

# EDWARD WILLIAM LANE AND NAPOLEON BONAPARTE IN EGYPT

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All that he said about Mahomet, Islamism, and the Koran to the great men of the country he laughed at himself. He enjoyed the gratification of having all his fine sayings on the subject of religion translated into Arabic poetry, and repeated from mouth to mouth.<sup>1</sup>

A Private Secretary, on Napoleon Bonaparte

To his intimate friends among them he acknowledged the hand of Providence in the introduction and diffusion of the religion of El-Islám; and, when interrogated, he avowed his belief in the Messiah as the Word of God, in accordance with the *words* of the Kur-án.<sup>2</sup>

A Biographer, on Edward W. Lane

## Introduction

The language of Orientalism is steeped in travel. Even a cursory review of texts by 19th- and early 20th-century western writers will likely yield prominent accounts of anticipation, then departure, approach, arrival and apprehension of the Oriental destination. What the writer finds in his travel, and how he accounts for it, has been the subject of much scrutiny in the scholarship of recent decades. Two foremost pioneers of early Orientalism, Napoleon Bonaparte and Edward William Lane, are among the most closely and exhaustively scrutinized in this canon. Aggregate Orientalism, as well as the contemporary critique of Orientalist pedagogy, owes inestimably to both men for their contributions to the field and the opportunities they afforded to successive investigations of the East,

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, from *Napoleon in Egypt*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Anonymous, the "Biographical Sketch" of *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, p. 9.

particularly Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Both made carefully considered excursions to Egypt, reading what they might on the realm before leaving and documenting their respective voyages with thoughts upon their intentions for Egypt, and speculation on what they would find there.<sup>4</sup> But, at least in the case of each of these protagonists of European adventure in the Orient, their travels are mere beginnings to rich and lengthy discourses the realm.

It is my intention to investigate both men through text, both their own and those aimed at them, all in context of their constructions of, and experiences in Egypt. Inevitably, they must be illuminated and interrogated in Bonaparte and Lane's relationships with Egypt: that defining component of the East that defined their Orientalist identities. The questions driving this endeavor are of these men's intents, approaches to, relationships with, and uses for Egypt. These qualities are of interest so as to define their respective dealings with the Orient they encountered. What qualities unite their relationships with Egypt? How does each man's own career prepare his legacy in Orientalism? What effects have they had, both upon Orientalist discourse and upon the Orient they found? That is, how has each left a proverbial name for himself, in writings of Egypt and in Egypt itself? Further, what effects has the Egyptian Orient had upon them? (Here the cycle of textual relations repeats itself; this inquiry investigates texts that have followed Bonaparte and Lane in order to more fully illuminate the men's relationships with Egypt – relationships they began by investigating texts.)

There can be no comparison of Bonaparte and Lane without acknowledgment of their contrasts. A strange coupling, in some ways unlikely, the two were brought to the same geographic place at times close only in date, not

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<sup>3</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>Said, p. 81; Ahmed, *Edward W. Lane*, p. 127, 198.

necessarily in cultural and historical dynamics. It must also be noted that they took altogether differing routes – literally and figuratively – in Egypt. Even within the general rubric of Oriental studies, to which each has made essential contributions, they bear little practical resemblance to one another. The former is known as the conqueror that brought post-Revolution France immense military victories and acquisitions. The notoriously narcissistic and dynamic Bonaparte remains greatly controversial in discussions of history. Lane, the quiet scholar whose personality reads as muted and largely unknown, is scarcely remembered outside his academy of study. Bonaparte resonates throughout popular and obscure memories. Lane had no history of celebrity, even fame, though his work has been widely read, at least around the time of its publication in the 19th century.

Their ambitions, too, were apparently disparate: Bonaparte's move was a strategic one, designed to subvert British trade with its colony of India, thereby strengthening his nation of France. Lane was consumed by a desire to systematically document the Orient in Egypt and deliver it, via his writings, to readers of English, his British countrymen in particular. In this respect there is some traceable similarity in their missions; a secondary outcome Bonaparte planned for his occupation was the foundation of an institute of Oriental study there, which came to fruition and produced much material of use to European scholars, including Lane himself.<sup>5</sup> This remarkable convergence will be discussed subsequently.

