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978-1-108-08020-0 - Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt: In Company with Several Divisions of the French Army, during the Campaigns of General Bonaparte in that Country: Volume 1

Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

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Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt

Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt in 1798 famously included various scientists and savants, among whom was the author of this three-volume work, published in French in 1802 and in English in 1803. Vivant Denon (1747–1825) was a dilettante and diplomat under the Ancien Régime, but survived the Revolution thanks to the patronage of the painter David, and met Napoleon through the salon of Josephine de Beauharnais. He accompanied the army, excavating and sketching, sometimes even during battles. The publication of this lively, illustrated account is regarded as the chief stimulus for the so-called 'Egyptian Revival' style of architecture, interior design and even costume. Volume 1 describes the voyage to Egypt via Malta, the storming of Alexandria, exploration of the Delta, and travel down the Nile to Cairo and the Pyramids. The combination of archaeological observations, notes on the modern Egyptians, and descriptions of warfare makes for a fascinating read.

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt

*In Company with Several Divisions
of the French Army,
during the Campaigns of
General Bonaparte in that Country*

VOLUME 1

VIVANT DENON

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR AIKIN



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Vivant Denon
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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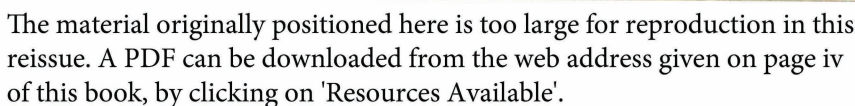
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in that Country: Volume 1
Vivant Denon
Frontmatter
[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TRAVELS
IN
UPPER AND LOWER EGYPT,
IN COMPANY WITH SEVERAL
DIVISIONS OF THE FRENCH ARMY,
During the Campaigns of
GENERAL BONAPARTE
IN THAT COUNTRY ;
AND PUBLISHED UNDER HIS IMMEDIATE PATRONAGE,
BY
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EMBELLISHED WITH NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.
—
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in that Country: Volume 1
Vivant Denon
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

DEDICATION.

TO BONAPARTE.

TO combine the lustre of your Name with the splendour of the Monuments of Egypt, is to associate the glorious annals of our own time with the history of the heroic age; and to reanimate the dust of Sesostris and Mendes, like you Conquerors, like you Benefactors.

Europe, by learning that I accompanied you in one of your most memorable

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

DEDICATION.

*morable Expeditions, will receive my
Work with eager interest. I have
neglected nothing in my power to ren-
der it worthy of the Hero to whom it
is inscribed.*

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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BY THE TRANSLATOR.

IT is presumed that an account, by an eye-witness, of the romantic but unprovoked invasion of Egypt by General Bonaparte, will not be uninteresting to the British Public. The Author, a member of the Institute of Cairo, and an excellent draftsman, was selected to accompany the troops designed for the conquest of Upper Egypt, that under the protection of a military escort he might have an opportunity of examining those stupendous remains, and eternal documents of the ancient civilization of the country, to which its then unsettled state had denied a peaceable admission. Hence the work contains an agreeable mixture of incident and description: and if the journal of the desultory operations of a campaign against an enemy, whose rapid motions, whose invincible courage, whose persevering bravery always rendered him a formidable opponent, interrupts unseasonably now and then an account of the venerable monuments

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

numents of Thebes or Tentyra ; yet this very interruption becomes a stimulus to curiosity, and the attention of the reader, though kept up active to the last, will not be withdrawn ungratified. Citizen Denon, not being a soldier by profession, and therefore not hardened to the atrocities of war, has, notwithstanding his natural partiality towards his countrymen, and his personal regard for many of the chiefs in the expedition, given a fairer account of the treatment which the natives underwent from their invaders, than we are likely to receive from any other quarter : and, indeed, of the campaigns in Upper Egypt, he is as yet the only historian : in this view, therefore, his narrative is of peculiar value. We see what a dreadful licence of lust, rapine, and slaughter, the French troops were allowed to indulge in, and how whole villages were exterminated upon the bare suspicion of meditating resistance to the ravishers of their women, the defolators of their fields, the incendiaries of their houses. We see that so far from conciliating the esteem of the Egyptians, the French dominion was confined to the range of their cannon, that their stragglers were cut off like proscribed beasts of prey ; and, pressed by the Arabs on one side, and Murad-Bey on the other,

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ADVERTISEMENT.

vii

other, they were kept in a constant state of watchfulness and alarm. The military transactions, however, are neither the most pleasing, nor the prominent feature of the work : the Author was by necessity a soldier, but by profession an artist, and a man of letters ; hence the remains of the architecture, the sculpture, and the painting of the ancient Egyptians, were the principal objects of his attention ; and these he has described both by words and the pencil, so as to render them highly interesting to all those who feel any curiosity about a nation, from whom ancient Greece derived her sublimest philosophy, and which is inseparably connected with the earlier ages of the Jewish history.

