, they would be annihilated. As Thomas Walsh recognized, there was nothing to stop the Vizir's levies deserting him should defeat be expected: "In times of prosperity and success the army increases in proportion with the hope of plunder but should it experience a defeat the general is entirely deserted and left to seek safety in flight."¹¹⁷ Hence the mere presence of the Ottomans was thought to be of greater strategic value than any contribution they might have made to a military engagement. Hutchinson judged - correctly - that the presence of the Vizir's army would discourage the French from concentrating superior numbers against him. Jacques-François Menou, the commander of the French garrison, refrained from launching a determined attack on the British bridgehead at Aboukir when it was most vulnerable, precisely because he was unsure of the Vizir's location, and vastly overestimated the extent of Anglo-Ottoman cooperation.¹¹⁸

This policy of protection brought considerable aggravation to the British. The intentions of the Vizir were often contrary to Hutchinson's, forcing the latter to revise his plans against his better judgement. After the Battle of Alexandria on 21 March, the British intended to lay siege to the encircled French garrison within the city, but the Vizir announced he was unable to cooperate in any operation except one against Cairo. He explained that his troops expected to plunder the capital, and feared they would desert should he countermand their wishes. Hutchinson was forced to either abandon the Vizir, or advance with him. He chose to advance, but leaving Alexandria in the hands of the French posed enormous risks. Hutchinson had to divide his army, leaving 6,000 men under Sir Eyre Coote to maintain the siege at Alexandria. Dividing the already outnumbered British army made the number of troops available to Hutchinson perilously small. Moreover, Hutchinson's advance on Cairo provided the French in Alexandria with an opportunity to break out and cut his tenuous supply lines.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Walsh, *Journal*, 55.

¹¹⁸ Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 58.

¹¹⁹ Hutchinson to Lord Hobart, 2 June 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, p.255.

The decision to advance was met with severe, almost mutinous opposition from Hutchinson's subordinates, who wanted the British to act independently of the Vizir. For some, cooperating with the Vizir was too dangerous, his army might be defeated regardless of British assistance, and the surrender of Cairo might not be the decisive blow hoped for. It was safer to remain at Alexandria and ensure the surrender of the French garrison. A group of officers "had written to both Coote and Moore inviting their concurrence in a plan which tended virtually, if not absolutely, to deprive Hutchinson of the command of the army". The plan fell apart after "the stern and uncompromising answer which they received from Moore."¹²⁰ The British reluctantly agreed to assist the Vizir, but their anxiety over the capability of the Ottoman forces remained, along with a great sense of frustration. Many of the strategic problems would not have been encountered had the Ottoman military possessed European discipline. On the advance towards Cairo from April to June, many of Hutchinson's 5,000 men fell sick with fever and ophthalmia, and the British became increasingly reliant on the Capitan Pasha's infantry detachment to maintain the offensive.¹²¹ Hutchinson bitterly detested his dependence on the Ottomans, writing to Henry Dundas:

...they are not even the shadow of an army, no dependence can be placed upon them; they are of that description that it is a most frightful experiment to act at all with them, and it is not by any means impossible that even in action, they might be more mischievous to their friend than to their enemy; they are therefore a most miserable instrument, but bad as they are, they must be used, we have no other resource.... they certainly have some degree of individual courage, but there is no doubt that their prejudices against

¹²⁰ Wilson, *History*, 97; Moore, *Diary*, vol.2, 26-29. Opponents to the decision were probably motivated by their dislike of Hutchinson, who did not command the respect Abercromby had.

¹²¹ Ingram, 'Geopolitics – Mediterranean Campaign', 701; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 164-166, 229; Catherine Kelly, 'Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign: The Development of the Military Medical Officer during the Napoleonic Wars c.1798-1801', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 27, no.2 (2010), 327-328.

innovation and the name of a Christian are still as strong as ever.¹²²

A consequence of this policy of protection was that Ottoman forces played little part in the fighting that took place during the Egyptian campaign. The British ridiculed the Ottomans' meagre contribution, and expressed considerable animosity at the prospect of sharing with them the spoils of the campaign. One officer wrote: "Although the Turks certainly compose a part of the army,... they certainly have nothing to do with the fighting".¹²³ Viscount Keith, an admiral known for his hot temper, mocked the Ottomans' involvement upon learning that the Vizir had been labelled by his troops "the Conqueror of Egypt": "in what Covert of Eastern double dealing will the Turks find a Cloak to conceal their inefficiency, not to say Nullity!"¹²⁴ This acrimony at sharing the victory is best illustrated by one officer, in a letter to Lord Minto:

...what creates general surprize, is that we come as Auxiliaries to the Turks tho' the Capn. Pashaw [Capitan Pasha] and Vizier never ventured to approach untill they had certain information of our Victories – and after we have Conquered a part of the Country we are told we have nothing at all to do with the internal Govt. tho' our very existence might depend upon a Judicious interference. Our Commr. in Chief says the Turks are to govern the Country, and we as long as we remain in it are to obey – Turkish Govert.: and British Subjects do not seem well calculated for harmonious Unison. I therefore should imagine, there must be some mistake...¹²⁵

¹²² Hutchinson to Dundas, 20 April 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.207-208, 211.

¹²³ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 74.

¹²⁴ Keith to General Ed. Smith 31 January 1801 War Office (WO) 1/345, p.32.

¹²⁵ F. Daniel to Lord Minto, 5 May, 1801, M 125, quoted in Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 148-149.

Symptoms of moral and social decay in the Ottoman military

The overwhelmingly negative appraisals of the Ottoman forces by British soldiers, share strong similarities with the writings of civilian travellers, historians and philosophers, who published work on the Near East in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Writers such as the Comte de Volney, François Baron de Tott, Claude-Étienne Savary, William Robertson, William Hunter and William Eton, who all adhered to the core arguments of Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, portrayed the Ottoman Empire as a despotic regime, gradually decaying under the cruelty, sensuality, corruption and arbitrary nature of its government and people.¹²⁶ Due to the popularity of travel literature in Britain at this time, and the interest of military men in such literature, one can safely assume that many British servicemen were pre-programmed by, or were at least receptive to, this prevailing negative image. The martial talents the Ottoman troops were thought to possess were being wasted by the corrupt and depraved regime under which they served, and the ineffectiveness of Ottoman military forces was a symptom of moral decay in Ottoman society. This line of thought is exemplified in William Wittman's writing. In May 1799, Wittman watched a majestic ceremony in which the Grand Vizir formally took command of his army. He argued that the grand affair encapsulated the problems within the Ottoman Empire:

It is impossible to contemplate these pompous ceremonies, and not to contrast them with the secrecy and silence with which the first movements of European armies are undertaken. It must be a trifling nation which can delay an expedition of importance,

¹²⁶ For analysis of the alleged decay of Near Eastern societies in contemporary literature, see: Aslı Çırakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe" European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 2-3, 22, 105-106, 110-118, 164; Aslı Çırakman, 'From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no.1 (2001): 49, 55-56; Bruce McGowan, 'Part III, Age of the Ayans, 1699-1812', *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, volume 2: 1600-1914*, ed. Halil İnalcik et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 637-758; M. E. Yapp, 'Europe in the Turkish Mirror', *Past & Present* 137, no.1 (1992): 134-135.

even for a single day, lest some little rite or ceremony should be omitted.¹²⁷

Wittman argued the Ottoman desire for vain, narcissistic displays damaged their chances of military success, as “it is truly impolitic thus to advertise an enemy, for even months beforehand, of the advance of an army.”¹²⁸

For some British observers, the decay and corruption of Ottoman society was most apparent in its officer corps. This was a common topic of discussion among British officers, perhaps because, as Patrick Porter points out, the upper echelons of western society had a tendency to believe they had more in common with Near Eastern nobles than their own social inferiors.¹²⁹ Despite this, the Ottoman officer was seen as a “man preferring to remain at home in quiet and indolence, enjoying his women, pipe, and coffee. In such an officer the Turkish soldier naturally puts no kind of confidence, but looks upon him as an animal, which in truth he is”.¹³⁰ One anecdote frequently narrated was the process by which Ottoman officers embezzled military funds. Each corps commander allegedly “obtains pay for double or triple the number of men he has to maintain; and this abuse having grown into a kind of established rule among them”.¹³¹ The criticism of corruption in the Ottoman army was a popular one, perhaps because it was known for British officers to engage in similar practices. Colonels controlled the wages and the supply of clothing to their regiment, and there were instances of certain officers abusing these responsibilities for financial gain. The average manpower deficiency for each battalion from 1801-1811 was 202 men, yet some colonels still received and pocketed the clothing allocated for these non-existent troops. Moreover, items of clothing could be purchased in bulk and then sold to their men for a profit.¹³²

¹²⁷ Wittman, *Travels in Turkey*, 9-10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10, 231-232, 274-277.

¹²⁹ Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 34.

¹³⁰ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 68-69.

¹³¹ Walsh, *Journal*, 1-3, Appendix.

¹³² Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 6. In 1811 the amount embezzled averaged £2 6s. 9d per man, or a total of £472 per battalion.

To the British soldiers, the most obvious sign of social and moral decay in the Ottoman Empire was the extreme violence of Ottoman soldiers towards Egyptian non-combatants and French prisoners. This level of violence and oppression seemed abhorrent to British soldiers, but as Mike Dash points out, ruthless violence was common practice within the Ottoman Empire, and from the Ottoman perspective, there was reason for it. Much of the success that the Ottoman dynasty had enjoyed throughout its history, certainly during the “golden age” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was thanks in part to the staggering violence it employed against even the most powerful members of society. The Ottomans were famous for the “law of fratricide”, drawn up by Mehmed II in the middle of the fifteenth century. Under the terms of this legislation, members of the ruling dynasty who succeeded in seizing the throne on the death of the old sultan were not only permitted, but commanded to murder all other potential claimants to the throne, in order to reduce the risk of subsequent rebellion and civil war.¹³³ Although the law of fratricide was abandoned early in the seventeenth century, this culture of violence remained. For many years Topkapi palace, the main residency of Ottoman Sultans in Constantinople, provided a mute testament to Ottoman ruthlessness. In order to enter the palace, visitors passed through the Imperial Gate, on either side of which were two alcoves where the heads of recently executed criminals were put on display. Inside the gate stood the First Court, through which all visitors to the inner parts of the palace had to pass. The focal point of this area was a pair of “example stones”, directly outside the central gate. These “stones” were marble pillars on which were placed the severed heads of notables who had offended the Sultan. Additional warnings and reminders of the sporadic mass executions ordered by the Sultan were occasionally piled up by the central gate: severed noses, ears and tongues.¹³⁴

The British failed to understand that the Ottomans approached the Egyptian campaign as a colonial and financial enterprise, using violence, plunder and extortion against

¹³³ Mike Dash, ‘The Ottoman Empire’s Life-or-Death Race: Custom in the Ottoman Empire mandated that a condemned grand vizier could save his neck if he won a sprint against his executioner’, *Smithsonian magazine*, 22 March 2012, Accessed Jan 17 2017, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-ottoman-empires-life-or-death-race-164064882/>. This law resulted in the deaths of at least eighty members of the House of Osman over a period of 150 years.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

the Egyptians as a method of re-establishing control over the country, and acquiring the funds to pay their troops. The Porte had struggled to assert its authority over Egypt for much of the eighteenth century, and the alliance with the British provided an opportunity for Ottoman power to be reaffirmed.¹³⁵ Incidents of Ottoman soldiers murdering or plundering the Egyptians shocked British soldiers. “The Turks... conceive they cannot plunder and oppress too much the inhabitants of a country towards which they feel no natural tie... and to whose complaints they uniformly turn a deaf ear!!!” The Ottoman cavalry sent by the Vizir to join the British army were described as “miscreants” and “inhuman barbarians”, who “scarcely passed through a village upon the Delta without plundering, murdering, in short committing all the most atrocious and horrible crimes that one could only think the greatest savages capable of”. One officer described the Ottomans’ method of extorting the inhabitants: “You cannot conceive how the private soldiers as well as others, knock about the poor Arabs, force them to sell their goods... at the price they think fit, as bastinado the unfortunate fellows if they look discontent.”¹³⁶ The rough treatment the Egyptians endured at the hands of the Ottomans was nonsensical to the British army. The inhabitants had sternly resisted the French occupation, and did not oppose the Ottoman advance. Robert Wilson argued that Ottoman officers, if not in collusion with these acts of oppression, were powerless to prevent such excesses. One officer’s attempts to discipline his men resulted in him being “hooted at, and obliged to desist”.¹³⁷ Such an anecdote demonstrates that the British mistakenly thought the Ottoman hierarchy of command had broken down.

After witnessing acts of Ottoman violence, British servicemen frequently expressed concern about leaving Ottomans in control of Egypt upon the conclusion of the campaign.

...if the Ancient Govt. is to be destroyed by our means,
it is hardly justice in us to place the Inhabitants under a

¹³⁵ Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*, 236-237; Aksan, 'Whatever Happened to the Janissaries?', 23-36; Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott', 271-272.

¹³⁶ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 36-37, 81-82, 95-96.

¹³⁷ Wilson, *History*, 99.

worse form of Govt. – it should be well weighed, now we have a footing in the Country, how it should be disposed of – and if it should be the Intention to leave the Turks in possession: the Inhabitants should not have it to say that we were the occasion of their miseries & the plunder of their homes - the french brought us here, and we should not in honor abandon this Country to be ravaged by an unfeeling Turk.¹³⁸

This British resentment of Ottoman conduct in Egypt was not only motivated by moral outrage. The oppression of the Egyptian inhabitants posed practical problems to the British, as Hutchinson recognized:

I perceive that their troops... will commit all kinds of horrors, and I am sure I do not know how to prevent them. There is a choice of difficulties – we must have either the Turks or the Inhabitants for our enemies, if we interfere with the Turks it will certainly indispose them against us, if we do not, the natives will soon be as little inclined to us as they already are to the French.... If [the Ottomans] do not establish some regular system of policy which can hardly be hoped for, after having done infinite mischief to the country they will be expelled again.¹³⁹

It was in Britain's interest to maintain amicable relations with the Egyptians, which it was hoped would provide a base for a strong administration once the British left Egypt.¹⁴⁰ Ottoman conduct towards the Egyptians obstructed this goal and had the

¹³⁸ F. Daniel to Minto, 5 May 1801 and 5 July 1801, quoted in Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire*, 139-140.

¹³⁹ Hutchinson to Dundas, 24 April 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.211-227.

¹⁴⁰ The importance of gaining the favour of the Egyptian inhabitants is illustrated by Abercromby's orders to his troops before landing in Egypt: "Every instance of an opposite conduct will be punished in the most exemplary manner. It will be the duty of the Officers of every rank to point out to the soldiers the evils

potential to incite the inhabitants against them. Should the Ottomans be left in power as planned, most soldiers reasoned that their administration would be weak and unsustainable, due to the animosity they provoked amongst the inhabitants. They would not be able to resist another attempt by the French to occupy the country.¹⁴¹

Throughout the campaign, particular disgust in the British army was reserved for the Ottoman practice of collecting the severed heads of French soldiers as trophies. The heads were often “carried with a triumphant insolence to the Turkish camp, where they were laid before the tent of the Capitan Pacha; here they were insulted by every Turk that passed, who kicked them, spit upon them, or made a stroke of a sabre at them...”¹⁴² Benjamin Miller, an artillery gunner, witnessed one such scene: “It was horrid to see the savage Turks come into the camp with the poor Frenchmen’s heads tied together by the hair and thrown across the saddle, and one or two in each hand streaming with blood.”¹⁴³ Seeing the collected heads was disturbing enough, but, as Sergeant Robertson wrote, witnessing the act of decapitation was “most horrifying”:

Two French soldiers, who had fallen in the rear, either by fatigue or sickness, were overtaken by some Turks, who had been hovering about the retreating army like so many vultures. That they might get their penchant for cruelty fully indulged, and to protract the agonies of their victims, they had been cutting off their heads by the back of the neck with their sabres and long knives,When we came up and perceived the barbarous work

they would expose themselves to, by a neglect of discipline and good conduct. The manners, customs and religious opinions of the inhabitants are to be most rigidly respected. Plundering, or marauding will expose the offenders to immediate death.” See: Report on the Egyptian Campaign by Capt. Alexander Bryce, Royal Engineers, National Army Museum, 03-12-13-1.

¹⁴¹ Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire*, 138.

¹⁴² Anderson, *Journal*, 306.

¹⁴³ Benjamin Miller, *The Adventures of Serjeant Benjamin Miller whilst serving in the 4th Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Artillery. 1796-1815*. (Darlington, Heathfield: The Naval and Military Press, 1999), 20-22. See also: Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 95-96; Wilson, *History*, 57, 73; Walsh, *Journal*, 124; Evans Diary, 166, 170-173.

in which they had been engaged, we soon put an end to it; but it was too late to save the lives of the poor Frenchmen....¹⁴⁴

Robertson's use of language to describe the Ottomans as "vultures" with a "penchant for cruelty" highlights the perceived inhumanity of their actions, and there is a little indication they were an allied party. It is important to note the timing of these anti-Ottoman publications is significant. Most were published in the two years following the Egyptian campaign, when British-Ottoman relations were poor. Following the conclusion of the campaign in Egypt, Ottoman foreign policy undertook an about-face as they re-established close relations with France. Britain did not cooperate with the Ottomans in any further operations throughout the Napoleonic Wars. Anglo-Ottoman relations continued to decline until hostilities broke out from 1807-9. These events provided little reason for British soldiers to write favourably of their former allies in the years following the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁴⁵

Another reason for opposition to the massacres of Frenchmen was the several British deaths that resulted from it, supposedly the victims of mistaken identity. Once the British captured Rahmanieh in May, a store of French clothing was discovered. Such a find was gratefully received, for the soldiers' uniforms had become dreadfully worn after months of fighting. The new clothing resulted in a drastic change in appearance among some of the men, attired in French blue rather than British scarlet. Tragically, this "cost several men their lives.... for the Turks saw some of them straggling and took them for French soldiers..."¹⁴⁶ Further altercations between British and Ottoman soldiers occurred as the allies converged on Cairo. Such episodes might have been the result of the reward offered for severed heads. There was little physical difference between British and French soldiers, and isolated, unsuspecting redcoats could have

¹⁴⁴ Robertson, *Journal*, 23-24.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV: Occupation and Withdrawal, 1801-3', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.2 (1995): 329-330; John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1965), 26, 81-92; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 232.