Naturally, the circumstances of each man's stay in Egypt have little in common, as well. Bonaparte's arrival was momentous and noted by historians, both Egyptian and European. He fully anticipated the attention he would attract by invading, and there is evidence that he relished his visibility as a foreign

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<sup>5</sup>Said, pgs. 81-8; Ahmed, p. 34

intruder.<sup>6</sup> Lane trained himself in Arabic and Turkish, and assumed the visage of a Muslim resident, all for the express purpose of experiencing Egypt without drawing attention to himself.<sup>7</sup> Further, Bonaparte's health seems to have suffered in the course of his yearlong stay abroad; one of Lane's motivations for leaving England was to cure his ailments in a warmer clime. In his failing health, Bonaparte left Egypt and did not return; Lane made several stays there and often expressed longing for it when resigned to live in England.<sup>8</sup>

All of this contrast is to say that, if one looks for a great many pragmatic similarities between these two actors upon Oriental Egypt, the connection will seem weak, at best. It is not the intention of this inquiry to search out whatever surface attributes Bonaparte and Lane hold in common; rather, it is to investigate them in the context of Egypt, which influenced deeply both men's careers and legacies, and was in turn manifestly affected by their tenures there. Moreover, within the frame of Orientalism, a phenomenon of Western thinking central to the above mentioned careers and legacies, they are shown to have distinct and related literary presences.

Finally, their legacies will be investigated in terms of their significance to writers of the Orient who followed, their critics, and to travelers in Egypt in particular. Here, this endeavor takes a turn toward the contemporary, and the personal. By discussing long-lasting contributions, consequences, illuminations and misconceptions offered by Bonaparte and Lane, this work of historical inquiry takes on contemporary concerns of scholarship and cross-cultural relations. Its personal flavor stems from my own outlook as a Westerner who has lived and studied in Egypt, and what implications Bonaparte and Lane's legacies have for me and other travelers in that realm.

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<sup>6</sup>Bourrienne, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>See Footnote 2.

<sup>8</sup>Bourrienne; Ahmed, p. 33.

## Appetites

Bonaparte's desire for conquest is legendary. Less well-known is his almost equal voracity for reading. Both of these defining characteristics inform his undertaking of the voyage to Egypt. Most likely, the former effected the latter, at least so far as the Egyptian expedition is concerned. It is his need to possess areas of strategic import, to acquire them and determine their courses for his designs, that resonates in accounts of his decision to invade. Bourrienne, in his dictated memoirs, recalls the general saying shortly before setting out from Italy, "Everything here wears out: my glory is already past; this tiny Europe does not offer enough of it. We must go to the Orient; all great glory has always been acquired there."<sup>9</sup> If Bonaparte had as his models such conquerors as Alexander and Julius Caesar, his inspiration to take an Oriental realm such as Egypt was strong. Indeed, the idea of national glory and historical imperative runs throughout his ambition for, and policy toward Egypt, as will be discussed subsequently.

There was another luminous quality of the Orient that beckoned to him. That image of the East – rendered romantic, strange and fantastic by prominent European accounts – seems to have been present in Bonaparte's mind for many years previous to his military ascension and exploits. In listing Bonaparte's motivations to take Egypt, Edward Said cites this incubating interest:

Secondly, Napoleon had been attracted to the Orient since his adolescence; his youthful manuscripts, for example, contain a summary he made of Marigny's *Histoire des Arabes*, and it is evident from all of his writing and conversation that he was

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<sup>9</sup>Bourrienne's *Memoires*, I, p. 230; as quoted by Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, p. 3.

steeped, as Jean Thiry has put it, in the memories and glories that were attached to Alexander's Orient generally and to Egypt in particular. Thus the idea of reconquering Egypt as a new Alexander proposed itself to him, allied with the additional benefit of acquiring a new Islamic colony at England's expense. Thirdly, Napoleon considered Egypt a likely project precisely because he knew it tactically, strategically, historically, and – not to be underestimated – textually, that is, as something one read about and knew through the writings of recent as well as classical European authorities. The point in all this is that for Napoleon Egypt was a project that acquired reality in his mind, and later in his preparations for its conquest, through experiences that belong to the realm of ideas and myths culled from texts, not empirical reality.<sup>10</sup>

So, with these attractions, Bonaparte's rationale for invasion, domination and colonization must have been compelling enough to overcome the doubts of France's governmental Directory, as well as those held by the army Bonaparte led from Italy. (The latter required a characteristically stirring speech from him at Ancona, in which he offered that the glory he sought in Egypt would largely be theirs.)<sup>11</sup>

But before invading the Orient, Bonaparte invaded its texts. "He had been meditating vaguely upon Egypt for many months: he had ransacked the libraries of Italy for books on the subject,"<sup>12</sup> says P. G. Elgood in his history of the Egyptian campaign. Although exactly which works he thus devoured are unclear to this inquiry, those he brought with him on the voyage are cataloged.

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<sup>10</sup>Said, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>Elgood, *Bonaparte's Adventure in Egypt*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>Elgood, p. 50.

