

**Chapter Three**

**AFTER-EFFECTS OF NAPOLEON'S INVASION OVER EGYPT.**

Although the French occupation of Egypt lasted only three years, it marks a turning point in the history of the country and its effects were enduring. (1) The most important effect was the re-introduction of Egypt to the outside world after a long period of isolation and stagnation.

The French military occupation of Egypt was in itself of little significance as compared to the consequences that resulted from

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(1) Umar al Dasūqī: Fī'l-Adab al Hadīth, p.18, Vol.I.

it. Until the last years of the 18th century, the people of the Middle East were living a self-contained life unmindful of Europe. In fact, there remained an entire unawareness of Europe throughout the world of Islam. With the occupation, a new era dawned, "and the end of the eighteenth century witnessed the beginning of the impact of European culture and civilization on the Arab World." (1)

Referring to the invasion of the Nile Valley by Napoleon, Hitti says: "The first impact of the West, the first contact in modern times between the West and this part of the East, was a military contact." (2) The occupation provided the first 'knock', which awakened the Middle East from its medieval slumber.

"..... The French occupation came like a breath of fresh air opening the windows of Egypt to the world; and it sowed the first seeds

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(1) Ibid., p.16

(2) Hitti: essay "Current Trends in Islam", New York 1951.

of a national consciousness which made the work of Muhammad 'Alī possible." (1)

The effect of the Western domination of Arab political life from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the middle of the present has been contradictory, although the intention was consistent. By deliberate policy and sheer example, the west introduced ideas and technology which have considerably changed the basis of social relation in the Arab world and have had profound political effects as well. At the same time, however, the Western powers studiously pursued a conservative policy regarding the political life itself, seeking in effect to prevent the social and economic consequences of their presence from altering the existing political institutions. They introduced revolutionary concessions, but tried to keep them from making revolution in the Arab political structure.

#### The Napoleonic invasion in the Middle East

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(1) Walter N. Birks: A short History of Islamic Egypt, p.62

set a continuous reaction that has not yet ceased. The year 1798 may be marked as the year in which western powers perhaps discovered the Arab East leaving to their rivalry for domination or spheres of influence. The influence of the West in the following century and a half was reckoned as a phenomenon with far-reaching consequences in the recent history of the area.

Political effects.

Politically and militarily, Napoleon's expedition ultimately turned out to be more than a transitional adventure, though it failed to establish France in the East.

One remarkable consequence of the French expedition was the appearance of national consciousness in Egypt. Napoleon in order to offset the prestige and authority of the Mamluks, and later, of the Turks, tried to appeal to the Egyptians to seek their cooperation in the governance of their country. By the time the Arabs began to desire freedom from the Ottoman Turks and European imperial power. (1)

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(1) Najib Ullah: Islamic Literature, p.174.

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Egypt was consequently divided into provinces and was placed under the governors but each of them was also to have a divan of local shaikhs to advise and assist, while it was further planned that these provinces should send deputies to a national consultative assembly. These were new and very strange ideas to the Egyptians who had for centuries been accustomed only to obeying the orders of their rulers. (1)

In 1801 the French in Egypt surrendered to the British. A temporary British occupation followed, but in 1802 the country was restored to the sultan. The evacuation of French forces from Ottoman territory made possible a gradual restoration of the traditionally friendly feelings between the two countries. French ascendancy in the Ottoman capital was re-established, and by 1806 Napoleon was able to induce the Porte to take arms against Russia, with whom France was

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(1) Walter N. Birks: A short History of Islamic Egypt, p.82.

then at war. The Turks, who helped her to get rid of the Russian danger by collaborating with the French Emperor, were sorely disappointed when Napoleon after spectacular victories over the Russians concluded the Treaty of Tilsit, (1) with Tsar Alexander I in 1807.

In 1812, Napoleon's ill-starred expedition to Moscow closed the chapter of forceful French intervention in the affairs of the Middle East.

#### Economic and Social Effects.

Middle East is mostly populated by the Arabs, Armenians, Egyptians, Greeks, Slavs and Turks. It began early in the nineteenth century to feel increasingly the impact of the modern western world. Their contacts with western ideas and institutions were through a variety of mediums-American, Austrian, British, German and Russian generally and French particularly. There was no uniformity of cultural diffusion in all parts of the Ottoman Empire and among all segments of

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(1) The alliance finally ended with Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812.

its varied people. In the urban centres of Egypt, in many parts of Balkans, Beirut and Damascus, intercourse with the West was far more frequent and intimate than in the rural areas. The contact of the peasants and nomads in the Asiatic parts of the Ottoman Empire with the western world was practically nil.