¹⁴⁶ Miller, *Adventures*, 20, 28.

seemed a more convenient target.¹⁴⁷ Whatever the cause, Hutchinson's response conveyed his displeasure. Benjamin Miller wrote:

Our General made complaint to the Basham [Capitan Pasha] and told him if he did not cause the Turks to desist from their barbarous treatment to the British soldiers, that all the influence he had with them would not prevent the whole British army from turning against the Turks and destroy[ing] them all.¹⁴⁸

At the time this threat was made, the British were heavily reliant on the Ottomans to make up the numbers for the anticipated assault on Cairo. Although Hutchinson had a reputation as an unlikeable, cantankerous character, his forceful complaint to the Pasha demonstrates the extent to which the British resented the Ottomans' seeming penchant for violence. Had relations between the Ottoman and British commanders been damaged by this protestation, it could have jeopardized the campaign.¹⁴⁹

One may argue there is an element of hypocrisy in British criticism of Ottoman conduct in Egypt; British troops were also guilty of roughly treating Egyptians, particularly when short of provisions.¹⁵⁰ The soldiers took or destroyed much of the local produce as they marched through and camped in fields of corn, tobacco, melons, and poppies. There were also "many instances of petty depredations and pilfering". The Arabs who sold their produce at the Arabian market in the British camp had "their articles taken from them by 'fellows of the baser sort,' without any payment, and sometimes with abuse into the bargain."¹⁵¹ In addition, the prodigious resentment of

¹⁴⁷ For other altercations between the British and the Ottomans, see: Miller, *Adventures*, 21-22; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 190.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, *Adventures*, 21-22.

¹⁴⁹ Early in the campaign, the Pasha had insisted on Sidney Smith's removal following a quarrel; he made it clear he would not work with individuals whom he disliked or did not respect.

¹⁵⁰ John Childs, *Armies and Warfare in Europe 1648-1789* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 1-27.

¹⁵¹ Anon. [George Billanie], *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow: 1820), 126-127.

Ottoman head collecting is puzzling when one considers that these atrocities were not that different from the conventional legal punishments imposed on felons in Britain. David Tyrie, the last treason convict to be hung, drawn and quartered in 1782, was still in recent memory.¹⁵² Head collecting is slightly different from execution by beheading, but the two practices illustrate a comparable tolerance for spectacular physical violence. Between 1752 and 1832, judges could order that a murderer not only be hanged, but that the body be given afterwards to surgeons for dissection. One of the ways in which hospitals and medical schools could supplement their incomes was by selling souvenirs from the dissected remains. The tanned skin of executed murderers was used to bind commemorative pocket books or court proceedings, and there was a disturbingly high demand for such mementoes.¹⁵³ Moreover, in Britain there was occasionally a distinct lack of regard for the bodies of the deceased, particularly those of the lower classes, and lower ranked soldiers. Officers killed in action were buried with honours according to their rank, but the bodies of common rankers were buried with little or no ceremony in mass graves, or even left where they lay. The bones of the men and horses left on the battlefield at Waterloo were treated like some sort of industrial by-product: they were collected by English contractors, who had them ground down into fertilizer and sold to farmers in the north of England.¹⁵⁴

Although the sanctity of the human body was not rigorously enforced in Britain, British soldiers of the French Revolutionary Wars regarded the defilement of enemy corpses as a practice that belonged to an uncivilized, non-European society.¹⁵⁵ The soldiers were able to adopt this stance because Europeans had developed a view of themselves as conducting civilized and humane wars, by virtue of their character as a civilized people. However, the obedience of European armies to civilized conventions of war was conditional. States reserved the right to carry out reprisals if their opponents did not abide by these conventions. If one side mistreated prisoners of war,

¹⁵² Simon Harrison, *Dark Trophies, Hunting and the Enemy Body in Modern War* (Oxford: 2012), 34.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 32-36, 43; Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Abingdon, Oxon: Psychology Press, 2002), 271.

¹⁵⁴ Harrison, *Dark Trophies*, 36-37.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

the other could legitimately retaliate with transgressions of its own. This unspoken code of conduct provided European nations with the pretext to adopt more severe methods when fighting non-European enemies, who, it was assumed, did not adhere to European laws and customs of war. According to Simon Harrison, such crimes carried out by European military personal were almost exclusively against enemies who were perceived to belong to a different race. Although it was permissible and often deemed necessary to kill enemies who were of the same race, it was not acceptable to mutilate the bodies of these people. Heads or other body parts could only legitimately be taken from enemies who were socially and geographically remote, and classified as sub-human or semi-human. During the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, British soldiers fought Native American Indians, who employed irregular tactics that were alien to European soldiers. As a consequence, it became permissible or even necessary, when fighting “savage” enemies, to adopt their methods, imitating the savagery imputed to them and reciprocating it. Civilized behaviour towards opponents was only deemed feasible when fighting armies of the same type as one’s own.¹⁵⁶ If one accepts this argument, the British could have interpreted the decapitation of Frenchmen as a demonstration of Ottoman feelings of superiority over Europeans. Given Britain’s own sense of pre-eminence, this would have been a cause of irritation. Moreover, such an argument provided an excuse for French atrocities during their occupation of Egypt. One could argue that the French were merely adopting the uncivilized tactics of those they fought when Napoleon ordered the massacre of Ottoman prisoners at Jaffa.

One incident which seemingly confirmed British beliefs in the uncivilized nature of the Ottomans occurred on 22 October 1801. The Mamluk Beys, the *de facto* rulers of Egypt prior to the French invasion, were invited on board the Capitan Pasha’s flagship, anchored in Aboukir Bay, to negotiate a settlement on the government of Egypt. The Mamluks suspected a trap; they knew that the Ottomans longed to be rid of them as political rivals to the control of Egypt. They appealed to the British, who provided escorts to ensure their safety. However, when the Mamluks met the Ottoman ferrymen who would take them to the Pasha, it was explained that the British could not accompany them. At length, the Mamluks complied, convinced by the Pasha’s

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 4-5, 27-29, 40-41.

pledge of safety and security. Their trust was misplaced. While being ferried to Pasha's ship, the Mamluks were fired on by Ottoman gunboats. Nearly all in the Mamluk party were killed, and those wounded were taken prisoner. Within a few days, the Grand Vizir had arrested a large proportion of the remaining Mamluks at Cairo.¹⁵⁷ It is uncertain whether the Ottomans had intended to murder the Mamluks. In Robert Wilson's opinion, "if the massacre of them had been predetermined on, the Pacha and the Grand Vizir would assuredly have at once executed all within their power."¹⁵⁸ It was beyond doubt however, that some form of coercive measure had been planned.

According to Edward Ingram, in his series of articles on the geopolitics of the Egyptian campaign, this sequence of events illustrates the misunderstandings that arise between allied states with conflicting interests. General Hutchinson thought that the Ottomans had given him assurances about the safety of the Mamluks.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the Ottomans affirmed that the British had promised to assist them in recovering the government of Egypt, an agreement which they assumed gave them the freedom to deal with the Mamluks. Seemingly unknown to the Ottomans, Hutchinson had promised the Mamluks British protection. This left Hutchinson in a difficult position:

Never was a General in a more embarrassing situation than that of the Commander in Chief... General Hutchinson had frequently witnessed the cruelty and cowardice of the Turkish Army, and he had received essential services from the Beys & Mamelouks. He had moreover solemnly pledged himself to protect them. If he abandoned these chiefs to the mercy of their... enemies he forfeited his word;.... and yet if he

¹⁵⁷ Diary of Captain C. Fitzmaurice Hill, The British Library (BL) MSS Eur D108, pp.134-136, 139; James J. Auchmuty, 'Lachlan Macquarrie and the Anglo-Indian Expedition to Egypt', *Egyptian Society of Historical Studies* 2, (1952), 109-110, 130. See also: Wilson, *History*, 244-245.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, *History*, 244.

¹⁵⁹ Ingram, 'Geopolitics - occupation', 330; Hutchinson to Hobart, 21 September 1801, War Office (WO), 1/345, pp.470-473.

prevented the Turks from prosecuting their odious plan, he would probably involve his Country in a War with the Ottoman Porte.¹⁶⁰

Although there was certainly an element of misunderstanding between allied parties here, there was also a sense of discomfort among many British observers, at what they deemed to be Ottoman deception. Lachlan Macquarie, the deputy adjutant-general to the Anglo-Indian army, wrote that the “massacre” of the Mamluks was “A most shocking and disgraceful Scene”, a “vile and infamous *assassination*... in the most treacherous, cruel and cowardly manner”.¹⁶¹ Likewise, Charles Hill was unequivocal in his condemnation: “the diabolical act... appears to have been planned and ordered to be put into execution by that disgrace to all courts, the Divan of Constantinople”. Hill was concerned that it would bring shame on the British, for “they will be sure to be implicated in the eyes of Europe, either as accessorys [sic] to this villainous murder, or as having designs of keeping the country themselves, in case they quarrel with the Turks for having commuted it.”¹⁶² The Capitan Pasha, previously described by Hutchinson as the “honourable exception” to Ottoman depravity, was labelled the primary culprit:

Turkish Faith was pledged for their [the Mamluks’] safety and security. But the vile and cruel Capitan Pasha paid no regard to that faith, and took advantage of the credulity of these noble generous gallant men... It was certainly ordered by the cruel Captain Pasha... What a wretched cruel policy! – but it is all of a piece with the system of the weak and tyrannical Turkish Government for many years back – but more particularly in governing Egypt.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Anon., Narrative of the Proceedings of the Forces that left Bengal in December 1800 to Egypt, National Army Museum, 68-07-223-1.

¹⁶¹ Auchimuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 109-110.

¹⁶² Hill Diary, 136-7.

¹⁶³ Auchimuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 109-110.

Hutchinson, having given the Mamluks his protection, was livid. He promptly marched a brigade over to Aboukir, surrounded the Pasha's forces, and ordered Admiral Bickerton to anchor his fleet beside the Ottomans. According to Charles Hill, a stormy meeting between Hutchinson and the Ottoman admiral then took place.

Nothing could surpass the rage of the British Genl.... He called him a villain, an assassin, a murderer, and by every infamous epithet that naturally swelled in his heart on this occasion,... he told the Pacha, that he was so infamous a scoundrel, that he would have nothing more to say to him than this 'that if he did not immediately deliver over the persons of the Beys dead or alive, he would hang him at the head of his army, and put to death every man of them if anyone dare interfere with the execution'.¹⁶⁴

An anonymous narrative describes a similar series of events, claiming that "The General [Hutchinson] then acquainted the Captain Pacha that if the whole of the Beys were not given up in Ten Minutes, the British troops would attack his Camp & recover them by force."¹⁶⁵ Hutchinson dealt with the Grand Vizir in a similar manner. A few days after the massacre, he wrote to the Vizir "I have just heard with the greatest astonishment that notwithstanding your most sacred promises... [you are] obstinately persevering in a system of conduct which has already covered you with shame and opprobrium."¹⁶⁶ When the Vizir refused to release his captives, and had "the insolence to demand" that the British should hand over the beys living under their protection, Hutchinson insisted "that he should deliver up the Beys, or send him a declaration of war."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Hill Diary, 140-141; Bengal Narrative. See also: Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 81-92; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 232.

¹⁶⁵ Bengal Narrative.

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in 'Geopolitics - occupation', 330.

¹⁶⁷ Hill Diary, 144.

These were not mere threats; Hutchinson prepared his forces for hostilities with the Ottomans. Lachlan Macquarie recorded that

Lieut. Colonel Lloyd, with the Detachment of the 86th Regt., embarked this day [27 October] for Giza to reinforce that garrison; and thereby enable Colonel Ramsey to enforce the demand lately made by Lt. Genl Sir Jho. Hutchinson to the Grand Vizier at Cairo to give up all the Beys & Mamalukes recently arrested and imprisoned by him at that place.¹⁶⁸

One officer presumed “that should the Grand Vizir refuse to give up the Chiefs he had confined at Cairo, the British Army would immediately march to the Capital.”¹⁶⁹ The Anglo-Indian army received orders to be ready to move at the shortest notice. One officer wrote: “The troops who detested the Turks, were daily expecting orders to commence hostilities.”¹⁷⁰ General Baird, with part of his force at Rosetta, fortified the ports in the town. Having seen the work, Charles Hill reported: “upon the least disturbance, I am convinced General Baird will spare none of them. It is needless to say with what detestation and contempt we all look upon a Turk.”¹⁷¹ At the same time, Lt-Col. Harness was ordered to take possession of Fort Julien, a few miles north-east of Rosetta, in the “view of the probable rupture with the Turkish Government on account of the assassination of the Beys – an action of so much wanton barbarity and atrocity loudly calls for reparation and vengeance!”¹⁷²

The Vizir eventually released the Mamluks, and Anglo-Ottoman tensions died down; by December, Charles Hill wrote: that “every thing in regard to them has blown over”.¹⁷³ Yet this series of events epitomized the problems experienced with the

¹⁶⁸ Auchimuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 110.

¹⁶⁹ Bengal Narrative.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Hill Diary, 139.

¹⁷² Auchimuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 110.

¹⁷³ Hill Diary, 145.

Ottomans throughout the campaign. British soldiers were tired of the Ottomans, and looked forward to leaving Egypt. Hill wrote

God send us out of this disgraceful country! For I really believe there is not a man, not a man upon the face of the Earth, however abominable, bloody, and treacherous but a Turk is capable of and does commit whatever he has it in his power so to do – The Devil take them all.¹⁷⁴

In a private letter to his sister in law dated 28 February 1802, Lachlan Macquarie expressed himself forcibly on the desire of the army to evacuate Egypt, especially owing to the methods of government and of warfare adopted by their Turkish allies. “We now daily hope to receive the happy tidings (of a definite Peace Treaty) and at the same time for us to *evacuate* this evil country – of which we are all most heartily tired.”¹⁷⁵

British and French cultural identification

Perhaps because of their opposition to Ottoman methods of war and conduct of rule in Egypt, British military personnel developed a closer cultural affinity with French soldiers during their time in Egypt. Despite having waged war on one another for a total of fifty-five years in the eighteenth century, British and French soldiers shared common cultural assumptions, which probably played a part in the British criticism of the executions of Frenchmen. Both were organized and clothed in similar ways,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 137.

¹⁷⁵ Auchmuty, ‘Lachlan Macquarie’, 131. Another individual who expressed a similar opinion was Colonel Robert Anstruther. As the quartermaster-general to the expeditionary force that landed at Aboukir Bay, he dealt closely with the Ottomans. He had been sent ahead of the force in December 1800 to acquire supplies for the campaign from the Ottomans. By April 1800, he was weary of the difficulties they had posed for him, writing, “One must feel some regret that there is a probability of its returning to the horrible government of the Turks”. See: Colonel Robert Anstruther to Colonel Brownrigg, 20 April 1801, *The Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, esq., Preserved at Dropmore*, ed. John Fortescue (London: The Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1892-1910), vol.7, 10.

lived under similar conditions, and shared similar conventions of warfare.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, both armies recognized the legitimacy of their opponents, and treated prisoners fairly. As Catriona Kennedy has argued, this indicates that although the shared code of civilized conduct came under severe pressure during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, it remained largely in place.¹⁷⁷ This shared code of conduct complicates David Bell's arguments in *The First Total War*. He asserts that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars witnessed a transformation of the nature of war, from a limited mode of warfare of the eighteenth century, into a state of 'total war', whereby all of society's resources – its economy, culture and people – were mobilized. Bell claims these wars saw the breakdown of traditional transnational codes of honour that had characterized the wars of the ancien regime.¹⁷⁸ Although the enmity between Britain and France could be easily sustained on opposite sides of the channel, the narratives of the soldiers in Egypt demonstrate this was more difficult to maintain when fighting in an unfamiliar land inhabited by non-European people. The associations British and French soldiers formed with one another also suggests that Britons were not always culturally opposed to the French Catholic 'other' during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, as Linda Colley has argued.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 33. See also: Childs, *Armies and Warfare*; Jeremy Black, 'Eighteenth-Century Warfare Reconsidered', *War in History* 1, (1994): 215-232.

¹⁷⁷ Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, 116-117, 129-130.

¹⁷⁸ David A. Bell, *The First Total War, Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007).

