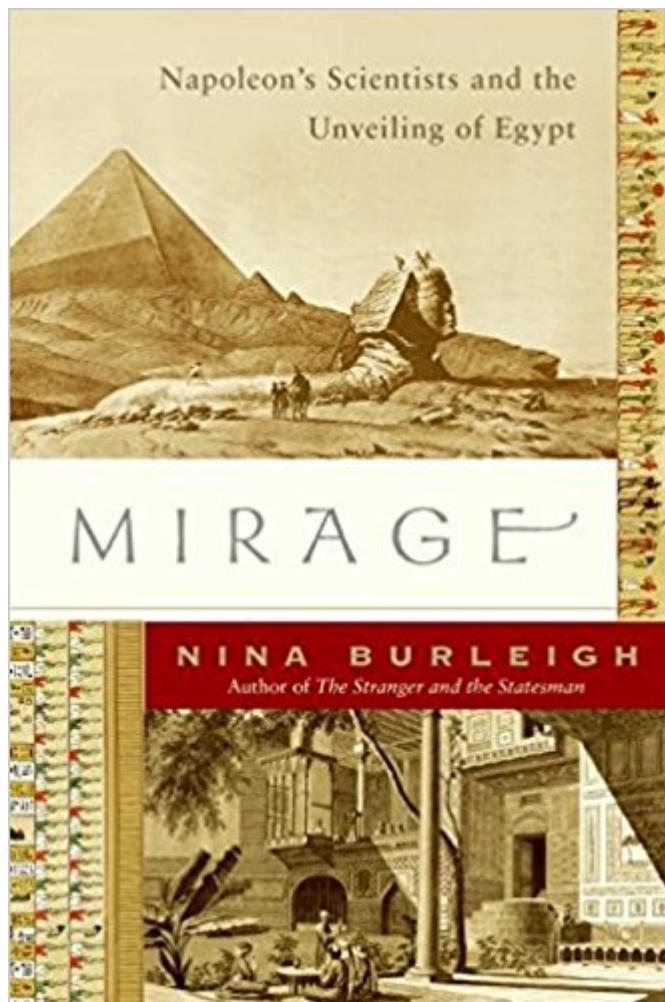


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Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists And The Unveiling Of Egypt



Synopsis

Little more than two hundred years ago, only the most reckless or eccentric Europeans had dared traverse the unmapped territory of the modern-day Middle East. Its history and peoples were the subject of much myth and speculation—and no region aroused greater interest than Egypt, where reports of mysterious monuments, inscrutable hieroglyphics, rare silks and spices, and rumors of lost magical knowledge tantalized dreamers and taunted the power-hungry. It was not until 1798, when an unlikely band of scientific explorers traveled from Paris to the Nile Valley, that Westerners received their first real glimpse of what lay beyond the Mediterranean Sea. Under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Army, a small and little-known corps of Paris's brightest intellectual lights left the safety of their laboratories, studios, and classrooms to embark on a thirty-day crossing into the unknown—some never to see French shores again. Over 150 astronomers, mathematicians, naturalists, physicists, doctors, chemists, engineers, botanists, artists—even a poet and a musicologist—accompanied Napoleon's troops into Egypt. Carrying pencils instead of swords, specimen jars instead of field guns, these highly accomplished men participated in the first large-scale interaction between Europeans and Muslims of the modern era. And many lived to tell the tale. Hazarding hunger, hardship, uncertainty, and disease, Napoleon's scientists risked their lives in pursuit of discovery. They approached the land not as colonizers, but as experts in their fields of scholarship, meticulously categorizing and collecting their finds—from the ruins of the colossal pyramids to the smallest insects to the legendary Rosetta Stone. Those who survived the three-year expedition compiled an exhaustive encyclopedia of Egypt, twenty-three volumes in length, which secured their place in history as the world's earliest-known archaeologists. Unraveling the mysteries that had befuddled Europeans for centuries, Napoleon's scientists were the first to document the astonishing accomplishments of a lost civilization—before the dark shadow of empire-building took Africa and the Middle East by storm. Internationally acclaimed journalist Nina Burleigh brings readers back to a little-known landmark adventure at the dawn of the modern era—one that ultimately revealed the deepest secrets of ancient Egypt to a very curious continent.