In the 287-volume collection were the works of classical Europeans, romantic and Victorian fictions and religious texts, including the Bible and Qur'an.<sup>13</sup>

All of this is to illuminate the relationship Bonaparte established with Egypt (that is, the Egyptian Orient he imagined) as he contemplated his undertaking. The relationship portrayed in histories of this pre-invasion period is one laced with desire, grand fantasy, and assumption – of what he would find once there, and what he would do with it. It is critical to an understanding of this regard that Bonaparte's relationship with Egypt, as with any Orientalist one, was at its roots a textual one. And, to be sure, this textual relationship was by no means benign; Bonaparte sought understanding of his target realm for the express purpose of dominating and controlling it as effectively as possible. One of his more prominent sources, in fact, may be read as text for thrilling at and taking on the Orient: Comte de Volney's *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie*. Bonaparte is said to have considered attentively this work after its 1787 publication. Predictably, he read it as if in search of a handbook on effective conquest and colonization, and took to heart its advice for the use of religion as a tool for control of an Oriental populace.<sup>14</sup> Again, this crucial notion will be addressed more fully in the analysis of Bonaparte's actual occupation.

If Bonaparte's ambition in setting out for the Orient is grandly expressed and documented, Lane's is muted, even veiled. Of the many things Oriental scrupulously qualified, quantified and analyzed in his publications, he offers little insight into his own designs for them. One apparent certainty is that he developed an early, enduring lust for the Orient, that he succumbed to as soon as afforded the opportunity to travel there. Texts by and of Lane betray a

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<sup>13</sup>Elgood, pgs. 67-8.

<sup>14</sup>Said, pgs. 81-2.

fascination with elements of the Orient, Egypt in particular, that seized the man and inspired his considerable efforts to engage and render them.

Evidence of this fascination is to be found dating from only a few years before his departure to Egypt. It is in his apprenticeship to his brother, an engraver,<sup>15</sup> in 1819 that he developed the first whims to study the Orient. Living and plying his new craft in London, he began a general investigation of “Eastern things.”<sup>16</sup> This continued, steeping and gaining momentum for some three years when, in 1822, Lane increased his research to include the Arabic language. He maintained what was likely a rigorous regimen while gaining proficiency with the apparatus and techniques of engravings, specifically lithography. To this end, Lane acquainted himself with the camera lucida, an early incarnation of reproductive technologies and a predecessor to the photographic emulsion camera.<sup>17</sup> (The camera lucida’s relevance is in Lane’s use of it to record the images of Egypt that appear in engraved form in his account *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*.)

At this approximate time Lane became a member of the Egyptian Society in England and subscribed to its publications. This organ catered primarily to the increasing number of Englishmen interested in pharaonic Egypt. Presumably, though, Lane’s Arabist tendencies possessed him to the exclusion of Egyptology; his writings make only preliminary mention of the discipline.<sup>18</sup>

All of Lane’s occupations conspired, according to his biographers, to leave him a physical wreck. He is reported to have suffered a fever that nearly took his life, invited and exacerbated by the “double strain of work and study”<sup>19</sup> he bore in London. Ill health provided immediate motive for Lane to arrange a stay in

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<sup>15</sup>See footnote 2.

<sup>16</sup>Ahmed, pgs. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup>Ahmed, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Ahmed, pgs. 2, 66-7; aggregate Lane.

<sup>19</sup>See footnote 2.

Egypt, where he would heal while pursuing his most ardent passion: study of the Arab Orient.

But well before boarding the ship that would bring him to Egypt, Lane had established the beginnings of a relationship with that realm. Like Bonaparte's – indeed, like that of every individual defined as Orientalist – it was derived through text, through the lens of a Europe increasingly enchanted with its idea of the East. It must be here noted that Lane's regard for Egypt before his first encounter is not explicitly well-documented in his writings, and it is subsequently unclear in the accounts of his biographers.<sup>20</sup> Still, it is reasonable to assume, by the magnitude and reported vigor of his studies, that he eagerly consumed those resources at his disposal. These resources were, of course textual: in the English language (there is no evidence that Lane knew another, excepting Arabic and Turkish, which he likely did not master until living in Egypt<sup>21</sup>), by Europeans from the last few generations before his. Other than the Egyptian Society publications he subscribed to, the discrete texts Lane read are unknown. What is clear is the context in which he, as a young informal scholar of the Orient, operated. This atmosphere of European (in this case, English and French) contemplation of the Orient via the recorded experiences of travelers, is marked by plentiful abstract notions thereof: images of the East manifesting as antiquities, paintings, illustrations, fantastic adventure tales for children and adults, and even imitations of pharaonic monuments on London thoroughfares. It is an era in the Western imagination, Ahmed posits, informed by:

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt at the turn of the century dramatically focused attention on the country. After the military engagements, and after Egypt had ceased to command attention

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<sup>20</sup>Ahmed, pgs. 2-19.

<sup>21</sup>Ahmed, pgs. 2, 190.

as a theatre of European war, it continued still, as a result of the reports and discoveries of Napoleon's teams of experts respecting its ancient civilisation, to hold public interest. Superimposed upon the interests and habits of the Englishman of the day, that interest was translated into travel.<sup>22</sup>

And so, under these circumstances did Lane make arrangements for his travel to Egypt. In the above assertion, there is some hint of initial intellectual contact between Lane and Bonaparte. Lane is presumed to have established, through his own research, a sort of relationship with the French leader. This seems a relationship mitigated by geopolitical differences (France and England, when not in direct conflict, remained at odds for much of the 19th century), and obscured by a slight generation gap (Lane was not yet born at the time of the French invasion of Egypt). Of course, it is not to be inferred that the two men were ever acquainted. It was, moreover, another relationship steeped in text: those produced under the auspices of Bonaparte's intellectual campaign in Egypt, which accompanied the military one. As will be shown, the famous *Description de l'Egypte* and other related writings produced by Bonaparte's company of "savants" served to carry his name through the history and impress it into the conscious minds of Europeans, particularly Orientalists such as Lane.

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<sup>22</sup>Ahmed, p. 4.

## Apprehensions

His preliminary designs for Egypt firmly in mind, Bonaparte addressed his troops with a proclamation around the time of their landing in Alexandria, the site of their *entrée* on Egyptian soil. “Soldiers,” it reads,

You are about to undertake a conquest whose effect upon the civilisation and the commerce of the world will be incalculable, You will inflict upon England the severest stroke, a stroke which she will feel most, till you can give her death-blow. We shall make some fatiguing marches, we shall fight some battles, we shall succeed in all our enterprises; the destinies are for us. The Mameluke Beys, who favored English commerce, who loaded our merchants with arbitrary imposts, and tyrannized over the unhappy inhabitants of the Nile, a few days after our arrival will exist no longer.<sup>23</sup>

Bonaparte’s lofty ambitions, specifically those as he voiced them to his men, should come as no surprise. Considering those plans contemplated before the Egyptian expedition, that he would imbue among the troops such grand ideas is logical. Whether or not he was as rationally attached to these schemes as he was invested in glorious campaigning and company morale, he expressed such confidence in them that his army – and, it seems, his biographers – took heart. Their conviction was surely bolstered by another sweeping sentiment that appears consistently in Bonaparte’s sayings: his sense of encouragement from historical precedents, which translated into the imperative cited previously in this discussion. “The first town which we shall enter was built by Alexander,”

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<sup>23</sup>As quoted by M. Jacques Miot, *The French Expedition to Egypt*, p. 10.

he informed his army. "At every step we shall find great recollections worthy to excite the emulation of the French."<sup>24</sup>

At every step, in fact, it seems that Bonaparte was seized by the monumental size and scope of his mission in Egypt. His words, to his countrymen under command and to the inhabitants of the Orient he found (as will be shown, his addresses to each group bear certain consistent themes but are decidedly different in tone), betray a sense of awe at his surroundings, and at his charge. This surely stirred his thirst for information on the realm; upon arrival, reports Bourrienne, "Nothing escaped his observation. Egypt had long been the object of his study; and in a few weeks he was as well acquainted with the country as if he had lived in it ten years."<sup>25</sup> He issued orders for observing the strictest discipline, and these orders were punctually obeyed."<sup>26</sup> Often did Bonaparte invoke his version of history to justify and bolster his actions, as well as religion. In that same proclamation to his soldiers, they are instructed to respect the resident faith of Islam, in the interests of winning the Egyptians' trust.<sup>27</sup> Further, he showed that he could follow his own advice, in the following proclamation to the people of Alexandria, dated July 1, 1798.

It is now a long time that the Beys have insulted the French nation and oppressed its merchants. The hour of their chastisement is come.

It Is [sic] now a long time, that these slaves of Caucasus and Georgia have tyrannised over the finest part of the globe, but God who orders every thing, has now destined their end.

People of Egypt, they tell you that I come to destroy your religion do not believe them. Answer to them, that I come to

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<sup>24</sup>Miot, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>How Bourrienne, himself freshly off the boat, would know the level of intimacy one would have after ten years in Egypt is questionable.

<sup>26</sup>Bourrienne, p. 144.

<sup>27</sup>Miot, p. 11.

restore their rights, and that I honour more than the Mamelukes  
God, his Prophet, and the Koran.<sup>28</sup>

Bonaparte's treatise reaches further for religious appeal in a subsequent passage, in which he boldly addresses the Islamic clergy, "Cadis, Cheiks, and Imams, tell the people that we true Mussulmen<sup>29</sup>." Here is one of the first indications of Bonaparte's relationship with religion, to wit, his use of it as a tool by which to exert influence. As will be illuminated in the section to follow, Islam was crucial to his designs in and for Egypt.

In contrast to the awe and pomp that were Bonaparte's vocabulary, Lane's is one of intimacy – that is, an obsessive desire for closeness with his subject. In his writing, he is to be found on his ship approaching Alexandria, anxiously awaiting his first encounter with the realm of his fancy.

As I approached the shore, I felt like an Eastern bridegroom, about to lift the veil of his bride, and to see, for the first time, the features which were to charm, or disappoint, or disgust him. I was not visiting Egypt merely as a traveller, to examine its pyramids and temples and grottoes, and, after satisfying my curiosity, to quit it for other scenes and other pleasures: but I was about to throw myself entirely among strangers; to adopt their language, their customs and their dress; and in associating almost exclusively with the natives, to prosecute the study of their literature.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Miot, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup>It should be here noted that, in the questionable Arabic into which this proclamation was translated, "Mussulmen" (*muslimûn*) is employed insidiously: aside from its usual connotation (believers and testifiers in Islam), its more innocuous literal definition is "ones who submit."

<sup>30</sup>As quoted by Ahmed, p. 1.

If there is but one metaphor Lane with which would have us picture his study of Egypt, it is of him unveiling the face of a woman — whom, we must assume, he found comely enough to devote much of his life to her. It must be noted, however, that in the motion of unveiling Lane implies that he has already had opportunity to regard his “bride.” This opportunity, the beginning traces of his rapport with the object of his fascination, can only be the product of Lane’s research while still in England. Thus texts, conventionally described as light-sources that illuminate subjects, are implied by Lane as a sort of veil. That is, through the veil he is able, looking hard, to make out some countenance, perhaps hints and contours of “her” character, but only in actual physical contact can he realize his search. Lane here insinuates, though surely inadvertently, the potential for text to obscure, which has provided theoretical basis for scholars (such as Said) to interrogate Orientalist writings, including Lane’s own work.

### **Appropriation and Authority**

In his attention to Volney’s ideas, Bonaparte took special note of the premise that, “To establish ourselves in Egypt, it will be necessary to sustain three wars — the first against England, the second against the Porte, and the third and most difficult of all against the Mussulmans who form the population of the country.”<sup>31</sup> All accounts of the occupation indicate that it was Bonaparte’s ambition to avoid the last of these predicted conflicts.

As early as the initial occupation of Alexandria, after only minor incidences of armed resistance from Egyptians, Bonaparte meant to maintain a publicly benevolent presence. Elgood contends, “Provided he gave up his fire-arms and wore a tricoulour cockade, the Egyptian was free to come and go, to

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<sup>31</sup>As quoted by François Charles-Roux, *Bonaparte: Governor of Egypt*, p. 70.

live and worship as he pleased. Everything pertaining to Islam was treated with great respect.”<sup>32</sup> Such respect was not out of any deeply rooted love Bonaparte held for Islam; this was rather his strategy to pacify the populace, that they would not resent the French presence to the point of uprising. Elgood continues, Bonaparte drew further from Alexander in assessing Egypt and designing its conquest, after taking Alexandria and preparing to march on Cairo:

But Bonaparte had his reasons for treating Alexandria so generously: he expected the rest of Egypt to mark the wisdom of submitting to his will. The occupation of the valley of the Nile was only the first phase of the campaign; the co-operation of the Egyptian people was necessary to accomplish his dream of Empire in the East. It was in his mind to emulate the achievements of Alexander the Great. That illustrious captain had won the friendship of Egypt by making a sparing use of the right of conquest, and Bonaparte proposed to follow the example. ... Hostilities would then cease, mild administration would replace oppressive government, and responsive to the change Egypt would become an outpost of France in the East, a stepping-stone to the conquest of India. It was an exhilarating prospect.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, it was this exhilaration – rather than an affinity or affection for Egypt, its religion, or its people – that seems to have moved Bonaparte to treat Islam as he did. More than just allowing its believers to observe their religion unmolested, he spoke deferentially, even reverently of Islam whenever he addressed the public. This became so routine that there were rumours that he was contemplating conversion.<sup>34</sup> (There is no evidence available to this investigation that Bonaparte sought to quell such talk; his biographers, though,

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<sup>32</sup>Elgood, p. 99.

<sup>33</sup>Elgood, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup>Bourrienne, pgs. 151-4.

hasten to point out that he in fact never converted.) Of his own flexible attitude toward religion, he is quoted as saying years after the Egyptian exploit, "In Cairo I was a Mohammedan, in Paris I was a Catholic."<sup>35</sup>

Aside from its air of deceit and unsettling tone, this maxim proves astonishingly appropriate: in Egypt but in Cairo in particular, Bonaparte sought a sort of Muslim identity for himself. Though this seems at first strange, it may be seen as the logical tactical move of a conqueror intending to gain the confidence of an otherwise resistant public. To this end, a proclamation drafted in Alexandria made its way to the Egyptian capital and into the hands of the Egyptian scholar 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti. Al-Jabarti would sit on the divan Bonaparte founded as a makeshift governing body and later wrote a scathing chronicle of the French presence in Cairo.