¹⁷⁹ The awareness of a shared identity and shared set of ideas between the British and the French is also evident in the tendency for the soldiers to use evidence from foreign authors in writing their accounts. Francis Maule used numerous extracts from the letters of French soldiers in Egypt, as well as from the French travellers Volney, Savary, Vivant Denon and C. S. Sonnini. See: Maule, *Memoirs*, 130-151. For other citations of French authors, see: Wilson, *History*, 62-63, 72, 252. In the medical sphere, George Power, assistant surgeon to 23rd Regiment of Foot, drew on work by Volney, the French practitioner Antonio Savaresi and the sixteenth century Italian physician, Prosper Alpinus whilst writing his publication. See: Kelly, 'Medicine and the Egyptian Campaign', 334-335. There are several other examples of British authors citing the work of foreigners, particularly Frenchmen. The Scottish physician Henry Dewar's work on diseases encountered in Egypt makes frequent reference to French practitioners, particularly Renée Desgenettes, Dominique-Jean Larrey and Savaresi. Daniel Whyte, a naval surgeon who travelled to the Levant prior to the Egyptian campaign, reviewed the works of the "Franko-Egyptian" practitioners, including Savaresi and another French army doctor by the name of Bruant.

The sense of a shared identity and code of civilized conduct between the British and French is apparent in a series of remarkable events during the siege of Acre in 1799. Before the hostilities got under way, Napoleon sent a request for an exchange of prisoners to Sidney Smith, commander of the British detachment of marines assisting the Ottoman defenders. Smith agreed, and in a chivalric act characteristic of his persona, he informed Napoleon that he had retained one French officer, Delasalle, who Smith had found in the dungeons of Acre, badly beaten. Smith told Napoleon he had removed Delasalle from Acre to his ship, adding,

It would be much better not to complain to Djeddar [the Pasha of Acre] about his mistreatment, for this would merely remind him of the matter, and make him wish to lay hands on him once more, given the present antagonism which Djeddar and the Turkish have towards the French.¹⁸⁰

Smith undoubtedly saved Delasalle's life. The governor of Acre, Ahmed Pasha, better known as "Al-Jezzar" (The Butcher), would have certainly ordered the Frenchman's death. Jezzar had acquired a well-deserved reputation for cruelty, ruthlessness and violent Francophobia.¹⁸¹ After the initial French assault, he ordered all French prisoners in his dungeons strangled. The French were grateful for Smith's compassion amidst increasingly savage siege warfare, and reciprocated. During a sortie against the French lines, some 60 British marines were killed or wounded. As Napoleon recalled in his memoirs, "The wounded Englishmen were looked after as if they were French, and these prisoners camped in the midst of our army as if they were from Normandy or Picardy; the rivalry of the two nations had disappeared at this great distance from their homeland amidst such barbaric people." For Paul Strathern, in his

¹⁸⁰ John Barrow, *Life and Correspondence of Admiral Sir Sidney Smith – vol. II* (London: 1848), 338-340; Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, 'The Greatest Glory'* (London: Vintage, 2008), 342.

¹⁸¹ J. Christopher Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2005 repr.), 147, 290; Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 185-186, 337. Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon the Great*, (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2015), 192.

narrative history of Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns, these chivalric exchanges suggest that the war in the Levant, for the French at least, was interpreted as a war waged between Europeans and people of the Levant.¹⁸²

These sentiments of cultural affinity with the French were shared by members of the naval blockade squadron at Alexandria. On 2 September 1798, HMS *Emerald*, a 36-gun frigate, with the larger *Swiftsure* in close support, gave chase to a small French cutter, *L'Anemone* of 6 guns and 70 men. Cooper Williams and John Lee watched the events unfold on board the *Swiftsure*. To prevent capture, *L'Anemone* grounded on the shore a few miles west of Alexandria. This proved a fatal mistake, as "an armed body of Arabs" appeared on the coast, and approached the wreckage of the French cutter. From the wild gestures and signs made by the French sailors towards the British, the crew of the *Swiftsure* concluded that the Frenchmen would meet a grisly end if left ashore. Boats were swiftly dispatched to retrieve the hapless Frenchmen, and the atmosphere on board the *Swiftsure* grew tense, as Lee described.

It was announced to our young Mid. that the only fresh meat dinner that could for a long time be expected was ready; but although some went below, our young sailor's anxiety, to see the fate of these poor Frenchmen, far exceeded the desire to partake of the last fresh meat meal that was for some months to be

¹⁸² Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 344. There were several other acts of chivalry on the part of the British as they sought to protect Frenchmen from the wrath of the Ottomans during the siege of Acre. In one of the final assaults, the leading section of the French attacking column was cut off. François Bernoyer, a French civilian in charge of the design and production of uniforms in Egypt, watched as they barricaded themselves inside a mosque, where "these brave soldiers decided to stand their ground to the last man. . . . Admiral Sidney Smith was moved by sentiments of humanity and generosity to intervene, and lost no time in coming to the rescue of our brave soldiers with a detachment of English soldiers. He called upon our grenadiers to surrender themselves and in return he promised them protection: they trusted him and this amiable officer saved the life of 200 men." See: Bernoyer, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 362.

enjoyed; and he therefore remained on deck, to witness the result of this distressing occurrence.¹⁸³

What is remarkable about this episode was the substantial efforts made by the British to save as many Frenchmen as possible from the Arabs. Both Williams and Lee recalled the extraordinary actions of a midshipman from the *Emerald*, who, having tied a rope around his waist, threw himself overboard and swam ashore. He instructed as many Frenchmen as he could to grab the rope and make for the frigate, and by this method saved the captain of the cutter and four of his crew. Others were hauled off through the surf by boats, yet only a minority were saved; the Arabs had captured the majority before the British arrived ashore. Williams recalled what happened next: “We perceived that the officers and men suffered themselves to be stripped without resistance. Many were murdered in cold blood, and apparently without any cause...”¹⁸⁴

Three years later, the chivalrous treatment of French soldiers continued in the Egyptian campaign. General Hutchinson angrily protested the execution of Frenchmen to the Capitan Pasha, who ordered his soldiers to take prisoners alive and “they should have 6 dollars instead of 5.” This had seemingly little impact on the number of decapitations, as it was traditional (and perhaps more practical) for the Ottomans to collect heads of their enemies for payment.¹⁸⁵ On occasion, British officers took matters into their own hands. According to Benjamin Miller, “our general” upon seeing “a Turk going to kill some poor wounded Frenchmen... ordered one of our Dragoons to go and cut him down”.¹⁸⁶

Amiable though such sentiments may have been, Paul Strathern suggests that this chivalrous treatment of enemy European soldiers exposes the unthinking racism of the period. Europeans saw themselves as superior; they were worthy of such treatment, and were capable of appreciating such marks of civilization amidst the

¹⁸³ Lee, *Memoirs*, 115-116. See also: Williams, *Voyage*, 93-94.

¹⁸⁴ Williams, *Voyage*, 94-95; Lee, *Memoirs*, 115-116.

¹⁸⁵ Wilson, *History*, 73; Miller, *Adventures*, 21-22.

¹⁸⁶ Miller, *Adventures*, 20. See also: Wilson, *History*, 99; Evans Diary, 137-139.

carnage of war. No such sentiments were extended towards the Ottoman army. It was assumed that the Ottomans did not share or respect the unspoken codes of honour that existed between British and French soldiers.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the associations British and French soldiers formed with one another demonstrates that their perceptions of Near-Eastern peoples can be treated collectively, as part of a wider European view. This sense of a European awareness was far from the modern form, and was generally limited to the more powerful western European nations. As Victor Kiernan argues, Europeans of ‘superior’ countries thought of ‘inferior’ Europeans and non-Europeans in very similar terms. The Czechs, the Spanish and the Italians, were all at one time or another regarded as backward, inferior and little different from non-Europeans.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

When the British soldiers and sailors left Egypt, their verdict on the Ottomans was very similar to prominent civilian travel authors who had written on this subject. Both civilian and military authors regarded Ottoman society as inferior and corrupt, yet the way in which military personnel reached this conclusion differed considerably from their civilian counterparts. Martial characteristics and performance in combat were vital elements in British servicemen’s appraisals of the Ottomans. The alleged warlike nature and appearance of the Ottomans was one of the only elements praised by British soldiers, and it provided a basis from which observers could critique various elements of British society. However, there was considerable disappointment at the thought that this martial potential was going to waste in the Ottomans’ degraded society. Some of the problems the British encountered with the Ottomans were typical of military alliances throughout this period, but many were not. Within British servicemen’s writings, there is a strong sense of a divide between British and Ottoman methods of warfare. The lack of distinctive ‘western’ features in the Ottoman army meant that the Ottomans were seen in a poor light despite the success of the campaign. This divide focused on discipline and organization: the chaotic masses of the Ottoman military were thought to be totally inferior to the disciplined, mechanical ranks of the British army. Ottoman individuals known to have tried to westernize their forces, such as the Capitan Pasha, were seen in more positive terms, but the British were blind to

¹⁸⁷ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 362.

¹⁸⁸ Kiernan, *Lords of Human Kind*, 29.

many of the improvements the Ottomans had made, such as the introduction of the *Nizâm-ı Cedid*. Most significantly, the British failed to appreciate the differences in the Ottoman system of military command. There was no permanent Ottoman standing army; the government's preference for the temporary recruitment of militias gave it a greater flexibility to respond against threats, but at the expense of the discipline and organization familiar to the British. Unaware of this fundamental difference, British soldiers evaluated the Ottomans based on the principles of their own military system.

A second dividing factor was the level of violence in Ottoman society. Through the plundering of the Egyptians, the execution of Frenchmen, and the attempt to trap and destroy the Mamluk Beys, Ottoman conduct in war came to be seen by the British as uncivilized and savage. By contrast, British, or European, methods of war were more refined, restrained and bound by unofficial conventions. Again, such a view derived from the British soldiers' failure to understand how the Ottoman army was organized. Plunder and the collection of heads and other body parts were the primary ways by which Ottoman soldiers were paid. These men were not motivated primarily by bloodlust as the British thought, but by a need for money. In opposing the excesses of Ottoman violence, the British developed a stronger cultural affinity with the French. Although at war with one another, the British and French prided themselves on exchanging acts of charity and civility. They did not consider themselves deserving of the savage treatment which the French prisoners had endured at the hands of the Ottomans and Egyptians during their occupation of Egypt. This suggests that the British military were not always culturally opposed to the French Catholic 'other', as Linda Colley has asserted. One could even argue for the existence of a wider European identity, which saw itself as superior to other non-European peoples.

5.

A “generous” but “cruel” race: British military perceptions of the Mamluks in Egypt

The Mamalukes are a brave and generous race, but are cruel and revengeful.¹

This comment, written by Captain Thomas Walsh in his *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt* presents an apparent contradiction. It makes little sense to refer to the Mamluks, the former rulers of Egypt, as both generous and cruel within the same sentence, but Walsh’s view was not an anomaly. He encapsulates the opinion of British servicemen towards the Mamluks during their time in Egypt. This seemingly paradoxical view is only present in the writings of military personnel, and this chapter will explain how and why these soldiers and sailors arrived at this judgement. It derived largely from the two dominant influences on their writing; the first of which was the negative stereotypes associating the Mamluks with despotism and effeminacy, which was prominent in civilian accounts of Egypt published before the 1801 campaign. The second was the Mamluks’ warrior image. Their appearance, and the skill with which the Mamluks controlled their horses and wielded their weapons, gave them a formidable reputation as a body of cavalry, at a time when the British were in desperately short supply of this resource. Much like its predecessor, this chapter will shed some light on the unique and distinctive ways in which military servicemen imagined and judged other peoples and cultures. It will provide an

¹ Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt: Including Descriptions of that Country, and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmorice and Macri* (London: 1803), 172. There are several alternative spellings of ‘Mamluk’. I have employed the most commonly accepted variation: ‘Mamluk’. The different spellings within contemporary quotations have not been altered.

examination of western perceptions of Mamluk warfare at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a period often overlooked by scholars of military orientalism.

First however, it is necessary to explain who exactly the Mamluks were. Egypt had been effectively under their control prior to the French invasion in 1798. The word *Mamluk* signifies “slave” or “bought man” in Arabic; in this case the latter is closer to reality as the Mamluks were not slaves in the ordinary meaning of the term. The Mamluks first appeared in Egypt in about 1230, when the Ayyubite Sultan Al-Malik purchased 12,000 youths from the Caucasus to form the elite corps of his army. Within twenty years, the Mamluks had moulded themselves into a formidable fighting force and, after murdering Al-Malik’s successor, established their own dynasty in Egypt.² The Mamluks organized themselves as a military caste of warriors, who replenished their numbers, which fluctuated between 10,000 and 12,000, by purchasing boys from the Caucasus, usually of Georgian, Circassian or Armenian origin, from remote mountain villages who had little contact with civilization. These boys were commonly eight to ten years old, and were immediately subjected to a fierce disciplinary regime aimed at instilling warrior virtues. Once a young Mamluk received a military command, he became a free man. It was these men who formed the Mamluk aristocracy, and they looked down contemptuously on those they ruled. There was very little miscegenation; the Mamluks only took wives of Caucasus origin, specifically imported for the purpose. These marriages seldom produced children, owing to high infant mortality and the almost universal practice of Mamluk wives aborting their pregnancies in order to preserve, so they believed, their youth and beauty. Hence the Mamluks remained totally reliant on the importation of youths.³

In their official capacity, the Mamluks were vassals of the Ottoman Empire after the conquest of Egypt in 1517. However, in the following centuries, the Mamluks had

² J. Christopher Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2005 repr.), 7-8; Linda S. Northrup, ‘The Bahri Mamluk sultanate, 1250-1390’ in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, volume I: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 242-289; Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt, ‘The Greatest Glory’* (London: Vintage, 2008), 10-11.

³ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 10-12; Jean-Claude Garcin, ‘The regime of the Circassian Mamluks’, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, volume I: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 290-317; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 7-8.

informally re-established their rule over the country at the expense of the Ottoman pasha, but had refrained from declaring independence. Preoccupied with defending its borders against the Austrians and the Russians, the Ottoman government had no cause for interference as long as there was a semblance of peace and the tribute was regularly paid. By the end of the eighteenth century this had degenerated into a farcical situation whereby the pasha had no real authority and remained under virtual house arrest. Should the pasha attempt to interfere with this arrangement, the Mamluks would request the Porte to send a replacement, and one would duly be sent.⁴

The Mamluks' constant and relentless combat training from childhood produced warriors who were wonderfully gifted in hand-to-hand fighting and horsemanship, yet these men had little knowledge of, or interest in, the means by which Egypt was governed. They enjoyed luxurious splendour, living off the extortionate taxes they levied on the fellahin, the local peasantry, which often amounted to three fifths of the produce. The regime they maintained kept the population downtrodden and allowed little economic or cultural development. Under Mamluk rule there was no provision for saving water or maintaining the irrigation canals upon which the agriculture depended. After a series of low yearly floodwaters in the Nile delta, hunger and epidemic became frequent occurrences. Decreases in the population left swathes of land in the countryside unworked, which would produce no crops for the following seasons.⁵ The Mamluks kept themselves occupied with constant infighting, as they overthrew one another in a succession of revolutions. With the focus largely on political scheming, the territory outside a bey's immediate domain was of little interest to him, which meant that the fierce roaming Bedouin tribesmen had free rein over the extensive wilderness and desert regions of the country, hindering the development of trade.⁶ Defeat by the French at the Battle of the Pyramids on 21 July 1798 effectively ended Mamluk control of Egypt. The Mamluks were reduced to

⁴ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 11; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 7-8; Shafik Ghorbal, *The Beginnings of the Egyptian Question and the Rise of Mehemet Ali* (London: AMS Press, 1928), 1-2.

⁵ Afaf Lufti Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 46-49; John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1965), 7. See also: Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 12, 112; Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁶ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 12; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 8.

groups of nomadic cavalry, which continued to harass French troops until they allied with the British expeditionary force in 1801.

Images of Mamluk despotism

The Mamluks' mode of rule prior to the French invasion led authors of contemporary civilian travel literature to associate them with oriental stereotypes, many of which had been inspired by Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*. John Antes, John Remmey and the French writers the Comte de Volney and Claude-Étienne Savary all denounced Mamluk rule, emphasizing its cruelty, depravity, effeminacy and despotism.⁷ Volney, perhaps the most popular travel writer to Egypt in the eighteenth century, was particularly severe in his criticism:

Ignorant and superstitious from education, they become ferocious from the murders they commit, perfidious from frequent cabals, seditious from tumults, and base, deceitful, and corrupted by every species of debauchery.... Their only employment is to procure money; and the method considered as the most simple, is to seize it wherever it is to be found, to wrest it by violence from its possessor, and to impose arbitrary contributions every moment on the villages...⁸

Due to the popularity of Levant-based travel books, and the keen interest military men displayed in this literature, it is unsurprising that British servicemen could be heavily critical of the Mamluks. According to Captain Thomas Walsh, the taxes levied by the Mamluks “often oblige the Fellahs [peasantry] to abandon their houses, and take refuge among the inhabitants of the Desert. Numerous villages, totally deserted, are

⁷ See: John Antes, *Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Egyptians* (London: 1800); W.G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798*, sec edn (London: 1806); John Remmey, *An Account of the Present State of Egypt* (New York: 1799); Constantin-François Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785* (London: 1787), 2 vols; Claude Étienne Savary, *Letters on Egypt* (London: 1787), 2 vols.