With regard to the present English edition, a few words remain to be said. The narrative in the original is one continued journal, without division of chapters, from the embarkation of the author at Toulon to his landing again in France at Frejus ; to this are added several notes, more particularly illustrative of the plates, and mentioning little traits of manners and customs, which the Author, either from inadvertence, or want of opportunity, neglected to introduce into the text. The Translator, however, has taken the liberty of breaking the journal into separate

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

ADVERTISEMENT.

separate chapters, without, however, in the least degree altering the order of its arrangement; and in a few instances, of incorporating with the text such parts of the notes as appear to have been thrown to the end of the original work, merely in consequence of having been forgotten.

Notwithstanding the liberal allowance of plates, it has been found expedient, for fear of too much enhancing the price of this edition, (the French original of which sells in London for twenty-one guineas) to leave out a few which are contained in the original. The picturesque views, therefore, of the battles, and of some other transactions, which, from their very nature must be mere fancy pieces, are omitted: a similar liberty has also occasionally been taken, in selecting the best of two or three views of the same place from different positions. In this arrangement the Proprietors have been enabled to retain nearly the whole of those engravings which represent the architectural and hieroglyphical remains of Upper Egypt, and which comprize the valuable part of the decorations of this splendid work.

A. A.

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

WHEN an author has decided on writing a preface, his principal aim is to give an idea of the nature of his work. This task, which becomes in a manner an obligation, I shall fulfil by inserting here the discourse it was my intention to read to the Institute of Cairo, on my return from upper Egypt.

“ You have acquainted me, citizens, that the Institute expected from me an account of my travels in upper Egypt, for which purpose I was, in the course of different fittings, to read extracts from the journal intended to accompany the

Vol. I. A drawings

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ii

PREFACE.

drawings I have brought from thence. My desire to meet the wishes of the Institute will stimulate me to digest, without loss of time, a multitude of notes which I have made, without any other pretension than that of forgetting no part of what offered itself daily to my observation. I was engaged in travelling through a country which was known to Europe by name only: it therefore became important to describe every thing; and I was fully aware, that at my return I should be interrogated on all sides, relative to what might, according to his habitual studies or his character, the most powerfully excite the curiosity of each of my enquirers. I have made drawings of objects of every description; and if
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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

iii

I am here fearful of fatiguing those to whom I display my numerous productions, seeing that they merely re-trace what they have before their eyes, I shall, perhaps, on my reaching France, have to reproach myself for not having multiplied them still more, or, to speak more correctly, shall lament that the circumstances in which I was placed did not allow me either the time or the conveniences to do so. If my zeal has called forth all the means of which I am possessed, these means have been powerfully seconded by the commander in chief, whose grand conceptions suffer none of the details to escape him. Being aware that the aim of my travels was to visit the monuments of upper Egypt, he

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

PREFACE.

sent me with the division which was to achieve the conquest of that territory. In General Defaix I found an inquisitive philosopher, a friend of the arts, from whom I received all the attentions which the circumstances would allow. From General Beliard I experienced friendship, and unwearied assiduities; from the officers politeness; and the utmost civility from all the soldiers of the twenty-first half-brigade. In short, I made so truly a part of the battalion it formed, and within which I had in a manner taken up my abode, that I was frequently in the heat of action without recollecting myself, and without reflecting that war was foreign to my avocations.

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

v

“ As our troops were engaged in the pursuit of an enemy constantly mounted, the movements of the division were invariably both unforeseen and multiplied. I was therefore sometimes obliged to pass rapidly over the most interesting monuments; and at other times to stop where there was nothing to observe. If, however, I have felt the fatigue of unproductive marches, I have also experienced that it is often advantageous to take a summary view of important objects previously to an entry into their details; that, if at first sight they dazzle by their number, they afterwards become classed in the mind by reflection; and that, if it be necessary studiously to preserve the first impressions, it is only during

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

PREFACE.

ing the absence of the object which has given rise to them, that these impressions can be carefully examined and analyzed. It has also struck me, that an artist who undertakes to travel, should, before he sets out, divest himself of all professional prejudices ; and that he ought not to consider what may, or what may not make a fine drawing, but the general interest which the aspect of the spot he purposes to draw may inspire. I have already, citizens, been recompensed for having divested myself of these prejudices, by the flattering curiosity you have displayed, and by the avidity with which you have examined the immense number of drawings I have brought with me ;—drawings which
I made

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

vii

I made most frequently on my knee, or standing, or even on horseback. I have never been able to finish any one of them as I could have wished, for this reason, that during the space of a whole year I could never find a table sufficiently straight and even, to be able to lay a ruler on it.

“ It has therefore been with a view to reply to your questions, that I have made this multitude of drawings, frequently too small, because our marches were too precipitate to enable me to seize the details of the objects, the aspect and *ensemble* at least of which I was determined to bring away with me. It is in this way that I have taken in the mafs the pyramids of Sfakharah, the site of which I crossed

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

PREFACE.

on a gallop, in my way to fix myself for a month in the mud houses of Bnifuef. This interval of time was spent in comparing the characters, and in drawing the persons and dresses of the different nations which now inhabit Egypt, together with their buildings, and the positions of their villages.