After quoting the proclamation verbatim, he criticizes its use of Qur'anic scripture and profession of Islamic tenets that preface a set of orders for the Egyptian people. Though the proclamation's most explicit and aggressive announcements include threat of torching any village that opposed the French army,<sup>36</sup> al-Jabarti takes particular exception to "His [Bonaparte's] statement 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He has no son, nor has He an associate in His Dominion.' In mentioning these three sentences there is an indication that the French agree with the three religions, but at the same time they do not agree with them, nor with any religion."<sup>37</sup>

Bonaparte depended on most Egyptians' not drawing al-Jabarti's conclusion. After maneuvering his way into Cairo and establishing central rule there, he never wasted an opportunity to espouse his respect for, even his leanings toward, the Islamic faith. Each proclamation distributed among Egyptians

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<sup>35</sup>As quoted by Elgood, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup>'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Napoleon in Egypt*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup>Al-Jabarti, p. 28.

quoted some Qur'anic or other traditionally Islamic saying; religious festivals were observed and often, with the help of the French, with more regalia than was customary. Rumors of Bonaparte's conversion, even of his supernatural abilities and personal contact with the Prophet Muhammad, spread among the common folk.<sup>38</sup> When approached by Muslim scholars and officials on the subject of conversion, he balked, citing ritual impediments: circumcision and abstinence from wine, he offered, precluded him and all Frenchmen from becoming Muslim. But this should be taken in context of an exchange among a few leaders, behind closed doors. In Oriental public life, he portrayed himself as faithful to Islam, if not truly indoctrinated.

Bourrienne echoes this sentiment more elaborately. "If Bonaparte spoke as a Mussulman," he writes, "it was merely in his character of a military and political chief in a Mussulman country. To do so was essential to his success, to the safety of his army, and, consequently, to his glory."<sup>39</sup>

During his sojourn in Alexandria, Lane occupied himself with orientation, making himself familiar and comfortable with his surroundings before embarking for Cairo. Just as his ship landed, he reports, the afternoon call to prayer was waning, the observant doing ablutions at the shore. He was so moved, Lane writes, "the sight of the Moos'lim at his devotions never failed to impress me with ... veneration."<sup>40</sup> It is useful to bear this observation in mind, as Lane surely did, in examining his subsequent experiences of Egypt.

On Lane's intended assimilation into the resident Orient, his biographers are clear. He continued in his study of Arabic and Turkish, but now with clear, immediate ambition; he donned traditional Egyptian garb and personal effects,

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<sup>38</sup>Bourrienne, p. 151-2; Elgood, 144.

<sup>39</sup>Bourrienne, p. 154.

<sup>40</sup>As quoted by Ahmed, p. 23.

growing a beard and imitating “native” mannerisms – all in order to seem Oriental. Like Bonaparte, it was in assumed his new identity for the Orient. With his own ambition and vigor, he took up residence in Cairo, where he sought to realize the goal of “becoming” Oriental. He would live this way at three lengthy intervals, altogether spanning three decades.<sup>41</sup>

The magnitude of his success is subject to speculation. In his own writing, Lane only hints at his assumed social transformation, relating a few events of his stay in which he was treated as a Muslim Turk.<sup>42</sup> His biographers – among them his grandnephew, the well-known Orientalist Stanley Lane-Poole, as well as Ahmed and nameless introducers of Lane editions – are less reserved. The contriver of the Biographical Sketch prefacing *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* has this to say of Lane’s Orientalization:

The result was that he gained the entire confidence of the Arabs. They even forgot that he was not an Arab. They were familiar and unreserved toward him on every subject. They were at no pains to conceal from him their feelings, their thoughts, or the reason of their actions. He was thus enabled to penetrate into the inner life of the people, to forget for the time that he was an Englishman, and to think their thoughts in their language.<sup>43</sup>

Here is the essence of Lane’s authority to account for the Egyptian Orient: so perfect was his disguise that he was taken for a native. Specifically and most importantly, he reports participating in Muslim prayer in mosques. The necessity of this, the consummate sign of inclusion, is explained by Lane-Poole, “only because without this conforming to the ways of the people he could never

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<sup>41</sup>See footnote 2.

<sup>42</sup>Lane, in his *Arabian Nights*, as quoted by Ahmed, pgs. 36-7.