⁸ Volney, *Travels*, vol. 1, 185-187.

seen all over Egypt; sad examples of these vexations.”⁹ Major Francis Maule wrote, “Their despotism and tyranny were so dreaded by the Egyptians, that, in the first instance, they hailed the advance of the French army, and were happy at the defeat of the Mamelouks.”¹⁰

Perhaps the most vehement critic of the Mamluks among the British forces in 1801 was George Baldwin, who had served as the British consul in Egypt, from 1786-98. Although not a military man, Baldwin’s experience of Egypt and his fluency in Arabic made him an invaluable asset to the expedition. He advised Ralph Abercromby on topographical matters, and, shortly after the landing, was made responsible for the requisitioning of provisions from the local population, and the management of the Arabian market that was established at the British camp.¹¹ Baldwin wrote extensively about the Mamluks in Egypt, strongly associating their rule with cruelty and despotism. A selection of letters and essays written about Egypt can be found in his *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt*, published on his return to Britain in late 1801. His work is easily one of the most detailed sources available in English on the Mamluk government prior to the French occupation. In it, Baldwin described the Mamluks as:

a set of swineherds, vagabonds, any thing; kidnapped in the mountains of Mingrelia, Circassia, Georgia, and brought young into Egypt; sold, circumcised, and trained to the career of glory; their road to honour, apostacy; their title to power, assassination and a contempt of death: no stability, no order, no character

⁹ Walsh, *Journal*, 273. See also: Lieut. Aeneas Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces Which sailed from the Downs, in April 1800...* (London: 1802), 454.

¹⁰ Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), 121-122.

¹¹ James Mew, ‘Baldwin, George (1744–1826)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Accessed 25 May 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1165>.

among them, but a constant thirst and jealousy of command.¹²

One of the most interesting documents within Baldwin's *Recollections* is 'Speculations on the resources of Egypt', a memorandum written between 1773 and 1785 on the request of the India Board. In it, Baldwin wrote of the constant infighting among rival Mamluks, which, encouraged by the Ottoman Pasha resident in Egypt, had brought about political and economic decay.

Hence the perpetual commotions in the government of Egypt.... hence the continual fluctuation in the tide of power; hence the security and affection of the state.... Ever since the establishment of this incongruous government, these have been the invariable effects of it. The Pasha inciting disorders and conspiracies among the Beys; the Beys expelling the Pasha in return, and the government subsisting inviolate in the midst of it.¹³

One of the major allegations made against the Mamluks was their ignorance of the ways of governing. Such a fault, it was supposed, derived from their upbringing which focused on military training to the exclusion of all else.¹⁴ Unable to read, "they are consequently obliged to leave their interest in the hands of the people." Each Mamluk employed administrators to tender to their regions but there was no communication or cooperation between these groups. Without this the Egyptian economy could not properly develop.¹⁵ Hence, the limited education of the Mamluks seemed to hinder the progress of Egyptian society, a state of affairs which exasperated Baldwin. During the 1790s, many foreign consuls left the country, weary of the continued economic

¹² George Baldwin, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt, with a Narrative of the Ever-Memorable British Campaign in the spring of 1801* (London: 1802), 188-189.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 189-90.

¹⁴ Ghorbal, *Egyptian Question*, 2; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 8.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Journal*, 455.

and social decay. Baldwin left in March 1798, and reflecting on Egypt after his departure, he wrote:

I do not conceive that Egypt can be much longer tenable by the Franks [Europeans] owing to the excessive tyranny of [the Mamluk ruler] Murad Bey who latterly had given them to understand... that Capitulations mean nothing to him, and that he shall extract and extract, as in fact he has done, without respect to anyone. The same spirit invades the whole body of the Mamluks.¹⁶

Criticism of ignorance, or lack of education, was a popular topic of discussion throughout the eighteenth century, but it is significant that these ideas were expressed in the British army, where signature literacy in some regiments was as low as forty per cent.¹⁷ Baldwin's view arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of Mamluk society. A 'western' style of rule was of far less use to the Mamluks in a country where displays of force were the traditional pathway to, and maintenance of, power. The political situation in Egypt made the constant use of force seem a legitimate mode of rule. The Ottoman pasha of Egypt remained technically at the head of the administration of the country, but his power had long since eroded. Real authority was divided between the Mamluk Shaykh-al-Balad (Governor of Cairo) and the Mamluk Amir-al-Hajj (leader of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, but effectively the commander of the army). In the 1790s, Ibrahim and Murad Bey occupied these two positions, and both constantly vied for ascendancy over each other. The infighting between these men and their followers dominated Mamluk rule and prevented either

¹⁶ George Baldwin to Spencer Smith, 19 April 1798, F.O. Turkey 31, quoted in Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 12; Ghorbal, *Egyptian Question*, 2; Mew, 'Baldwin, George'.

¹⁷ Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 31. See also: John E. Cookson, 'Regimental Worlds: Interpreting the Experience of British Soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars,' in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 23-42.

side from consolidating their power.¹⁸ Any sign of weakness, such as a relaxation of coercive measures, or a more liberal policy, could be capitalized upon by political rivals, or lead to attempts by the Ottomans to re-establish their authority.

Apart from their cruelty and illiteracy, British servicemen commonly accused the Mamluks of effeminacy and depravity. This image was conveyed effectively by one staff officer, who wrote:

You will be surprised when I tell you that several French soldiers have deserted to the Mamelukes!!! How they can be so base, and so lost to manly feeling, I cannot conceive; for they subject themselves not only to everything that is *humiliating*, but *disgraceful to human nature*.¹⁹

The use of the phrase “disgraceful to human nature” might refer to a suspicion of collusion between the French and the Mamluks over the future of Egypt. The French had a history of fraternizing with various factions that were in a position to potentially damage the British Empire. Two years previously, Britain had been alarmed by talk of an alliance between France and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Fearing an attack on British India, forces of the East India Company declared war on Tipu, storming his fortress at Seringapatam and killing him. The officer was certainly concerned with what the French might have planned should they remain in Egypt, especially since the Mamluks had no hereditary succession:

I should hope and believe that we will not suffer these [French] soldiers to remain in the country, for their stay would be replete with mischief, and indeed of the most serious kind: in truth there is no knowing what the extent of the evil would be; for, as any individual is

¹⁸ Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 7-12.

¹⁹ Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 82.

liable to become chief of the [Mamluk] Beys, why should not one of these intriguing Frenchmen, *who possibly may be sent on purpose*, gain such ascendancy.... and not only incline them towards the French, but ensure their alliance and active assistance at any future period.²⁰

However, the language used by the officer in the letter – “humiliating”, “disgraceful” and the reference to “manly feeling” – is most probably an allusion to the popular suspicion that the Mamluks practiced homosexual acts, seen at the time as abhorrent to gentlemanly sensibilities. In this context, the officer’s shock that Frenchmen chose to join the Mamluks is more easily understood. References to homosexual acts among the Mamluks can be found in other memoirs: Thomas Walsh wrote that they were “addicted to the most detestable and unnatural crimes, which is extremely prevalent in parts of the Turkish empire.”²¹ Reflecting on the fall of the Mamluk government at the hands of the French, Robert Wilson wrote: “Nor should Europe lament their fall. The government of the Mamelukes was unnatural and oppressive” and “their habits and customs degrading to manhood.”²² Such accusations were not completely unfounded; there had been a prevalence of same-gender sex without moral censure in the Mamluk military system in medieval Egypt.²³ However, the popular oriental stereotype employed by travel writers throughout the eighteenth century, that emphasized effeminacy and debauchery, was certainly exaggerated. It was a portrayal expressed both in writing and painting, and was not limited to British observers.²⁴ Volney, in his *Travels*, wrote that the Mamluks were:

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Walsh, *Journal*, 172.

²² Robert Thomas Wilson, *History of the British Expedition to Egypt; to which is subjoined a sketch of the present state of that country and its means of defence...* (London: 1803), 246-247.

²³ Patricia Owens, ‘Torture, Sex and Military Orientalism’, *Third World Quarterly* 31, no.7 (2010): 1042.

²⁴ One example of this representation in painting is Anne-Louis Girodet’s painting *The revolt of Cairo* (1810). It depicts a scene during the Egyptian uprising against the French occupation in October 1798. It contrasts the dignified, unsuspecting, brave, benevolent French soldier with the savagery, voluptuousness, pompousness and effeminacy of the Egyptian Pasha and his naked slave.

... above all, addicted to that abominable wickedness which was at all times the vice of the Greeks and of the Tartars, and is the first lesson they receive from their masters. It is difficult to account of this taste, when we consider that they all have women, unless we suppose they seek in one sex, that poignancy of refusal which they do not permit the other.²⁵

These comments on the inherent wickedness and debauchery of the Mamluks implied that colonial intervention in Egypt would be easily possible and beneficial for mankind. George Baldwin provides one of the best examples. In spite of the damage wrought by the Mamluks on the country, he asserted that Egypt's pivotal position gave it enormous trading potential. In letters to senior officials in London, he made numerous sweeping statements that described the country as "a resort of all traders of the world", and "a common centre of universal commerce."²⁶ A similar message was contained within a series of letters Baldwin wrote in autumn 1801 to Henry Dundas, and published in his *Recollections*.

If Egypt could be improved in any proportion to the susceptibility of improvement, I would not hesitate to say that we might reckon upon a circulation of two thousand ships of commerce in one year from Egypt to the ports of England. Do we forget what Egypt was?... If it can be held to England, she may talk of jewels in her crown, but a brighter than this she will not possess.²⁷

See: Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire, Art in the Service of French Imperialism 1798-1836* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 69.

²⁵ Volney, *Travels*, vol. 1, 185.

²⁶ Baldwin, *Recollections*, 8-9, 184; Mew, 'Baldwin, George'.

²⁷ Baldwin, *Recollections*, 174-176.

One could argue that Baldwin's grim appraisal of the Mamluks and his fanciful speculations on Egyptian trade were the rantings of a frustrated man. By 1801, when Baldwin's *Recollections* were published, the former consul had much to be bitter about. Baldwin had first visited Egypt almost thirty years previously, to explore possible connections between India and Egypt via the Red Sea. He saw the country as an untapped centre of trade, ripe for exploitation. According to his own account, his initial investigation into a trade route promised great success.²⁸ In 1774, under the auspices of the East India Company, Baldwin sought to establish trade with India and Britain, organizing schedules and quick turnarounds. Between 1776 and 1778 the trade route blossomed, but prosperity was short lived. The success of Baldwin's business competed with that of the Ottoman Empire, and the Sultan issued a firman forbidding the traffic of European ships via Suez. In May 1779 a caravan from Suez was attacked, some merchants died and others were imprisoned. European trade via Suez came to an abrupt halt. With his commercial venture in tatters, Baldwin set out for India, hoping to restore his fortunes, but was robbed and wounded by bandits on his journey and returned to England in 1780. Six years later he embarked for Egypt again, this time as Consul, but was unable to further any commercial ventures in the face of Mamluk opposition.²⁹ Although much of Baldwin's writing on Egypt may well have been an attempt to recoup his lost investments, the language he used, and the stubbornness with which he continued to assert his opinion, suggests he genuinely believed what he wrote. Irrespective of his motivations for writing, Baldwin's portrayal of the Mamluks, and his conviction in the commercial potential of Egypt, provided an overt rationale for British colonial intervention. Other military personnel, such as Robert Wilson, who lacked Baldwin's financial attachment to the country, also commented on the commercial promise of a pro-British government in Egypt. "Egypt would soon again recover by commerce considerable splendour, if a good government did but direct the resources... to what vast extent would it expand, when cherished and protected by the regulations of an adequate government."³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4; Mew, 'Baldwin, George'.

²⁹ Mew, 'Baldwin, George'.

³⁰ Wilson, *History*, 234–235.

Martial images of the Mamluks

Although the Mamluks were considered cruel, depraved and despotic by British military observers, an argument can be made that these negative stereotypes were highly conditional. They altered according to circumstances and military imperatives. Irrespective of their alleged personal character, there was a widespread British appreciation of the Mamluks' contribution to the success of the Egyptian campaign. Their praise outweighed their negative assessment of the Mamluks, and this sets military writing apart from civilian travel authors. The differing perceptions of the Mamluks in military and civilian writing, reflect the unique conditions to which soldiers were subject on campaign. Before the Mamluks joined the British in June, the latter had been in desperate need of cavalry. They had hoped to obtain 1,200 mounts before the campaign, but had only managed to acquire 450, all of which were small in size and not suitable for a cavalry charge.³¹ Even before losses during the campaign are considered, the British cavalry was severely limited.

Aside from this, British cavalry at this point in the wars was largely inferior to that of the French. Standards of training and organization for both men and horses were poor; a regular system of manoeuvre was introduced in 1795, and standard sword exercises and trumpet calls the following year, but these were not directed to the requirements of active service. Even simple manoeuvres were made complex; for example, when a regiment in line changed its facing by pivoting on the central squadron, 35 verbal commands were required. Part of the reason for the lack of control in cavalry troops was the sacrifice of order for speed in training. As a consequence of this, British cavalymen were generally less stable on their mounts than their continental rivals; many injuries and deaths were caused by falls and accidents in unexpected circumstances, even on ceremonial occasions. Moreover, unlike most continental armies, the British cavalry received no training in scouting and skirmishing before 1805, and these vital skills had to be learned entirely on campaign. On the continent, cavalry were given specialized roles; heavy cavalry was deployed almost entirely in shock tactics, whereas outpost duties and scouting were reserved for light cavalry. Many British cavalry regiments failed to appreciate the significance of these

³¹ Anderson, *Journal*, 194; Wilson, *History*, 21; Walsh, *Journal*, 53; Piers Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt, The End of Napoleon's Conquest* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010), 19.

specialized roles: apart from their titles, there was no difference at all between the seven regiments of Dragoon Guards, and the six regiments of Dragoons. Generally, in the British army, both light and heavy cavalry were expected to undertake all cavalry roles. This lack of specialization harmed their efficiency and effectiveness.³²

The inexperience of cavalry troops added to these problems. The training for new cavalymen was relatively short, and they required a period of active service before they could be considered proficient. Insufficient training was not the only failing; there were a high number of inadequate officers. Purchased commissions into cavalry regiments was popular, thus, before the system was reformed in 1802, twenty per cent of cavalry officers were under fifteen years of age. Some were simply unsuited to leadership. One of the most infamous examples was George 'Beau' Brummell, a crony of the Prince of Wales. He served in the Prince's regiment, the 10th Light Dragoons, from 1795-8, and was so neglectful of his duty that he allegedly was unable to recognize his own troops.³³

Although the army reforms from 1795-1809 substantially improved the effectiveness of the cavalry, they continued to suffer from a lack of control and discipline.³⁴ It was almost impossible for them to reform themselves to execute fresh orders after an attack had been made, and Wellington was acutely aware that his cavalry was a weapon that could only be used once in battle. At Waterloo, the Royal Scots Greys, after reinforcing the crumbling infantry line, famously charged the French artillery battery without orders and were bloodily repulsed. Wellington complained during the battle: "Our officers of cavalry have acquired a trick of galloping at everything. They never consider the situation, never think of manoeuvring before an enemy, and never keep back or provide a reserve."³⁵ Years later, in a letter to John Russell, Wellington maintained this view when reflecting on the performance of the British cavalry during the wars:

³² Philip Haythornthwaite, *British Cavalryman 1792-1815* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1994), 6-21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795-1809* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 134-138, 142.

³⁵ Quoted in Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo*, trans John Cullen (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 140-142.

I considered our cavalry so inferior to the French for want of order, that although one of our squadrons was a match for two French, yet I did not care to see four British opposed to four French... as the numbers increase, order becomes more necessary. They could gallop but could not preserve order.³⁶

The quality of the horses themselves was another problem. Instruction on the care and feeding of horses were published in 1795, and veterinary surgeons became regularly commissioned a year later. Despite this, a significant proportion of horses were neglected by cavalrymen. They often considered stable duties beneath them, and left the care of their horses to NCOs. Throughout the wars, the army found it necessary to closely supervise the feeding of horses to ensure that no unscrupulous troopers sold their horses' rations to buy alcohol. When on campaign, any shortage in supplies could severely affect the performance of the cavalry. The condition of horses was so poor that the instructions on the care of horses were repeated in an article in the *British Military Journal* in 1801. Furthermore, heavy cavalry outside Europe was severely limited, owing to the difficulty of finding horses large enough. Although useful work was performed by the light cavalry as flank guards during the advance on Cairo, their standards of efficiency were well short of the British infantry during the Egyptian campaign. In the only sizeable clash between British and French cavalry in Egypt, the former were severely bested by the latter.³⁷

It is unsurprising then that the arrival of the 1,200 Mamluk cavalry, under the command of Osman Bey, resulted in a marked increase in optimism among the British. Aeneas Anderson considered the Mamluks' arrival in the British camp as "a circumstance of great importance, from the superior discipline of that cavalry, their

³⁶ Wellington to John Russell, 31 July 1826, in Sir Charles Oman, *Wellington's army 1809-1814* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), 104; Philip Haythornthwaite, *British Cavalrymen, 1792-1815* (Oxford, 1994), 15.

³⁷ Haythornthwaite, *British Cavalrymen*, 6-21, 45; Michael Barthrop, *Napoleon's Egyptian Campaigns 1798-1801* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 19-20, 25.

intimate acquaintance with the country, and their powerful influence among the inhabitants.”³⁸ Francis Maule provided a similar judgement:

This force was of the highest importance at such a crisis, our own cavalry being but weak in number. The Mamelouks [sic] made a fine appearance. We admired the appearance of their noble horses, their rich and sumptuous appointments and the wonderful rapidity of their movements.³⁹

Even the usually pessimistic General Hutchinson wrote an upbeat letter to Lord Hobart, the new secretary of state for war and the colonies, announcing the arrival of the Mamluk cavalry: “I am sanguine enough to hope, that the most serious good effects will arise from this junction, as they have a most intimate knowledge of the country, and the greatest influence amongst the inhabitants.”⁴⁰

It was obvious to the British that the Mamluk cavalry was vastly superior to their own. The sense of a cultural divide between Britons and Mamluks faded as the potential importance of the Mamluks to the campaign was realized. A significant factor in the formation of British perceptions was that little had been expected from the Mamluks in the initial stages of the campaign. By 1801, the Mamluks had little control over the country, their powerbase had been irrecoverably destroyed by Napoleon after the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798. In subsequent clashes Mamluk numbers were greatly reduced, and they had been unable to replenish their losses, after the lines of communication to the Caucuses were cut. Therefore, British servicemen did not witness the Mamluks’ oppression of Egypt first-hand. What they did see however, were the wonderful displays of swordsmanship and equestrianism by Mamluk warriors. These physical encounters did not correspond with what British personnel had read or heard about the Mamluks from earlier civilian portrayals. The more positive appraisal of the Mamluks in servicemen’s writing demonstrates that physical

³⁸ Anderson, *Journal*, 292.