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Customer Reviews

When 28-year-old Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, his band of 50,000 soldiers and sailors was accompanied by 151 Parisian scientists and artists, who laid the groundwork for what became Egyptology. Ten of these remarkable men are the focus of Burleigh's narrative. Among them, three of the most prominent were the lowborn, pugnacious mathematician Gaspard Monge, a dedicated revolutionary who invented descriptive geometry; the painfully shy chemist Claude-Louis Berthollet, who invented new ways to make gunpowder and steel; and the witty artist and diplomat Dominique-Vivant Denon, who produced 200 architecturally precise sketches of Egyptian ruins and a bestselling travelogue; later he became Napoleon's first director of the Louvre Museum. The survivors of the team brought home a vast body of knowledge, but surrendered their greatest discovery, the Rosetta Stone, to conquering British troops. The result of the savants' work was the 24-volume Description of Egypt, magnificently illustrated with engravings and maps, which helped launch Egyptomania and the rape of the Nile, though Burleigh's discussion of this is scanty. Still, Burleigh (A Very Private Woman) offers an absorbing glimpse of Napoleon's thwarted bid for a grand French empire and its intellectual fruits. 8 pages of b&w photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"With an easy style and an eye for striking detail, Burleigh concentrates on 151 French scientists, scholars and students who joined the expedition, tempted by hero worship of Napoleon and the prospect of scientific adventure." (Associated Press) "Burleigh spotlights the Indiana Jones-esque scientists who joined Napoleon's Egyptian invasion during the late 18th century." (People)

Fascinating subject matter but not well written

I'm interested in the archaeological side of Napoleon's expedition and having seen copies of the Description de l'Egypt I was interested in the men behind that. Nina's book was wonderfully interesting to read - though in fact not a lot about the archaeology and site visits themselves. Fascinating to read behinds the scenes and what these artists and scientists coped with on their visit. Am looking forward to reading some of the books in her bibliography.

Interesting book. Several reviewers have panned this work. I'm not hung up on the absolute historical correctness of all the boo-boo's Napoleon made in Egypt. I like the emphasis on the characters the big N. took with him. Since there is no test at the end of the book or a professor to please this makes for an easy, interesting, casual read. I can't vouch for all the negative review points being made and really don't care. The 'savants' he took are an interesting and are about what one would expect of 'scientist types' from that era. Worth reading if you don't want a text book version of the Invasion of Egypt.

Love Napoleon stuff. Loved this, in particular! Can't wait for next stay in Paris to ID the streets named after savants...

A thoroughly engrossing, thoroughly fascinating account of Napoleon's disastrous and ill-conceived campaign to conquer Egypt, and pre-empt British influence in the area. What set this invasion apart was Napoleon's decision to bring some 250 'savants', or scholars in various fields with the invading force, to document the wonders of Egypt from its flora and fauna to its monuments and geography. The stories of these amazing men, and their dedication and accomplishments are truly inspiring. The French discovery of the Rosetta stone, and its subsequent forced relinquishment to the British, and the story of the subsequent ravaging of Egypt's treasures are additional pieces of history well-covered, that you don't want to miss. A masterful book that I could not put down!

A great, punchy account of the Scientific Expedition to Egypt drawn from the journals of the scientists themselves. An engaging read!

Very well researched and written. Excellent reading for the ordinary reader as well as for historians interested in that particular subject

a good read about a little known failure of Napoleon's storied military programs. How it failed. The

best is the body of knowledge brought back to Europe and the Savants who did it are the highlights of the book. well written and orgainzed.

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