<sup>43</sup>Anonymous (see footnote 2), pgs. 8-9.

have acquired that knowledge of their character which he afterwards turned to so great an account."<sup>44</sup>

Reacting to the above premise (as Lane himself voiced it in an edition of *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* unavailable to this inquiry), Said concludes, "Thus while one portion of Lane's identity floats easily in the unsuspecting Muslim sea, a submerged part retains its secret European power, to comment on, acquire, possess everything around it."<sup>45</sup>

The level of intimacy Lane is said to have achieved would have surely made Bonaparte envious. The very success presumed by Lane's biographers, was in fact precisely what the French general lacked. It was this shortcoming, history indicates, that Bonaparte's reception in Cairo. On his fond gestures meant to enamor the Egyptian people, and his overtures of Muslim sympathies – in this case, his inquiry into the feasibility of French conversion and his promise to build a grand mosque – Charles-Roux concedes:

Must we take it that, as some have affirmed, 'from this moment there was entire confidence'? It would be going too far to do so. The truth seems to have been told on this point by a Turkish chronicler, a Christian, when he declares that the ulema were never convinced by Bonaparte's professions of faith, and saw in them nothing but a pretence made from interested motives.<sup>46</sup>

So the issue of authenticity remained, for both Lane and Bonaparte, a criterion intrinsic to the success of their respective Oriental ambitions. In both men's cases it was necessary to "gain the confidence" of the Egyptians in their capital,

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<sup>44</sup>As quoted by Ahmed, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup>Said, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup>Charles-Roux, p. 76

whether to govern or study effectively. That Bonaparte failed in this is evident to historians; that Lane succeeded is wholeheartedly assumed by his biographers. There is no finer illustration of these differing accounts than the example of both men assuming Oriental clothing: Bonaparte ordered for himself a Turkish robe, which he wore once in jest and found too uncomfortable to bear;<sup>47</sup> Lane, himself posing as a Turk, found the garb if not to his liking then a tolerable necessity – and wore it every day for his years of Egyptian life.<sup>48</sup>

Further proof of Bonaparte's shortcoming is Elgood's observation that, "Despite his strenuous professions of respect for Islam, it was clear that to the capital he remained an alien, remote and incomprehensible. Until he had overcome that prejudice he could not hope to possess the goodwill of the Egyptian people. It was a disturbing reflection."<sup>49</sup> That this comment pertains to the time of popular anti-French rhetoric, and even revolt in Cairo, should come as no surprise. In the context of Bonaparte's rule of Egypt, both resentment at the French presence and suspicion of the general's professed Muslim sympathies are voiced in the proverbial same breath.

It would be equally disturbing for Lane's numerous lauders in Western academia to reflect that his Oriental identity might not have been so complete or convincing. Though conspicuously absent from any discussion of Lane in his biographies, there is reason to doubt that a young Westerner in his twenties could so immaculately master two Eastern languages that he would be taken as an Oriental by the Orientals.<sup>50</sup> Such inquiry, though, is not in the interests of his

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<sup>47</sup>Bourrienne, p. 154.

<sup>48</sup>Ahmed, 26.

<sup>49</sup>Elgood, p. 144.

<sup>50</sup>As a student of Arabic currently the same age as was Lane during his first studies (to make no mention of my experiences as an obvious foreigner in the Cairo where he is presumed to have assimilated), I am all the more skeptical of his "Orientalization."

biographers (who often seem as well-spoken publicity agents for the Lane legacy), as it shakes the authentic foundation upon which his career has rested. To question Lane's ability to become Oriental is to question his authority to represent the Orient. Intriguing though this dichotomy is, it deserves better attention than this inquiry can provide: it could well be the subject of its own piece of scholarship.

## Conclusions

To assess Bonaparte and Lane in the context of Egypt, to compare their characters, their common conceptions and dealings with the Orient, it is helpful (even necessary) to interrogate the legacy each man left in Egypt. Both seemed to come to Egypt out of some dissatisfaction with their native Europe, exemplified in Bonaparte's quotation of seeking in the Orient a glory unavailable to him at home (see the "Appetites" section). In the case of Lane's stay in Egypt, Ahmed surmises:

As well as being a device adopted as the means to a variety of ends – to spy on an enemy nation, to study Arabic society, to mobilise a nation in the cause of a European war – latent to it was the fact that it was also, and it might be at the same time as it served a particular goal, a means of escape from Western civilisation. ... Lane does not anywhere say that he wished to escape from European civilisation, but his frustration and misery when compelled, through lack of funds, to remain in England, the fervour of his longing to be in Egypt, "that paradise" as he called it, and the fulfilment he evidently found in living as an Arab among Arabs, all suggest that the impulse to slough off European ways was, to some extent at least, present in him also.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ahmed, p. 102-3.

In this, too, there is evidence of Bonaparte: “to mobilise a nation in the cause of a European war” is associated with T. E. Lawrence, but it describes Bonaparte’s precedent almost as aptly. Moreover, it can be said that both Bonaparte and Lane staged campaigns in Egypt: Bonaparte’s military, Lane’s anthropological.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, both men came in search, not just of the nebulous Orient of which they had read, but of a “real” Orient. They longed to assert themselves in a realm where the sublime, gritty, voluminous and even voluptuous elements of a living Oriental theatre were theirs to experience firsthand. To this end, each man seized upon those characteristics that impressed him as Oriental, then attempted to possess and use them for his own purposes. That is, they identified such cultural phenomena as religion, language, even clothing, then identified *themselves* in some way with each phenomenon. Though their respective thresholds for appropriation and observance differed, the common motive for Bonaparte and Lane was power. Both men required their association – or, at least, the assumption of association – with things Oriental, in order to assert themselves upon the Orient. Bonaparte’s efforts were for political spoils; Lane wished to render Egypt (and Egyptians) in his own words. Both men, ultimately, sought to somehow possess Egypt and package it, to be brought to the eyes of their fellow Westerners. To be sure, their campaigns were intellectual, in their respective textual contributions: descriptions and diagrams the Orient, all for European purposes. And, just as they first regarded the Orient via texts, they brought it home as texts: Bonaparte had “his” *Description*,<sup>53</sup> Lane his *Manners and Customs*.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Says Robert Irwin in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, “It [Manners and Customs] deserves to be considered as an early work of anthropology. (p. 23)”

<sup>53</sup>The immediate product, of course, of his savants and the Institute he founded in Cairo.

<sup>54</sup>And, later, Lane translated the Bulaq edition of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Essential to this investigation in its entirety is the notion that each came to Egypt intending to make a kind of name for himself. (Tangentially, each acquired an actual Arabic name for himself, and remained fond of it after returning to Europe.<sup>55</sup>) Those ambitions for Egypt, discussed earlier, seem to increase enormously in magnitude after their initial Oriental encounters. There are the above-mentioned texts, far and away the most substantive products of their efforts. Further, in his musings after his year spent in Egypt, Bonaparte presents the most extreme example of this:

In Egypt, I found myself freed from the obstacles of an irksome civilization. I was full of dreams. ... I saw myself founding a religion, marching into Asia, riding an elephant, a turban on my head and in my hand the new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs. In my undertakings I would have combined the experiences of the two worlds, exploiting for my own profit the theatre of all history, attacking the power of England in India and, by means of that conquest, renewing contact with the old Europe. The time I spent in Egypt was the most beautiful in my life, because it was the most ideal.<sup>56</sup>

Surely such speculation, waxing to the point of absurdity, is more the product of Bonaparte's fantastical hindsight than it is the resonance of his original plans for Egypt. Still, from his attempts to emulate Alexander, to his fabled exclamation at the Giza pyramids that "forty ages are beholding us!"<sup>57</sup> to his founding of the Institut d'Égypte, there can be no doubt that Bonaparte intended to leave his mark on the history of the realm.

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<sup>55</sup>Charles-Roux, p. 67; Ahmed, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup>Told by Bonaparte to Madame de Rémusat, as quoted by Herold, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>Miot, p. 21.

And yet it should come as no surprise that he was most influential, not to the Orient itself but to its study. This is the natural result of the most important intellectual product of the French occupation, the *Description*, and its rendering for the benefit of Europeans. As has been shown, Lane was altogether in position to benefit just so:

If we use the Napoleonic expedition (1798-1801) as a sort of first enabling experience for modern Orientalism, we can consider its inaugural heroes – in Islamic studies, Sacy, Renan, and Lane – to be builders of the field, creators of a tradition, progenitors of the Orientalist brotherhood. What Sacy, Renan, and Lane did was to place Orientalism on a scientific and rational basis. ... it established the figure of the Orientalist as central authority *for* the Orient... it put into cultural circulation a form of discursive currency by whose presence the Orient henceforth would be *spoken for*...<sup>58</sup>

There is in this evidence that Bonaparte, and the Orientalist work he sponsored, made possible in some part the efforts Lane would undertake only two decades later. More to the point, of interest here is the discourse – a dialogue of sorts – between Bonaparte and Lane. To take the above observation a step further, it can be said that Bonaparte's campaign enabled not merely aggregate Orientalism but *Lane's own* Orientalism. Bonaparte provided the precedent and intellectual atmosphere necessary to Lane's ambition and praxis in Egypt. The final, most novel, point I would like to make is that, by the rubric established in this investigation, Bonaparte and Lane emerge as the foremost voices of the Egyptian Orient; further, they exist in direct relation to one another,

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<sup>58</sup>Said, p. 122.

their respective legacies interdependent. It is therefore impossible, within the framework of Oriental and Egyptian study, to understand one without the other.

None of this is to imply a tautology between these men. From its start, my inquiry has sought to make clear their actual and intellectual disparities. Also clear is Lane's sense that, in order to accomplish his aims, he would also need to assimilate further than did Bonaparte: to "become" Oriental. He was thus authorized to speak, as Said contends above, on behalf of true Egyptians. This was an authority that the famously power-hungry Bonaparte never attained; and it is how Lane helped expand the vocabulary of Orientalist pedagogy. And because he, like all Orientalists, intended his works for other Europeans, Lane set a presumptuous directive for travelers following in his footsteps to the East: assume the manners and customs of the people; become them; and record them.