“ I saw at length the portico of Hermopolis, the huge masses of the ruins of which gave me the earliest idea of the splendour of the colossal architecture of the Egyptians. On each of the blocks of which this edifice was composed, I fancied I saw engraved the words *posterity*, *eternity*.

“ Shortly after, Denderah (Tentyris) taught me that it was not in
the

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

ix

the doric, ionic, and corinthian orders alone, that the beauties of architecture were to be sought : wherever a harmony of parts exists, there beauty is to be found. I had approached these edifices in the morning : in the evening I was snatched away from them, more agitated than satisfied. I had seen a hundred things, while a thousand others had escaped me ; and had, for the first time, found access to the archives of the arts and sciences. I had the presentiment that I should meet with nothing finer in Egypt ; and, after having made twenty journies to Denderah, I am confirmed in this opinion. The sciences of arts, united by good taste, have decorated the temple of Isis : there astronomy, morals,

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

PREFACE.

morals, and metaphysics, assume shape and figure, and these figures and shapes decorate the ceilings, frizes, and bases, with at least as much taste and grace as our flight and insignificant paintings *in fresco* ornament the modern cabinets.

“ We continued to advance. I must confess that I trembled a thousand times, lest Mourad-bey, wearied with hunting us, should either surrender, or try the chance of a battle. I was of opinion, that the one which was fought near Samanhut would wind up this great drama: in the midst, however, of the combat, it struck Mourad-bey that the desert would be more fatal to us than his arms. Desaix was thus again deprived of an opportunity

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

xi

tunity of destroying him ; while, for my part, I cherished the hope of pursuing him beyond the tropic.

“ We marched towards Thebes, the name alone of which fills the imagination with vast recollections. As if this city could escape me, I made a drawing of it the moment it came in view. We passed through it so rapidly, that scarcely was a monument discovered, when it was necessary to abandon it.

“ There a colossal statue presented itself which could be measured by the eye alone, governed by the sensation of surprise which the view of it occasioned. To the right were seen mountains excavated and sculptured ; to the left, temples which, viewed at a distance, appeared like
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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

PREFACE.

so many rocks. Next came palaces, and other temples, which I was obliged to quit precipitately. I returned, to seek mechanically the hundred gates of which Homer poetically speaks, to express by a single word this splendid city, the weight of the porticoes of which oppressed the earth, while the breadth of Egypt scarcely sufficed for its compass and extent. Seven subsequent journeys thither have not satisfied the curiosity with which this first visit inspired me. It was not until the fourth that I was enabled to cross to the opposite side of the river.

“Farther on, I should have regarded Hermontis as superb, if that city had not been placed so near to the

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

xiii

the gates of Thebes. The temple of Esneh, the ancient Latopolis, appeared to me to be the perfection of art among the Egyptians, and one of the finest productions of antiquity. That of Edfù, or Apollinopolis Magna, is one of the largest, best preserved, and most advantageously situated of the monuments of Egypt. In its present state it still appears like a fortress which commands the surrounding country.

“ It was there that the destination of my travels was decided on: we set out on our march for Syené (Afsuan) under the most positive instructions. In this passage through the desert, I felt for the first time in my life the weight of years, on which I had not reckoned when I engaged

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

PREFACE.

engaged in the expedition. On this occasion I derived greater support from my spirit than from my strength. At Syene I quitted the army, to remain with the half-brigade which was to keep Mourad-bey in check in the desert. Proud at finding my country in possession of the very boundaries which had once belonged to the Roman empire, I inhabited with exultation the quarters which three Roman cohorts had anciently occupied for the defence of these limits. During the twenty-two days which I spent on this celebrated spot, I took possession of whatever was to be found in its vicinity. I extended my conquests as far as Nubia, on the other side of Philoe, that delightful island, where
it

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

xv

it was necessary to snatch by force from the inhabitants the curiosities with which it abounded; and the temples of which were not opened to me until after five days of siege and six journies I had made thither. Feeling all the importance of making you acquainted with the spot I inhabited, and with all the interesting objects it contained, I have made drawings even of the rocks, of the quarries of granite from whence have been drawn those colossal statues, those obelisks still more than colossal, and those blocks covered with hieroglyphics so celebrated in history. With the form of them I could have wished to bring back with me the specimens which would have interested you the most powerfully.

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Vivant Denon

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

PREFACE.

fully. Not being able to make a map of the country, I have drawn a bird's-eye view of the entrance of the Nile into Egypt, together with views of that river running over beds of granite, which seem to have marked the boundaries between Ethiopia and a country more fertile and temperate. Quitting for ever the former rude territory, I approached the verdant Elefantis, the garden of the tropic. I fought and measured all the monuments it contains, and quitted with regret that tranquil abode, where the pleasing occupations in which I had been engaged had re-established my health, and given me a new vigour.

“ On the right bank of the Nile
I visited Ombos, the city of the crocodile,