³⁹ Maule, *Memoirs*, 120.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson to Hobart, 1 June 1801, quoted in Anderson, *Journal*, 422.

encounters could be more influential on individual opinions than second-hand oral accounts or written records. Such a conclusion suggests that recent literature on European encounters in the Near East during this period, such as the work by Aslı Çırakman and Michael Curtis, may have overemphasized the dominance of pre-existing stereotypes in shaping attitudes towards this region.⁴¹

British praise of the Mamluks' martial qualities also has significant ramifications for Heather Streets' thesis on martial race. After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, Streets argues that concepts of martial race became an influential factor on the British Empire's recruitment policy towards Indian Sepoys, Punjabi Sikhs and Nepalese Ghurkhas. Enlistment of these groups was favoured as they were considered culturally and biologically predisposed to war.⁴² Although martial race theory had no direct influence on British imperial thinking in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the observations made by British servicemen on the appearance of the Mamluks during the campaign, provide a comprehensive example of martial race discourse pre-1850.

The appearance of the Mamluks struck the British and it is easy to see why. They were undoubtedly an impressive sight; picked as boys by experts and trained from childhood, they were invariably large, lean and muscular. Each cavalryman was a veritable arsenal on horseback, armed with carbines, several pairs of pistols, djerids (a short javelin made of palm branches) and scimitars. The supreme confidence in their own abilities meant that they carried with them a fortune in jewels, clothes and coins. Over a muslin shirt, they wore layers of bright and brilliant silken vests and caftans, the whole encased in gigantic silken trousers. Their swords, saddles, and

⁴¹ Aslı Çırakman, 'From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no.1 (2001): 49-68; Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68-72.

⁴² Heather Streets, *Martial races, The Military race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3; John Mackenzie, 'General Editor's Introduction', in Streets, *Martial races*, viii-ix. See also: 2, 8-9, 11.

pistols were all inlaid with silver and jewels, each alone worth a fortune. The result was that a fully armed Mamluk cavalryman literally glittered in the desert sun.⁴³

One of the first occasions in which British forces physically encountered the Mamluks came on 1 May 1801. During the advance towards Cairo, British and Ottoman forces were joined by “Mulley Mahammed, the Prince of Fez”. Although a mere messenger for his master, Osman Bey, Muhammed made a strong impression. Robert Wilson provided an account of this Mamluk’s imposing appearance:

...his dark eye was remarkably keen, his face florid, and extremely handsome: his turban and robe were white, edged with gold; a red and gold embroidered pouch was suspended from his shoulders, by a broad gold lace belt: his arms were superiorly fine, his horsemanship and dexterity admirable; indeed every motion was graceful: his modest yet noble mien, a certain expression of sanctity in all his actions, enforced an immediate idea of his pretensions and character.⁴⁴

Such was the sensation caused by a simple messenger. When the full force of the Mamluks, under the command of Osman Bey, joined Hutchinson’s army on 1 June, the British were awed by their collective appearance. Osman, “a handsome lusty man, of fifty years of age” commanded 1,200 cavalry, a “united efficient force”. Each Mamluk was “richly dressed, well mounted, appointed, and armed”. “Their appearance”, one officer wrote, was “truly magnificent; nothing can be more splendid or rich than their dress and appointments... Their swords are of a peculiar good quality and highly valued: some of them at so extravagant a price as 1,000 dollars.”⁴⁵ Thomas Walsh was just as amazed: “every individual superbly mounted, richly dressed, and

⁴³ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 102; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 91-92.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *History*, 71-72; see also: Anderson, *Journal*, 292.

⁴⁵ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 78.

attended by a servant on foot.... the magnificence of the beys or chiefs was beyond any thing that can be conceived".⁴⁶

The French soldiers shared this view of the Mamluks' appearance. Once the Mamluks realized the danger of the French invasion to their rule, they united their forces, and faced the French for the first time at Shubra Khit on 13 July 1798. The French cavalry officer Nicholas-Philibert Desvernois witnessed this first clash. Presumably with the aid of a telescope, he wrote:

It was a magnificent sight. In the distance, the desert beneath the blue sky, before us these beautiful Arab steeds, sumptuously harnessed, snorting, neighing, prancing lightly and gracefully beneath their martial riders, who were covered with dazzling arms inlaid with gold and jewels. They were clad in varied brilliantly-coloured costumes, some wearing turbans bedecked with egret feathers, others wearing golden helmets, armed with sabres, lances, maces, spears, rifles, axes and daggers, each with three double-barrelled pistols.⁴⁷

According to Desvernois: "the novelty and richness of this spectacle dazzled our soldiers", but not in the sense that they were intimidated, for "from then on they began to dream of pillage."⁴⁸ Years later, Napoleon would remember how "the sun touched their helmets and coats of mail, making their fine line glimmer in all its brilliance."⁴⁹

Given the riches they carried, it is unsurprising that the French soldiers poured over the bodies of the Mamluk fallen even before the fighting was over, looting them of

⁴⁶ Walsh, *Journal*, 157.

⁴⁷ Nicholas-Philibert Desvernois, *Mémoires* (Paris 1898), 108, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 101.

⁴⁸ Desvernois, *Mémoires*, 100, 118, quoted in Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 90-91 Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 101.

⁴⁹ Napoleon, *Correspondence*, vol. 29, 442, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 101.

gold coins secreted amongst their charred satin jerkins, sewn into their silk cloaks and hidden in money belts. After delivering the killing blow to a majestic, white bearded Mamluk during the Battle of the Pyramids, Desvernois found rich booty on his corpse: a “canary-yellow turban made of cashmere... more than five hundred gold pieces sewn into his skull cap... a magnificent sabre, its sheath and pommel inlaid with gold; its handle was a rhinoceros horn, and the blade was black Damascus steel.”⁵⁰ The looting continued into the evening. Many soldiers left the camp that night under the pretext of seeking out any remaining French wounded, but in reality they roamed across the battlefield, lantern in hand, eagerly helping themselves to the valuables on the Mamluk corpses. Napoleon himself wrote in his memoirs that the men

...had a field day. They found the luggage left behind by the beys and their warriors, containers of jam and sweets, carpets, porcelain, silverware in great abundance... During the days following the battle, the soldiers busied themselves fishing in the Nile for bodies, many of which had two or three hundred gold pieces on them.⁵¹

Auguste de Marmont, one of Napoleon’s division commanders, who also recorded his men fishing Mamluk bodies out of the Nile, wrote “Some soldiers deposited as much as thirty thousand francs with their regimental cashier.”⁵² When the French army embarked for home after their surrender, they took many of the trophies taken from the Mamluks with them. A selection of these items can be seen in the Musée de l’Armée in Paris.⁵³

The Mamluks’ horses boasted an equally impressive appearance, and provided much joy to British personnel with equestrian interests. “Their horses are beautiful... In the

⁵⁰ Desvernois, *Mémoires*, 124, quoted in Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 98.

⁵¹ Napoleon, *Correspondence*, vol.29, 451, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 127; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 99-100.

⁵² Marmont, Duc de Raguse, *Mémoires du Maréchal Marmont* (Paris: 1857), vol.1, 384, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 127.

⁵³ See: Figures 7 and 8, Appendices.

highest order possible, and managed with such grace and dexterity, that their exercise is a spectacle really well worth seeing.”⁵⁴ Thomas Walsh was amazed not only by appearance of the horses, but also by the equipment that adorned them, which was just as extravagant as the clothing of their riders:

Nothing can equal the grand and splendid appearance of this cavalry. Their horses are well made, strong, sleek, and plump, very surefooted, stately in their attitudes, and have altogether the most beautiful appearance. The magnificence of the trappings, with which they are covered, is amazing, and the saddles and housings glitter with gold and silver, almost dazzling the eyes of the astonished spectator.⁵⁵

French soldiers too were impressed by the Mamluk horses: One soldier wrote:

There is no spectacle more graceful in its strength than an Arabian horse ridden in the Arabian style... To the weary French army, after trudging for days in utter exhaustion through the desert and through the parched, cracked land along the Nile, the sight of such dancing vigour, such weightless power, such beauty in strength, must have seemed something unbelievable.⁵⁶

The Mamluks’ military spectacle appealed to the British army, which, according to Scott Myerly, was itself very much a “theatrical institution”. Great emphasis and importance was put upon colourful, brilliant clothing, extravagant headgear, and elaborate equipment. Generally, the more splendid the uniform, the greater the implied honour attached to it. Flamboyant uniforms were strongly associated with a soldier’s pride, self-esteem and sexual appeal. Presenting the correct and proper

⁵⁴ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 76-78.

⁵⁵ Walsh, *Journal*, 157.

⁵⁶ Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 91.

appearance was frequently a source of personal gratification in the British army, some became so fixated with the image of themselves and their regiment that they neglected other important considerations, even if these were vital to the army's success.⁵⁷ It is unsurprising then, that the Mamluks, who poured most of their considerable wealth into their appearance and equipment, found many admirers amongst British servicemen.

Much of the equipment that the Mamluks carried with them was not just for show. Although their mode of warfare was outdated by the nineteenth century, they were extremely adept at their craft. Their skills elicited universal admiration and respect from European observers. This was certainly the case for Cooper Williams and John Theophilus Lee, respectively a reverend and a midshipman serving on board the HMS *Swiftsure*. From the aftermath of the Battle of the Nile in August 1798, until February 1799, the *Swiftsure* took part in the blockade of the Egyptian coast, intercepting any ships and harassing French strongpoints. Their operations kept them in frequent communication with the French, as they negotiated for the exchange of various supplies. On one such occasion, Frenchmen came aboard the *Swiftsure*, and told the crew of the battles they had fought with the Mamluks. After listening intently, Williams recorded what he had heard about the Mamluk cavalry charge: "The mode of attack of these brave, but ill-disciplined troops, was extremely irregular". Small bodies of Mamluk cavalry simply charged at the French infantry that were arranged massed square formations.

In this desultory mode of attack they were open to every disadvantage: in the first place, they had no covering artillery, but were themselves exposed to that of the French... and on their near approach they were received by a steady fire of musketry.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle, From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 8, 57-58, 81-82, 87.

⁵⁸ Rev. Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson... with a description of the battle of the Nile* (London: 1802), 143, 149-150.

According to Lee, the Mamluks were aware of their vulnerability, and adorned themselves with “a quilted jacket lined with steel net, that will resist the sharpest sword, and often turn bullet.”⁵⁹ Many Mamluks were killed, “but” Williams wrote, “if, escaping these dangers, they came to close quarters, the bayonets of the French could not protect them from the force and skill of the Mamaluk sabre, which bearing before it every resistance, hewed down all that came within reach.”⁶⁰

A charging Mamluk was unquestionably an imposing sight. At full gallop he would first discharge his carbine with some accuracy, and then fire several pairs of pistols at closer range. Next he would fling his djerid, and finally he would charge his foe with scimitar in hand. The Mamluks wielded their scimitars with deadly accuracy and power, capable of decapitating their enemy with a single blow. Some could even wield scimitars in both hands, whilst holding the horse’s reigns between their teeth.⁶¹ Although these abilities were rendered obsolete by the French soldiers’ use of cannon and muskets, there remained considerable respect for the Mamluks’ martial capabilities amongst both the British and French military. Williams wrote:

The French officers who came to us, reported that the stories we had heard of the skill and power of the Mamaluks with the sabre were literally true, and that if they were disciplined according to European tactics, they would be the finest cavalry in the world.⁶²

⁵⁹ John Theophilus Lee, *Memoirs of the Life and Services of Sir J. Theophilus Lee, of the Elms, Hampshire* (London: 1836), 138.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Voyage*, 149-150.

⁶¹ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 102; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 91. Napoleon himself observed with some admiration: “The Mamelukes displayed all their skill and courage. They were at one with their horses, which appeared to sense their every wish... having fired their six weapons they would outflank the line of sharpshooters and pass between the squares with marvellous dexterity.” Napoleon, *Correspondence*, vol.29, 442, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 102.

⁶² Williams, *Voyage*, 149-150.

The image of the Mamluks charging headlong towards an organized enemy, and who, once engaged with their foes, “hewed down all that came within reach”, emphasized their bravery, ferocity and physical strength. The dedication and training required to wield their sabres with such skill was often written about. Williams noted:

The mode in which they are exercised to the use of the sabre is curious; bags stuffed hard with cotton, are placed upright the height of a man, and till a soldier can cut through one of these with a single stroke, he is not accounted a skilful Mamaluk.⁶³

Nearly three years later, one officer in the British army wrote in a similar manner about the Mamluks’ swordsmanship:

so expert are they in the use of the sword, that one of their common practices is cutting in two a thread suspended without any weight at the end to keep it stretched, and thus afford resistance; infinite skill is required to do this.⁶⁴

These comments support Patrick Porter’s assertion in *Military Orientalism* that once in battle, cultural differences between people became less important, and men were judged primarily on their military skill. Combat was seen as a redemptive, cleansing and manly experience. The impressive performance of the Mamluks in battle exonerated them from accusations of cruelty, corruption and effeminacy. It was perhaps for this reason that the martial talents of the Mamluks held greater sway over the opinion of military personnel, than over those of civilians.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 76-78.

⁶⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites Origins and History of the Passions of War* (London: Holt Paperbacks, 1997): 125-127.

Furthermore, slicing through bags of cotton with a single blow, or cutting individual threads of linen from horseback, endowed the Mamluks with a certain romantic and exotic appeal. The image of the Mamluks' charge in particular can be connected to the romantic sublime. In the 1790s, with the advent of a new scale and ferocity of warfare on the continent, Europeans began to see war as an appalling abomination, but one that held a terrible fascination, even sublimity. War became seen as the ultimate test of a society and of an individual self. In this way, war was becoming a matter of romantic self-expression.⁶⁶ Although the romantic sublime was primarily associated with natural phenomena, such as panoramas from mountaintops, it was also closely connected to war, especially pitched battles. Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller grounded the sublime in the sense of self-preservation, arguing that terror and fear of death are at the bottom of the sublime experience.⁶⁷ Obviously, a battle has the potential to be more terrifying than any naturally occurring spectacle. For Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, the figure of the brave soldier, defying the fear of death on the battlefield, is "the object of the greatest admiration."⁶⁸ It was this heroism that was so admired by British and French troops. When the order to attack was given, the Mamluks simply galloped forward as fast as they could, each man just as keen to be the first into the fray and intent on individual glory. It became more of a race than a charge, the lines of cavalry becoming ragged as they approached the French. The Mamluks had little conception of an ordered concerted charge that might have broken through the French infantry squares, and were dumbfounded by the seemingly impenetrable lines of bristling bayonets. The swirling masses of Mamluk cavalry were met with barrages of artillery, grapeshot and small arms fire. Wave after wave of Mamluks were cut down in a series of engagements, with little or no impression made on the French squares. The Mamluks' formidable skills and quixotic heroism could not gain them victory against well-drilled European infantry, a fact which contributed towards their appeal.⁶⁹ The moment in which the Mamluks charged

⁶⁶ David A. Bell, *The First Total War, Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), 6-7.

⁶⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 155.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 102; Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 92.

towards the waiting French guns, their armour glittering in the desert sun, and death almost a certainty, was identified as sublime, romantic and tragic.

Such emotions are present in the writing of Captain François, a French officer present in Brigade General Marmont's infantry square during the Battle of the Pyramids. According to his account, the Mamluks

threw themselves forward in a mad charge. Our order was not to move! We hardly breathed; brigade commander Marmont had ordered us not to fire until he gave the command. The Mamelukes were almost upon us. The order was finally given, and it was real carnage. The sabres of the enemy cavalry met the bayonets of our first rank. It was unbelievable chaos: horses and cavalymen falling on us, some of us falling back. Several Mamelukes had their [silk] clothes on fire, set alight by the blazing wads from our muskets.... I saw right beside me Mamelukes, wounded, in a heap, burning trying with their sabres to slash the legs of our soldiers in the front rank... I have never seen men more brave and more determined.⁷⁰

Unlike the French, the British soldiers had little chance to observe their effectiveness in combat. Aside from a series of sporadic skirmishes with the French, there was little fighting involved in the latter stages of the campaign. Robert Wilson recorded one of the few skirmishes that took place at Giza. He wrote that the Mamluks charged a body of French cavalry

in a very handsome manner,... and although the French fired sharply with their cannon at them, killing and

⁷⁰ C. François, *Journal du Capitaine François, dit le Dromadaire d'Égypte* (Paris, 1903), vol.1, 206, quoted in Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 122. An image of the Mamluks in combat was perhaps best captured by Carle Vernet. See: Figure 9, Appendices.

wounding several horses, they retired again in perfect good order. This affair, if not brilliant, from the loss of the enemy... still was honourable to the Mamelukes, and assured the English that their reputation was justly earned.⁷¹

Such a short action provided little evidence with which to draw conclusions, but the Mamluks' constant training provided the British with opportunities to observe their skills. Soldiers gathered at the market in the British camp, where "there was some good horsemanship to be seen by the Mamelukes." Two horsemen would face each other roughly 300 yards apart, with their fine Arabian horses and javelins, when they would ride at each other at full speed, throwing both javelins in the air at once. They would then throw themselves out of the saddle and hang by the side of the horse to avoid the incoming missile. Their incredible abilities to manoeuvre their horses suddenly, without even stirrups, amazed European observers.⁷² During Hutchinson's visit to the Grand Vizir's camp in mid-May, the Mamluks performed in front of a far larger audience, when a djerids tournament was held. An equestrian team sport, the objective of djerids is to score points by throwing blunt javelins at opposing teams' horsemen. Solyman Aga, "the pride of the Mamelukes", stole the show. Robert Wilson, watching in the crowd, wrote "the beauty of his countenance,... his excellence in all the martial exercises...excelled beyond competition, and extorted universal admiration."⁷³ One could argue that the British fascination with the Mamluks' martial skills, in training and tournaments, comprised a form of nostalgia. As outlined in the previous chapter, classical republican thinkers, writers and philosophes, such as Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, saw military service and martial virtue as an important unifying force for society. Commercial and industrial

⁷¹ Wilson, *History*, 129-130.