We find that Western ideas, manners, customs and dress tended to be adopted more rapidly by the Christians of the middle class in the urban centres than by the Muslims. Nevertheless, this foreign culture of western and Christian origin began to spread among the educated Muslims. Foreign missionaries in their schools and colleges, foreign businessmen introducing modern goods, services, and methods contributed much to the dissemination of western culture. Young men of the upper classes went to Europe to complete their education. Foreign tutors were employed by wealthy families and became acquainted with European culture in its all phases.

Chief among the points raised by the French scholars was the problem of joining the Red

Sea to the Mediterranean with a canal. But after calculations, it was wrongly thought that the water level in the Red Sea was thirty-three feet higher than the water level in the Mediterranean. The project was thus given up for the time being.

Later in 1869, the opening of the Suez canal for maritime traffic led to the penetration of French culture and commercial influence in Egypt. It seemed that it would be important as a spearhead of French influence.

#### Educational Effects.

The french expedition against Egypt in 1798 was not of a purely military composition; it had with it a group of French savants whose main purpose was to conduct the scientific research necessary for the maintenance of the French rule. These scholars founded L'Institut Francais and immortalized its name by a number of important academic and scientific achievements which were the basis of other valuable and

lasting works produced by later scholars. (1)  
 The Institute had a large library of Arabic books. Shaikh al-Jabarti, who was himself well known as a mathematician, expressed his admiration for the French enthusiasm for learning; he used to visit the library and attend lectures given by French scholars on electricity and chemistry. (2)

Until Napoleonic armed inroad into Arab territory, the people of the Arab world were generally leading a self-contained and traditional life with no progress and being unmindful of the progress of the world outside. "Change did not interest them. This sudden contact with the West gave them the first knock that helped to awaken them from their medieval slumber. It kindled the intellectual spark that was set to corner the Muslim world on fire." (3)

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- (1) The Institute made a complete study of the country from almost every point of view, which culminated in La Description d'Egypte (Paris, 1809-1816). Even the history of Egyptology owes to the beginning of its advancement to the discovery of the Rosetta stone by an officer in the army, Boussard by name.
- (2) Gordon: Egypt. p.70.
- (3) Hitti: History of the Arabs, p.745

The result was that some intellectuals among the different peoples of the Ottoman Empire, propagated western culture within their own communities. They formed centres of revolt against the backwardness, the ignorance, and the darkness which prevailed in the Middle East. They became heroes of the new knowledge. They sought to destroy the old and to introduce the new. With satire and ridicule, they attacked the old regime. By the translation of western literature and scientific books and by the publication of magazines and pamphlets they endeavoured to introduce the western thought and knowledge to their communities. In the Middle East they performed a function somewhat similar to that of the intellectual leaders of the Renaissance in Europe in the fifteenth century.

The French expedition was of a great importance in introducing western cultural impact to the Middle East. The impact of the brief three year occupation (1798-1801) was gradual and indirect, and lasted long after the French had evacuated Egypt.

With the first contact between the Western and Arabic thought and culture in Egypt began the awakening of the Arab scholars from their medieval slumber and apathy to the light of new science and material civilization. In his chronicle "Ajā'ib al-Āthār", al-Jabartī expresses his wonder at some chemical experiments which were conducted at the laboratory of the Institute. (1) He describes them as follows:

"Among the strangest things I saw in that place (the laboratory) was that one of the people in-charge took one of the bottles containing distilled water he poured a little from another bottle. The two liquids rose, and a coloured cloud ascended therefrom, until it disappeared. The contents of the tube dried up, and became a yellow stone ... a dry stone which we handled and examined. This he did again using different waters, then produced a blue stone. Repeating the experiment a third time with other waters, he produced a ruby red stone. Further, he took a pinch of white powder, put it on an anvil and struck it gently with a hammer, then a terrific sound ensued, a sound similar to that of a gun, which gave us a shock. So they laughed at us"  
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(1) i.e. L'Institut Français. Its name was immortalized by a number of important and scientific achievements which were the foundation of more and lasting works produced by later scholars.

(2) al-Jabartī: Ajā'ib al-Āthār, pp.36-37, Vol.III

Napoleon brought with him a band of scholars in various fields consisting of one hundred and sixtyseven mathematicians, engineers, architects, hydrologists, historians, Egyptologists, authors and archseologists, who promptly began to study the ancient Egyptian monuments, language, history and geography. