

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS
IN
UPPER AND LOWER EGYPT



CHAPTER XIX.

Arab Council—Further Particulars of the Remains at Tentyra —Inundation of the Nile —Hot Weather—Visit Thebes and Etfu—Coptic Monastery— Rise of the River—Tombs of the Kings near Thebes

ON the next day there was an assembly of the sheiks of the villages (See Plate XXXVIII.) for the purpose of discussing a method to reconcile the interest of the government with that of the cultivators, and of

VOL. III.

A

offering

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

offering premiums to those who should distinguish themselves in the ensuing year, (for in Egypt the year may be said to commence with the preparation of the canals to receive and distribute the waters of the inundation, every thing being then concluded relative to the past, and the operations for the future crop being about to begin). It is not in my power to give the particular deliberations of this council, but I was informed that no innovations were introduced without previously consulting the will of the inhabitants, to whom every possible encouragement was promised. When the session broke up, to the honour of these brave men be it spoken, they said, “ This is like an assembly of the
“ time of Sheik Prince Ammon, in which
“ the consultation was not about arbitrary
“ impositions, but the best means of promoting the public welfare.” This Prince
Ammon

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

3

Ammon was a powerful Arab chief, who, during the troubles of Egypt, had rendered himself the independent sovereign of all the Upper Thebais from Girgeh. The Mamelukes, whom he sheltered in their misfortunes, had no sooner thrown off the authority of the Porte than they looked upon him as a rebel and protector of the mal-contents, whom they therefore attacked, enfeebled, and at length destroyed. We have already seen the unhappy end of the last prince of this house, after the battle of Samahute.

The following day we were feasted with equal abundance by the villages of Abumannah, though their manners were by no means so polished as those of our former hosts, for, notwithstanding they had themselves of their own accord furnished this plentiful repast, they waited impatiently till we had finished,

A 2

in

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

in order to carry away what was left, and make a great scramble of it.

Citizen Gerard, and eight members of the committee of arts being about to proceed up the Nile to make a chart of its course, offered me an opportunity of renewing my travels, and in this journey it was that I made a drawing of the zodiac, which is on the ceiling of the portico at Tentyra ; that I enriched my collection of these new proofs of the skill of the Egyptians in astronomy, with a number of drawings and hieroglyphical inscriptions, which, compared, examined, and discussed in the tranquillity of the closet, ought to reveal their mysteries, or convince us that they are not to be found out. I procured also many particulars relative to the state of the fine arts in particular, by the discovery of a canon of proportions traced upon a human

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

5

a human figure with red chalk, and afterwards covered by a thin stucco, a method, no doubt, adopted by the Egyptians to give a finer finish to their bas-reliefs, and render their paintings indestructible. I made an outline drawing of the bas-relief and the lines, by which the figure was divided into proportions: hence we may infer the principles which they had adopted, their mode of applying them, and, in short, that method of proceeding, which, to the advantage of preventing at once all errors, all unharmonious combinations, and ignoble proportions, unites that of attaining the constant equality observable in their works; an equality, which, if it is detrimental to the sallies of genius and the expression of delicate sentiment, tends at least to the perfection of uniformity, converts drawing into a mechanical art, and reduces sculpture to an accessory proper for the decoration

A 3

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

ration and enriching of architecture, to a method of expressing ideas, in short, to writing. It is worthy of remark that, according to the Egyptian canon the human figure was divided into twenty-two parts and a half, of which the head took up two and two-thirds, or the eighth of the whole, corresponding in this respect with the heroic style among the Greeks.

I observed also among the bas-reliefs a little votive temple, with a pediment, which is never used in Egyptian architecture, (See Plate LX. Fig. 8): a small figure holding a rabbit shows that in merely ornamental works the Egyptian artists could occasionally deviate from their usual severity; a statue modelled from this very figure would be a Greek faun (Plate LX. Fig. 7.) I completed also my collection of animals, a kind of sculpture in which they excelled, and where the grandeur
and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

7

and simplicity of the lines often comes up to the ideal abstract of beauty: it was generally in neglected corners, in pieces condemned to everlasting obscurity, that I found the most laboured and best preserved specimens, and therefore in copying them I had to experience peculiar difficulties. A constant subject of astonishment is afforded by the equality of care observable in all the parts of so vast a whole, by that minute exactness of execution, and that perfect finish, the fruits of an obstinacy and an inflexible perseverance which characterises the monastic spirit, whose zeal neither perishes nor even cools, and whose pride is not individual but corporate. Probably the artists themselves were a constituent part of the colleges of priests; for it is scarcely to be supposed that these would have allowed the arts, that elevate and adorn

A 4

the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the human mind, to be entrusted to any cat but their own.

On the 20th of June the Nile began to rise, and on this and the two following days had attained the height of three inches, it then increased at the rate of two inches a day, and afterwards at three inches; the water now filled the banks, ceased to be green, without, however, becoming muddy. It was proposed to make a tour, in order to examine the canals and the intended ameliorations, and to complete the plan of all those useful and benevolent operations which evince the public spirit and paternal care of a government. The heat had become insupportable; the west wind oppressed us, caused bleedings of the nose, and painful eruptions, which covered alternately all parts of the body, dried and hardened the skin, and impeded

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS IN EGYPT.

9

peded perspiration ; the rays of the sun, the principal, perhaps the sole cause of these evils, raised on every pore a pustule similar to the small-pox, which became intolerable, when in lying down it was necessary to rest on these inflamed points. I was myself as much a sufferer as the others, but regretting the tombs of the kings at Thebes, I resolved to brave my disorder, and accordingly marched with the detachment.

The heat was extreme on the first of July, our blood was inflamed by the solstitial sun : two soldiers fainted while we were leaving Kenh, and on the next morning fifteen others were obliged to be left behind ; and if we had not by this time been a little accustomed to the climate, not an individual would have been able to resist it ; as it was, we were obliged to make shorter days journies, and to march only in the morning.

The

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08022-4 - 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 3

Vivant Denon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The country, notwithstanding the heat, was quite alive; the whole population, under the direction of the sheiks, was busily employed in clearing out the canals, and opening them to admit the inundation. The restoration of public confidence and tranquillity had brought back the herds from the passes of the desert, and the fields, abandoned four months ago, were now covered with animals feeding in peace.

We rested one day at Kous, and on the third arrived by sun-rise at Karnac, where I did the honours of the place to those who were now come hither for the first time: I then satisfied myself of the exactness of my former operations. Among the new discoveries which I made while traversing the ruins of the temple, may be mentioned a figure that I perceived on the outer walls of the small buildings by the side of the sanctuary :