⁷² Nothing Pertickler Happened: An Autobiography of William Billows, Queens Regiment, 1797-1817, National Army Museum, 11-10-7-1, pp.78-79.

⁷³ Wilson, *History*, 118-19. Both the Capitan Pasha and the Grand Vizir took part in the djerid tournament. The Vizir was a fan of the sport, and years previously, had lost an eye after being struck by a javelin. See also: William Wittman, *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria and Across the Desert into Egypt during the Years 1799, 1800 and 1801, in company with The Turkish Army and The British Military Mission* (London: 1803), 209.

expansion, although undoubtedly having some benefits, was thought to encourage a decline in martial virtue. Hence the Mamluks, a band of brave, ferocious warriors seemingly devoted to war, came to symbolize the martial traits which Britain had lost.⁷⁴

The British conviction in the martial qualities of the Mamluks was shared by the French, and is evident in their attempts to recruit them. As early as 7 September 1798, Napoleon ordered all Mamluk slaves between the ages of eight and fourteen to be drafted with a view toward the eventual formation of a Mamluk corps. General Desaix advocated a similar project: to integrate approximately two thousand young Mamluk slaves with French apprentice seamen, “imported Negroes” and other young Arabs, all of whom would be given military training and French schooling. The project was proposed largely for its practicality; if realized, it would have precluded the need for any reinforcements from France. This was, however, a long-term project, requiring five years to come to fruition and was never undertaken.⁷⁵ Other attempts to employ the Mamluks’ martial skills were more successful. On 14 September 1799, Jean Baptiste Kléber established a mounted company of Mamluk auxiliaries and Syrian Janissaries. The unit was later reorganized and renamed “Mamluks de la République” (Mamluks of the Republic). In 1801, the Mamluk regiment returned to France with the rest of the French army, and by decree of 25 December 1803, they were organized into a company attached to the Chasseurs-à-Cheval of the Imperial Guard. They served in numerous Napoleonic campaigns. Impressed by their loyalty and bravery, several French commanders hired Mamluks as bodyguards. Napoleon himself employed Roustam Raza, who served for almost sixteen years from 1799 to 1814, and was privy to the most private aspects of Napoleon’s life. Following the emperor’s

⁷⁴ John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: 1985), 1, 10-11, 13, 203-204, 222. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘*The Machiavellian Moment*’ *Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), ix, 466, 499; Bruce Buchan, ‘Enlightened Histories: Civilization, War and the Scottish Enlightenment’, *The European Legacy* 10, no.2 (2005): 181-187.

⁷⁵ Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, 212. Herold does not state where these “imported Negroes originated”.

example, Napoleon's stepson, Eugène Beauharnais, and the Imperial Old Guard Marshal, Jean-Baptiste Bessières, also appointed Mamluk bodyguards.⁷⁶

Interestingly, the British made very little effort to recruit the Mamluks for military purposes, despite appreciating their military skills. Only one letter in the war office alludes to an attempt at recruitment. It is addressed to Henry Dundas, and written by Lt-Col. John Douglas, who worked closely with Sir Sidney Smith during the Ottoman operations against the French prior to the Egyptian campaign. Douglas wrote vaguely about his attempt to raise a corps in Egypt, but he abandoned the project due to unsurmountable obstacles.⁷⁷ This lack of effort is unusual, Britain certainly had a history of enlisting ethnic groups considered to have great martial prowess. The East India Company recruited Indian sepoy in large numbers from 1750, and twelve West India regiments had been formed in the 1790s to serve in the Caribbean. As Heather Streets highlights, after the 1857 mutiny, the ethnic recruitment of "martial races" became the standard practice in India. However, in Egypt, recruitment of indigenous peoples was never considered by the British because officially, they had no intention of remaining in the country. The objectives for the campaign, set by the cabinet in late 1800, were to remove the French from Egypt and hand the governorship of the country over to the allied Ottoman forces. By October 1801, these objectives were achieved, and the majority of the British forces were withdrawn. The seven-month campaign was too short for any policy of selection to be considered for the formation of a Mamluks corps. Moreover, by the time the British arrived, the Mamluks were a shadow of their former strength, many having been killed or driven away after defeat by the French. When the French landed in Egypt in July 1798, there were an estimated 10-12,000 Mamluks in the country; yet only 1,200 Mamluks joined the British as they advanced on Cairo in June 1801.

⁷⁶ Roustam Raza, *The Memoirs of Roustam Napoleon's Mamluk Imperial Bodyguard*, trans Catherine Carpenter, ed. Ara Ghazarians (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2014), 11-12, 111; Harutyun Amirkhanian, 'Napoleon's Armenian "Ring"', *Yerevan*, 9 (2009): 138. See also: Ronald Pawly, *Napoleon's Mamelukes* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 8-9.

⁷⁷ Lt Col. John Douglas to Henry Dundas, 9 January 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.553-554, The National Archives.

Although the British commanders never sought to recruit the Mamluks, they did declare a preference for Mamluk rather than Ottoman rule in Egypt. This contradicted the official policy agreed by the British cabinet in October 1800, which had declared that Egypt should be returned to Ottoman rule. John Hely-Hutchinson, the commander of the British forces in Egypt, saw the value of the Mamluks as a cavalry force and gave Osman Bey “the protection and guarantee” of the British government.⁷⁸ A constant theme of Hutchinson’s despatches to Henry Dundas, the Secretary of War, and Lord Elgin, the ambassador at Constantinople, was the inability of the Ottomans to govern the country, and the proposal for a British sponsored Mamluk regime in Egypt.⁷⁹

By October 1801, Hutchinson was expecting to establish the Mamluks in power. He had put the British in an embarrassing position, having promised Egypt to the Mamluks while the cabinet had given similar assurances to the Ottomans. This led to disaster, as British attempts to mediate a compromise between the two parties were unsuccessful. On 22 October the Capitan Pasha, the Ottoman admiral, set an ambush for the Mamluk commanders, under the pretext of negotiations on board his flagship. All of the leading beys were either killed or captured, and although Hutchinson secured the release of the Mamluk prisoners, a settlement became impossible.⁸⁰ As the British army withdrew from Egypt, the situation was far from resolved; neither Ottomans nor Mamluks were able to gain ascendancy. This chaotic state of affairs was only resolved when the Albanian contingent of the Ottoman army, commanded by Muhammad Ali, mutinied over lack of pay. Being the only fully trained unit in Egypt, they prevailed, and Ali became Pasha of Egypt in May 1805.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hutchinson to Dundas, 3 April 1801 and Hutchinson to Hobart, 2 June and 21 September 1801, quoted in Edward Ingram, ‘The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV: Occupation and Withdrawal, 1801-3’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.2 (1995), 327-329.

⁷⁹ Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 24. This brought about a rupture between the British military command in Egypt and the British embassy at Constantinople. Preoccupied with limiting French influence in the Porte, Lord Elgin chose the Ottomans in preference to the beys.

⁸⁰ Stuart to Hutchinson 23 October 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.507-508.

⁸¹ Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 31-32.

The response of British personnel to the murder of the beys demonstrates their strong attachment to the Mamluks, as well as their nostalgia for Mamluk military virtues. Charles Hill, an officer in the Anglo-Indian army, was saddened by the loss of these exotic and formidable warriors. They were, he wrote, “fine Mamalukes, who behaved so well in their different actions with the French, and who were the greatest friends to our army”. Hill felt guilty that Hutchinson had “pledged for their protection”⁸², but had failed to keep them safe:

...the brave Mamalukes heartily acquit us of even being the means of their Beys unhappy fate, and nobly say that ‘The English not being so well acquainted with the treachery of the Turks, were more liable to be deceived but that their Beys should never have trusted them because they knew them better’ nevertheless poor princes! It was the sacred word of Britain, that drew you into destruction – and that word has never been pledged in vain before.⁸³

When the bodies of the dead were secured from the Ottomans, Hutchinson ensured they were “interred with minute guns & military honours”. On their release, only one of the Mamluks attacked in the boats, Osman Bey Bardisi, was still alive, but seriously wounded. He “has eight wounds on him,” Hill wrote, “General Baird paid a visit to the wounded Bey, who burst into tears directly he saw him.”⁸⁴

For the romantically inclined among the British army, this was a tragic end to a formidable warrior people. Others were more ambivalent. Robert Wilson still remembered their tyrannical mode of government prior to 1798. Reflecting on his belief that “the Mamluks will surely become extinct” he wrote, “Nor should Europe lament their fall. The government of the Mamelukes was unnatural and oppressive,

⁸² Diary of Captain C. Fitzmaurice Hill, The British Library (BL) MSS Eur D108, pp.134-135, 137.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 137-138, 141.

their habits and customs degrading to manhood".⁸⁵ Wilson's view was rare. Lachlan Macquarie was happy to see the Mamluks released and living under British protection, but he was concerned for their future: "I fear we shall not succeed, and that the poor Mamluks will, in the end, be left to shift for themselves."⁸⁶ Despite their dwindling numbers, Hill admired their resolute defiance.

Even the small remains of them only wish for leave to show at, how soon they could clear Egypt of near 30,000 Turks – there is something uncommonly interesting in the fate of these brave fellows, and God forbid, the English should allow them to be swept off by the arm of the Turkish assassin! Even before this bloody business, a Mamaluke was loved and respected by every British soldier, whereas a Turk has been justly detested by every Christian who have [sic] been serving near them.⁸⁷

Hutchinson continued to advocate a British-sponsored Mamluk regime in Egypt after returning to Britain in 1801. He endeavoured to move the government and public opinion over to support the Mamluks, and enjoyed some success. The public was shocked by the Ottomans' attempted massacre of the beys and were impressed by the warrior traits of the Mamluks.⁸⁸ Hutchinson's opposition to official policy, and his stubborn backing of the Mamluks after the campaign, testifies to how attached some British personnel had become to these seemingly exotic warriors. This affection might be attributed to the appeal that the Mamluks seemed to offer to British officers. Although a large proportion of written material available to historians was authored

⁸⁵ Wilson, *History*, 246-247.

⁸⁶ James J. Auchimuty, 'Lachlan Macquarie and the Anglo-Indian Expedition to Egypt', *Egyptian Society of Historical Studies* 2, (1952): 131.

⁸⁷ Hill Diary, 143.

⁸⁸ Hutchinson to Hobart, 21 September 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.471-472; Hutchinson to Hobart, 24 December 1801, War Office (WO) 1/345, pp.537-549; Hutchinson to Hobart, 9 January 1802, War Office (WO) 1/346, pp.1-19; Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 232-233; Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 26.

by officers, the lack of almost any notable comment by the lower ranks on the Mamluks, suggests that officers associated with them more closely. It is possible that British officers saw the Mamluks as the Muslim equivalent of the upper-class gentleman officer. Comparisons such as this go back centuries; Saladin was often recognized to have had ideal European qualities, and some western European contemporaries even branded him an honorary Christian.⁸⁹ Bernard Lewis claims that from the fifteenth century onward, Ottoman Muslims were likened to gentlemen of the established Church, and Ottoman Christians were equated to factious nonconformists.⁹⁰ Moreover, European intellectuals had a habit of comparing their own social and political life with that of Muslims, particularly the Ottomans, during their expansion into eastern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. British officers who were raised in this intellectual environment would be more disposed to compare and contrast themselves with the Mamluks.⁹¹

The impact of the Mamluks on the British military's self-image and on images of other 'martial' peoples

A striking aspect to the admiration of the Mamluks, was the conviction among some British observers that the Mamluk cavalry was superior to any European equivalent. One of the strongest compliments was written by an officer in the Anglo-Indian army.

These brave handful of gallant cavalry... have ever withstood all attempts of the Turks to extirpate them by fair force of arms, and, must to the British, the French themselves acknowledge, they gave them most desperate battles, they fairly beat their cavalry

⁸⁹ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 34.

⁹⁰ Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 117.

⁹¹ Aslı Çırakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe" European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 2.

whenever they met them, but the French infantry & artillery were too hard for them.⁹²

General Hutchinson described them as “inferior certainly to none in the world”,⁹³ and another officer wrote, “The French confess that their cavalry, which is... decidedly the finest European I ever saw, did not dare meet the Mamelukes with equal numbers.”⁹⁴

Such comments contrast with the common tendency of Britons who visited the Near East or India to express a deeply engrained conviction in superiority over the people they encountered.⁹⁵ The statements of regret among the British army after learning in October 1801 that their withdrawal from Egypt was imminent, demonstrates British confidence in their capacity to rule over eastern peoples, not only Indians. George Baldwin thought that “the peasant could enjoy the fruit of his labour” with Egypt under British rule,⁹⁶ and Robert Wilson considered how much “happier” and “more advantageous” it would have been for the Egyptians “if Egypt had been constituted an Indian colony.”⁹⁷ Even John Moore, contemplating a redevelopment of Alexandria, thought “it was in the power of the English to do more in Egypt than it will ever been in that of any other nation.”⁹⁸

The statements alleging the superiority of the Mamluks may have served a practical purpose. It provided an image with which Britons could critique their own forces, and

⁹² Hill Diary, 142-143.

⁹³ Anderson, *Journal*, 422.

⁹⁴ Anon., *Non-Military Journal*, 84.

⁹⁵ For studies of this British superiority, see: Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*; Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind, European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (London: Serif, 1995); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁹⁶ Baldwin, *Recollections*, 174-176.

⁹⁷ Wilson, *History*, 241-242.

⁹⁸ Sir John Moore, *The Diary of John Moore*, ed. Sir J. F. Maurice, vol. 2 (London: E. Arnold, 1904), 51; Beatrice Brownrigg, *The Life & Letters of Sir John Moore* (Oxford: 1923), 133.

improve elements in their society.⁹⁹ This propensity for Britons to look towards exotic oriental powers in order to critique themselves was not a new development. Europeans had often compared themselves unfavorably with the Ottoman Empire, as it expanded into eastern Europe from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁰ Patrick Porter argues that Europe had a long-standing sense of vulnerability to the ‘orient’, despite the conviction in technological and moral superiority over it. This was expressed in the folklore of famous battles between East and West, such as Thermopylae (480 BC), Roncevaux Pass (778), Constantinople (1453) and Lepanto (1571).¹⁰¹ One may argue the favourable portrayals of the Mamluks merely continued this trend. Indeed, it is possible that representations of the Mamluks served as an implicit criticism of Britain’s own cavalry. This would certainly be justified; as we have seen, the performance of British cavalry throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars was at times far from exemplary. One could argue that problems existed in the army as a whole. Since the Seven Years War, the British army had known nothing but failure. Expelled from the American colonies after the War of Independence, driven out of the Low Countries by the Revolutionary armies in 1793-4, the British army had been obliterated by yellow fever and malaria during an inconclusive campaign in the West Indies. The 24 months prior to the Egyptian expedition added to these disappointments. In autumn 1799, a second campaign in Holland ended in failure. In 1800, three separate amphibious assaults were aborted last minute, on Belle Ile in June, the Spanish naval base at Ferrol in August, and at Cadiz in October. By 1801, the reputation of the British army had plummeted to arguably its lowest ever depth. It had become, said Lord Cornwallis, “the scorn and laughing stock of friends and foes.”¹⁰²

Not all agreed that the Mamluks comprised a superior military force; their quality was a debated topic. The martial ability of the Mamluks was employed to both disparage and champion the British army. For several observers, such as Thomas Walsh, the

⁹⁹ Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 42; Streets, *Martial races*, 1-3 10, 196, 225. See also: Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, 116-117.

¹⁰⁰ Çırakman, ‘*Terror of the World*’, 79; Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 43-44.

¹⁰² Lord Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, (London: 1859), vol.3, 300, quoted in Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt*, 3.

Mamluks were certainly competent, but inferior to elite European cavalry regiments, particularly those of the British army. “The Mamalukes, taken as light troops, or as individual horsemen, are equal, and perhaps superior, to any in the world; but without tactics, and never acting in a body, they cannot be expected to succeed against European troops.”¹⁰³ Robert Wilson agreed with this estimation: “Individually, without doubt, they are superior to any cavalry in the world; but collectively, British dragoons must, from their physical superiority of strength, weight, and velocity, overpower in a charge more than an equal number of them.”¹⁰⁴ These comments are particularly interesting, for they highlight a conviction in the superiority of ‘western’ over ‘eastern’ modes of warfare. This belief continues in modern literature to this day.¹⁰⁵ For the British soldiers in Egypt, organization and discipline were the crucial differences between the two modes of war; it was commonly highlighted as the fundamental reason behind Europe’s self-perceived military superiority over oriental powers. Such a view was prevalent among French as well as British observers. Vivant Denon is a significant example. He accompanied General Desaix’s division as they chased Murad Bey and his followers into Upper Egypt. The two forces clashed on 22 January 1799. Denon, in the middle of one of the infantry squares attacked by Mamluk cavalry, evoked the scene, drawing a strong contrast between the two sides.

The Mamelukes wheeled around us, their resplendent arms shining as they manoeuvred their horses. They deployed all the splendour of the Orient, but our northern severity presented a harsh aspect which was no less imposing. The contrast was striking: it was iron defying gold – the plain glittered, the spectacle was superb.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Walsh, *Journal*, 158. See also: Maule, *Memoirs*, 121.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *History*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ See: John Jandora, ‘War and Culture: A Neglected Relation’, *Armed Forces and Society* 25, no.4 (1999): 541-556; Christopher Cocker, *Waging War Without Warriors? The Changing Culture of Military Conflict* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002): 144-151; Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 130. For analysis of this literature, see: Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, in Company with several divisions of the French*

These representations of the Mamluks draw strong parallels with, and were likely influenced by, images of other, supposedly primitive ‘oriental’ warrior peoples. Indeed, the British view of the Mamluk often seems to comprise of a combination of ‘eastern’ images: of the effeminate ‘oriental’ despot, and of the primitive, simple-minded, noble and exotic warrior. Such a blend of paradoxical images was not unique, as strong comparisons can be made between more general British views towards Indian and Mamluk peoples. Much like opinion of the Mamluks, the British formed two discrepant views towards native peoples living in British India. The first was that Indian societies were backward, despotic and corrupt, and should be overthrown in favour of the more sophisticated European model of civilization. The second was that native people enjoyed a primitive but natural, traditional and harmonious form of civilization. This style of society had been destroyed in Britain by the development of commercial society and should therefore be preserved and cherished where it still existed. These two opposing viewpoints often came into conflict with one another, most infamously during the trial of Warren Hastings, the former Governor-general of India, who had been accused of misconduct and corruption.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, the martial characteristics attributed to the Mamluks were recognized to exist among Indian Sepoys. Much of the success the East India Company enjoyed in the wars against indigenous Indian powers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period can be attributed to the performance of the native sepoys, who bore much of the fighting. At the battle of Assaye in 1803, during the Marathas Wars, Wellington

Army under the Command of General Bonaparte, trans Francis Blagdon (London: 1802), vol.1, 174; Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, 290. Similar portrayals of the value and superiority of discipline over Near Eastern irregularity were presented in paintings. Louis-François Lejeune’s painting *Battle of the Pyramids* (1808) presents a characteristic example. Critics described the picture as a contrast between French order and oriental chaos. The French troops are depicted as an ordered, unified, geometric force, driving their wild, chaotic, disorganized Mamluk enemies into the Nile. See: Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, 63.

¹⁰⁷ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12-13; Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111-112.

wrote “Our troops behaved admirably; the sepoys astonished me.”¹⁰⁸ The impressive conduct of the sepoys led many British personnel to think of them as bred for war, in a similar way to the Mamluks. In some respects, this image was accurate. In India, *jati*, literally meaning birth, defined an individual’s occupation and status - it was one of the most important determinants of an Indian’s life. The profession of the sepoy effectively became another *jati*, and fitted well into Indian culture that was largely defined by function and community. Sepoys easily adopted the military mentality that one individual was a representative of a wider community, which required unconditional loyalty.¹⁰⁹

Similar to the encounters with the Mamluks, the experience of Indian powers occasionally engendered criticism of British forces. Indian rulers had observed the success of the East India Company in the 1760s and 70s and copied their military tactics. By the end of the century, the native powers had become proficient in European-style warfare. It was not difficult to import European weaponry and tactics, but Indian arsenals were also perfectly capable of churning out their own weapons, which were no different to the British in quality.¹¹⁰ The Nizam of Hyderabad, Tipu Sultan of Mysore and the Marathas all possessed armies that were armed and trained in the European fashion. They were far from being a tribal rabble, and were able to wage conventional modern warfare.¹¹¹ Wellington, who suffered army losses between thirty and fifty per cent at Assaye, later considered it to be his hardest battle.¹¹²

Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, British soldiers were able to maintain seemingly contradictory views towards the Mamluks, which derived from the two dominant

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 146-148, 177.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 158-159, 162. This fact was illustrated during the Maratha Wars, when Wellington integrated captured Indian cannon into his own artillery train.

¹¹¹ Jeremy Black, *Western Warfare 1775-1882* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5; Lynn, *Battle*, 146.

¹¹² Porter, *Military Orientalism*, 39; Hew Strachan, ‘A General Typology of Transcultural Wars – The Modern Ages’, in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 92.

influences on their writing. It seems that the soldiers arrived in Egypt carrying negative stereotypes about the Mamluks and other ‘eastern’ people, having most likely been pre-programmed by portrayals of the east in civilian travel literature. These images, focusing on the despotic rule of the Mamluks were never disproved, for when the British army landed in Egypt, the Mamluks were a shadow of their former strength, and no longer in power. When the Mamluks joined the British forces, and the strategic value of their superior cavalry to the campaign was recognized, the British were more accepting of Mamluk culture, and forgiving of any perceived flaws in character. The negative stereotypes that soldiers had brought to Egypt were to some extent supplanted by military imperatives. This argument calls into question the assumption, made by recent scholars, that pre-existing stereotypes were always pre-eminent in shaping attitudes of Europeans towards non-European peoples.¹¹³ Instead, it seems clear that the physical encounters between Britons and Mamluks were far more influential on personal opinions than second hand verbal accounts and written records. Such a conclusion supports Patrick Porter’s view that British servicemen saw war as a crucial medium through which the calibre of civilizations were judged, and that once in battle, cultural differences tended to fade.

Significantly, the warrior-like image of the Mamluks draws marked similarities with popular representations of East India Company sepoys. This suggests that both Mamluks and Sepoys were part of a more general, homogeneous British image of the ‘oriental warrior’. It also demonstrates that the concept of ‘martial race’, examined by Heather Streets, was fairly well formed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was long before the 1857 Indian Mutiny – the point from which Streets argues that martial race began to influence British imperial culture.¹¹⁴ The formidable appearance of the Mamluks, and the skill with which they used outdated weapons and tactics, inspired a romantic attachment, and a nostalgia for the chivalric, martial values thought to have been lost during Britain’s commercial development. These martial representations of Mamluk warriors served an important purpose; they provided an image with which Britons could evaluate their own military. In this way,

¹¹³ See: Çırakman, ‘From Tyranny to Despotism’, 49-68; Çırakman, *“From the ‘Terror of the World’”*; Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 68-72.

¹¹⁴ Streets, *Martial Races*, 2, 8-9.

commentators could both criticize and glorify various elements within the British military.

Conclusion

On the morning of 7 October 1801, just over a month after the surrender of the French garrison at Alexandria, George Billanie, a private in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, sailed with his regiment from Aboukir Bay for Britain. By noon, he had “lost sight of the celebrated land of Egypt”. He wrote: “None regretted this. We indeed regretted our countrymen and comrades, who had found a grave there; but the country itself had no charms to make us regret leaving it.”¹ Billanie’s desire to leave the country was probably greater than most: having been wounded in battle on 21 March, he had spent the remainder of the campaign at the hospital camp at Aboukir. His wound suffered from multiple recurring infections and he would never fully recover. Upon his return to Britain, he was discharged from the army and lived the remainder of his life as an out-pensioner at the Chelsea Hospital.² Nevertheless, Billanie’s comment encapsulates the general attitude of the army. The soldiers had no wish to linger in the country that had been the cause of so much hardship over the past six months. The appearance of the men told of the adversity they had endured. The majority were clad in rags, having worn the same clothes day and night for six months. Many were suffering from ophthalmia and had bandages over their eyes. Added to this were the numerous blotches and swellings from the bites of mosquitoes and spiders, and the sting of scorpions.

The British government had long anticipated the victory in Egypt and had planned the redeployment of the army. 7,000 were to return to England to help quell bread riots. Another 7,000 were relocated to Malta and Minorca to maintain a strong Mediterranean base. 4,000 were headed for the West Indies to attack Spain’s American colonies.³ The dispersal began immediately after the French capitulation. Lord Keith departed with the majority of the battle fleet on 9 September. Over the next two months, British regiments slowly embarked at Alexandria or Aboukir Bay

¹ Anon. [George Billanie] *Narrative of A Private Soldier in His Majesty’s 92nd Regiment of Foot...* (Glasgow, 1820), 128.

² *Ibid.*, 98-119, 129-130.

³ Piers Mackesy, *British Victory in Egypt, The End of Napoleon’s Conquest* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010), 226.

and set sail. A small garrison remained at Alexandria until the last of the British forces evacuated in 1803. General Baird's Indian army stayed with the garrison until June 1802, when they departed for India via Suez. Those who remained looked on enviously at the embarkation of their comrades. Major Francis Maule learnt that his regiment was to remain in the garrison:

The prospect was indeed discouraging – to bear up another year against the maladies with which this climate is pregnant; to live amongst Mahometans, who detested the very sight of Christians, and who had already begun to shew symptoms of hostile conduct towards us, will sufficiently explain the cause of our chagrin.⁴

Fortunately for Maule, he did not remain much longer at Alexandria. His regiment, the Queens', unexpectedly received orders for their departure, and had left by December. His relief at his evacuation is palpable. "The fatigue, the cares and the recollections of Egypt were quickly dissipated... We forget the past, enjoy the present and anticipate the future."⁵

Those who survived the campaign were proud to have helped to restore the fighting reputation of the British army and of having played a small part in the army's victory. Yet in their comments, this pride is secondary to a sense of relief at leaving the uncomfortable Egyptian climate and its strange inhabitants. This sense of alleviation is underlined by the loathsome conditions on board the troopships. Embarkation meant at least a month of poor food, inadequate drinking water, and unsanitary accommodation. At the beginning of the campaign in March, the soldiers had been anxious to leave the troopships, some even volunteered for the amphibious landing at

⁴ Major Francis Maule, *Memoirs of the Principal Events in the Campaigns of North Holland and Egypt; Together with a Brief Description of the Islands of Crete, Rhodes, Syracuse, Minorca, and the Voyage in the Mediterranean* (London: 1816), 215-216.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 217. See also: Diary of Capt Exham Vincent 54th and 39th Regiments, 1800-1813, pp.31-32. National Army Museum, 06-05-69-1.

Aboukir to accelerate their disembarkation. After six months of campaigning, many wished to be shipboard as soon as possible. For those heading home, the chance to see their families and loved ones again was certainly an important factor in their impatience. Few, if any at all, however, expressed a desire to remain in Egypt.

The joy the soldiers expressed at sailing from Egypt highlights one of the central distinguishing features between the accounts of British military personnel and civilian travellers. Soldiers were not ordinary travellers; the war distinguished them from civilians, and their paths were determined by the exigencies of war. The variety of ways in which the soldiers saw and described the Egyptian environment has been detailed in chapter 1. Exclusive to the writing of soldiers was their strategic appraisals of the landscape. They discussed how cities might be attacked or defended, and speculated – with the benefit of hindsight – how the campaign might have progressed differently had they been fully aware of the topography at the time. These strategic surveys were not as common as one might assume. It was a taboo subject in military circles during off-duty hours and was not a popular or fashionable topic to discuss in memoirs. It was more common for soldiers to outline the suffering they endured as a result of the climate and landscape. The accounts of heat, dehydration, unbearable conditions in sandstorms, irritating pests and the prevalence of infection and disease, provided a medium through which soldiers could transmit the extreme psychological experience of war to their readers. This enabled them to establish themselves among reading audiences as sentimental heroes. Many of these responses drew a strong resemblance with the writing of civilian travellers, particularly those labelled by Carl Thompson as “suffering travellers”, who sought out discomfort and adversity to evoke a sympathetic response from their readers.⁶ It is important to remember that military memoirs competed with popular travelogues, and for this reason, contained a similar structure and narrative arc. It was common for military memoirs to contain a symbolic turning point, usually the moment that the soldiers reached the Nile, when the misery of combat, heat and dehydration was replaced by the joy of the picturesque and fertile landscape of the Nile delta. From this point on, the worst privations were in the past,

⁶ Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-23.

and British victory was more assured, which set up the remainder of the narrative for a positive conclusion.

Although the soldiers were at pains to emphasize their suffering, many favoured some form of further imperial intervention in Egypt. The picturesque, used by several officers to describe the landscape, played an important role in this regard. The literary and visual representations of the picturesque, helped writers and artists to domesticate exotic landscapes, and by doing so, render them desirable. This desirability was reinforced by the productivity of the Nile delta, which, given the lack of proper cultivation, could be improved upon and exploited under British instruction. This desire to acquire or exploit Egypt's productive landscape was juxtaposed with concerns over the moral and physical diseases within the country. Although the number of casualties from disease during the Egyptian campaign was relatively low, Egypt came to be regarded in a similar manner to the deadly tropical climates in India and the West Indies. This assumption was largely unfounded and derived from several factors: the geographical proximity of Egypt to India, which led to the belief that Egypt possessed similar dangerous diseases to India's tropical climate, the biblical account of the ten plagues of Egypt, and the warm climate, which was thought to have an enervating effect on the human body. Moreover, the superior health of the Indian sepoy during the campaign furthered the conviction that Egypt was unsuitable for European habitation. Nevertheless, the fear of disease in Egypt also provided a rationale for an increased involvement in the country. Disease provided British physicians, who possessed an enthusiastic curiosity and a confidence in the superiority of British medical sciences, with a powerful moral right to intervene.

Although soldiers and sailors were not ordinary travellers, they were capable of acting as such when not marching or fighting. One of the most popular pastimes for the soldiers in Egypt was the exploration of the monuments and ruins of antiquity, examined in chapter 2. Antiquarian pursuits were not at odds with military priorities. The techniques of draughtsmanship, surveying and cartography that were important to military proficiency in this period also enjoyed a great deal of overlap with the techniques associated with antiquarian study. One might even argue that antiquarianism in Egypt held a strategic importance, as it enabled Britain to maintain a low-level presence in the Near-East after the campaign, and provided detailed

information on ancient structures that might be used for military purposes. Many soldiers adhered to the established civilian conventions for collecting antiquities, a practice which was justified in part by the allegedly uncivilized, undeveloped state of contemporary Egypt. However, the soldiers also developed a distinctive militaristic understanding of collecting. They referred to objects they acquired not only as “souvenirs” and “mementoes”, but as “trophies”, and “spoils”. These terms imply that collection served as a form of reward for achieving victory over the French, and enduring the hazards of the campaign.

The response towards antiquities was varied, and this was most discernible between the officers and the lower ranks. Without the classical education that many officers possessed, the ordinary soldiers’ experience of antiquities was surprising and revelatory. They relished exploring and learning about ruins, of which they had little or no knowledge, and looked to the Bible and the ten plagues of Egypt to explain the decayed state of Egyptian civilization. Officers, by contrast, were well read about classical antiquities, some had embarked on Grand Tours to Greco-Roman sites in their youth. The exploration of Egyptian ruins allowed these men to continue their cultural refinement. They explained the degenerated condition of Ancient Egypt with reference to secular interpretations of history, such as the concept of the cyclical rise and decay of civilizations.

When the British soldiers and sailors left Egypt, their verdict on the people they had encountered was often comparable to prominent civilian travel authors. Their portrayals of Egyptian customs and culture, examined in chapter 3, demonstrate the fluidity of conceptions of identity and difference at this time. As highlighted by Colin Kidd, Roxann Wheeler and Dror Wahrman, conceptions of religion, civility, clothing and class were traditionally more important to Briton’s assessment of themselves and other people than physical attributes, such as skin colour, but in the final decades of the eighteenth century this began to gradually change. Britons began to realign their conceptions of human variation towards more racial understandings of difference. This shift only became fully visible a few decades into the nineteenth century.⁷ In

⁷ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27, 80, 82, 92-93, 271; Roxann Wheeler, *The*

1801 therefore, a confused mix of both traditional and new conceptions of identity and difference existed. From the confused mix of images in the writing of servicemen, one consistent theme which emerges is that the people encountered in Egypt were seen as polar opposites to Britons. The exposure to Egyptian customs and practices proved a jarring experience for most British soldiers, and the local culture was seen negatively, as a mirror reflection of British society. In this regard, British servicemen probably based much of their arguments on earlier travel works, which, under the influence of Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, saw the Near East through a negative lens which Malcolm Yapp has labelled the "Turkish Mirror". The critical arguments made by these travellers were often ambiguous, homogenised and drew heavily from existing stereotypes.⁸ The campaign in Egypt took place at the height of the evangelical missionary impulse in Britain, hence it is unsurprising that the soldiers' negative reaction to Muslim customs and practices led to support for the foundation of a British imperial mission.

Although the verdict of the British military on the people they had encountered was often comparable to prominent civilian travel authors, the way in which they formed these views differed considerably from their civilian contemporaries. Unlike civilian literature, martial characteristics and performance in combat were vital elements in British servicemen's appraisals. The alleged warlike nature and appearance of the Ottomans, discussed in chapter 4, was one of the only elements praised by British soldiers, and it provided a base with which observers could critique various elements of British society. However, there was considerable disappointment at the thought that this martial potential was going to waste in the corrupt, despotic Ottoman regime. Military performance was also vital in appraisals of the Mamluks. As outlined in chapter 5, negative stereotypes associating Mamluk society with despotism and effeminacy seemed to be supplanted by military imperatives. Once the strategic value of Mamluk cavalry to the campaign was recognized, the British were more accepting

Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 9, 31-32, 37; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 86-87.

⁸ See: M. E. Yapp, 'Europe in the Turkish Mirror', *Past & Present* 137, no.1 (1992): 134-135, 142-145, 147, 152-153.

of Mamluk culture, and forgiving of any perceived flaws in character. The argument in these chapters calls into question the assumption, made by recent scholars, that pre-existing stereotypes were always pre-eminent in the shaping attitudes of Europeans towards non-European peoples.⁹ Physical encounters could be as influential on personal opinions as second hand verbal accounts and written records.

The different modes of warfare that these ‘eastern’ bodies practised was one of the primary ways in which British soldiers and sailors distinguished themselves from these people. The lack of western features in the Mamluks’ mode of warfare added to their exotic appeal in the eyes of British soldiers. The formidable appearance of the Mamluks, and the skill with which they used outdated weapons and tactics, inspired British soldiers, who developed a romantic attachment and a nostalgia for the chivalric, martial values thought to have been lost during Britain’s commercial development. It can be argued that this image was part of a more general, homogenous image of martial groups in the ‘east’, which included Indian sepoy. Conversely, the absence of western features in the Ottoman army meant they were seen in a poor light despite the success of the Anglo-Ottoman alliance in the Egyptian campaign. Unaware of the fundamental differences in the Ottoman system of military command, British soldiers evaluated the Ottoman soldiers based on the principles of their own military system. They castigated the chaotic masses of the Ottoman military, which were thought to be greatly inferior to the disciplined, mechanical-like ranks of the British army. The poor condition of the Ottoman armed forces was seen by some as a symptom of Oriental despotism. Most significantly, through the plundering of the Egyptians, the execution of Frenchmen, and the attempt to trap and destroy the Mamluk Beys, Ottoman warfare came to be seen by the British as uncivilized and savage. By contrast, British or European methods of war were more refined, restrained and bound by unofficial conventions.

⁹ For this argument, see: Aslı Çırakman, ‘From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment’s Unenlightened Image of the Turks’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no.1 (2001): 49-68; Aslı Çırakman, *“From the ‘Terror of the World’ to the ‘Sick Man of Europe’ European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002); Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68-72.

As they became estranged from their Ottoman allies, and unsettled by local Muslim culture, the British found in their French enemy a cultural ally of sorts. Despite the demise of the French Catholic church during the Revolution, British soldiers continued to refer to the French as Christian, or the French nation as a “Christian power”.¹⁰ The British and French also prided themselves on exchanging acts of charity and civility. They did not consider themselves deserving of the savage treatment which the French prisoners had endured at the hands of the Ottomans and Egyptians during their occupation of Egypt. This suggests that the British military were not always culturally opposed to the French Catholic ‘other’, as Linda Colley has argued. The Protestant-Catholic divide outlined by Colley was less clear to British and French servicemen when they encountered one another in a non-Christian environment. This British and French identification with one another was not unique to the Egyptian campaign and draws a comparison with recent research on British soldiers in the Peninsular wars, particularly that by Gavin Daly.¹¹ In both Egypt and the Peninsular, British opposition to the local religion and culture led to a level of sympathy for the French occupation, who were seen, to some extent, as progressive liberators. There was however, a contradiction in attitudes in Egypt that was not present in the Peninsula. On the one hand, a similar culture reinforced a sense of ‘Christian’ affinity with France, but on the other hand, Egyptian Christians, such as the Copts, were seen as lying outside this shared identity because of their adoption of Muslim customs and culture. Evidently, those living outside Europe without European manners could not be considered Christian.

Over the course of their time in Egypt, British soldiers and sailors had seen most of the locations that would have been on a civilian tourist’s itinerary. They marched through deserts and along the lush banks of the Nile, they saw Egypt’s famous cities – Alexandria, Cairo and Rosetta - and visited the great structures of Egyptian antiquity – the Pyramid complex at Giza, Pompey’s Pillar, Cleopatra’s Needles, and the temple at Dendera. Many of the ancient objects discovered were acquired as personal trophies

¹⁰ See, for example, Anon., *A Non-Military Journal, or Observations made in Egypt by an Officer upon the Staff of the British Army* (London: 1803), 31, 33, 42.

¹¹ See: Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

or mementoes; some of the larger pieces were removed to the British Museum, where they catalysed the study of orientalism as an academic discipline. Finally, the soldiers mingled with Ottoman troops and the formidable Mamluk cavalrymen. This varied range of experiences highlights that there was much more to soldiering than the experience of battle, even during a campaign that lasted a mere six months. Writing about their experiences in Egypt, British soldiers and sailors discussed a range of topics beyond military imperatives. Their accounts constitute a distinctive form of military orientalism. Much like contemporary civilian orientalists, military authors were influenced by the ideas of Montesquieu, and often saw the people they encountered in Egypt as opposites to themselves. Yet, as I hope to have shown here, these soldiers and sailors retained a distinctive military outlook on their experiences. Their writing is a unique historical source; a fascinating blend of military narrative, travelogue and oriental scholarship, which deserves further study. They can be described as ‘orientalists in uniform’.

Appendices

(PLAN of the ACTION of the 13th of MARCH.)

Plate 22.

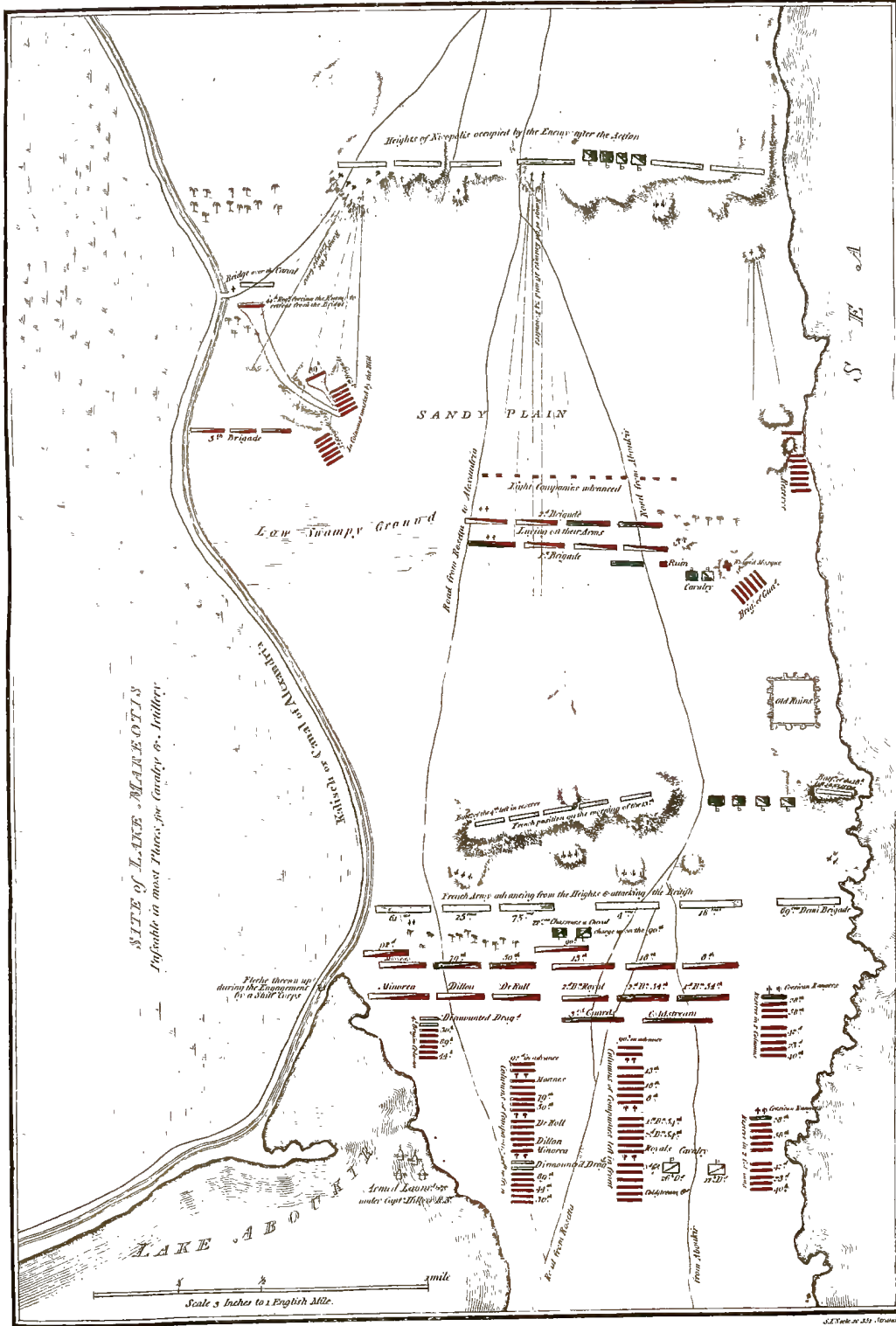


Figure 1. 'Plan of the Action on the 13th March', from Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt* (London: 1803), 86-87.

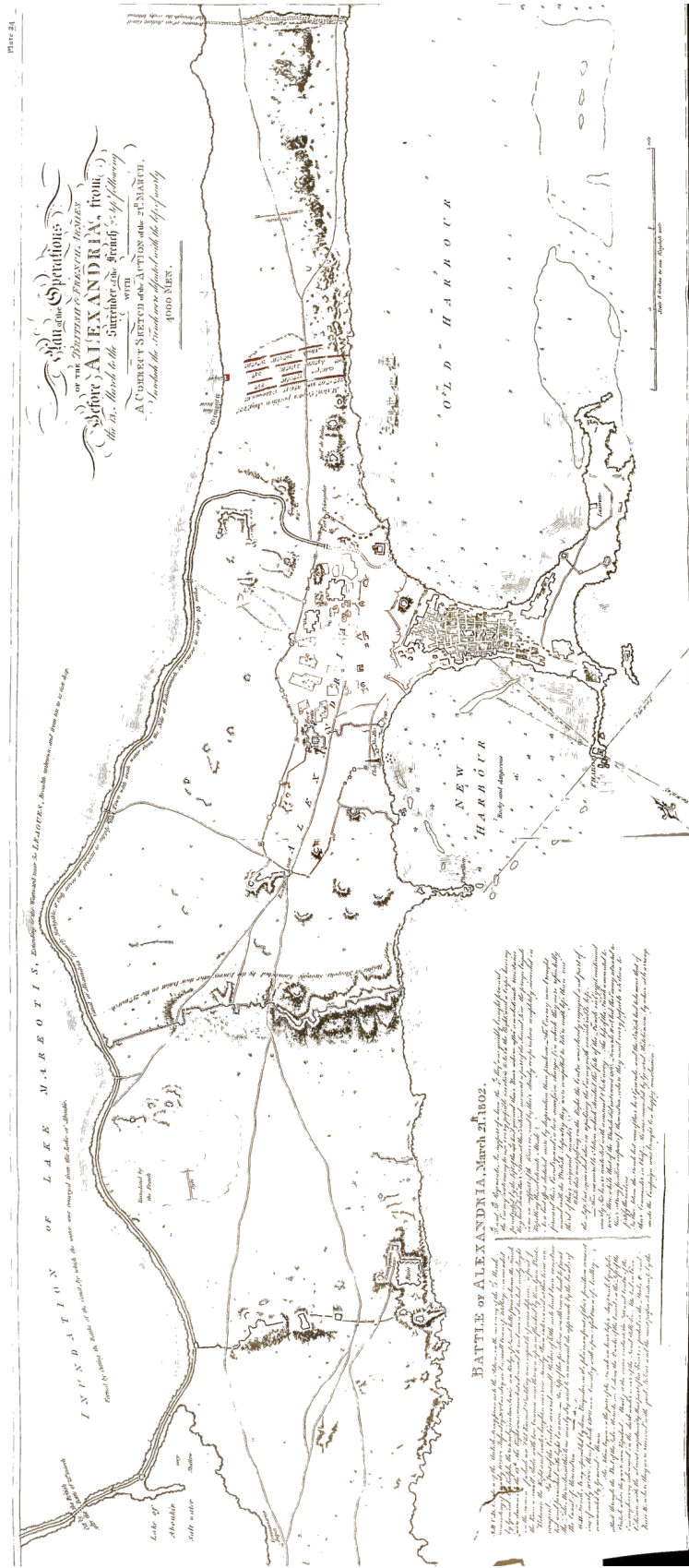


Figure 2. 'The Battle of Alexandria 21st March', from Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt* (London: 1803), 96-97.



Figure 3. 'The Bay of Acre, from the Top of Carmel', from Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson* (London: 1803), 152-153.



Figure 4. 'Caiffe and Mount Carmel', from Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson* (London: 1803), 152-153.



Figure 5. 'Antiquities from Aboukir Island', from Cooper Williams, *A voyage up the Mediterranean in His Majesty's Ship the Swiftsure, one of the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson* (London: 1803), 134-135.

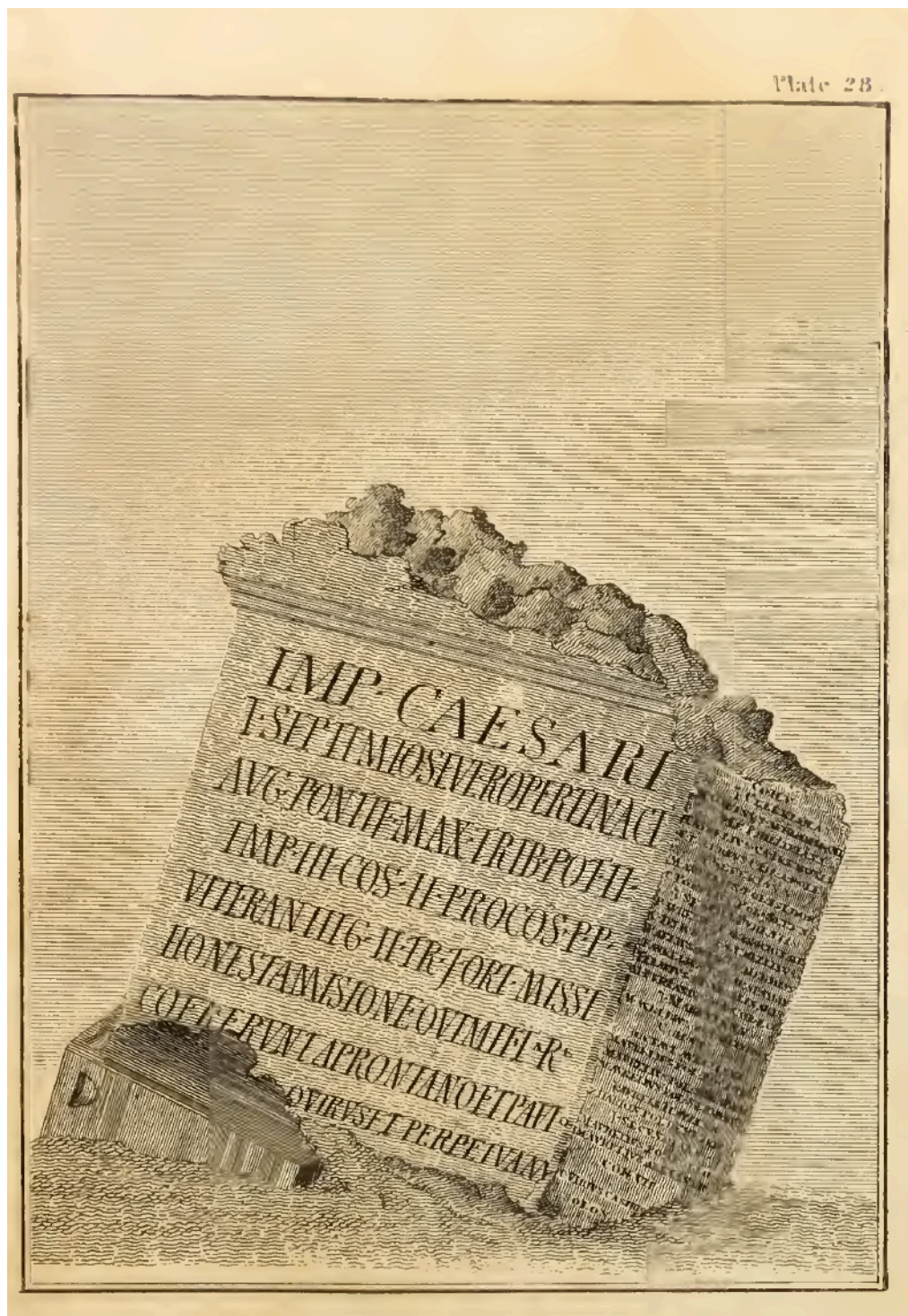


Figure 6. An inscribed stone uncovered by Thomas Walsh's men, from Thomas Walsh, *Journal of the Late Campaign in Egypt* (London: 1803), 132.



Figure 7: A Mamluk saddle, captured by the French at the Battle of the Pyramids 21 July 1798, on display at Musée de l'Armée, Paris.



Figure 8. A set of Mamluk sabres, captured by the French after the Battle of the Pyramids, 21 July 1798, on display at Musée de l'Armée, Paris.



Figure 9. 'Combat between a hussar and a Mamluk', an engraving by Carle Vernet, circa 1800.

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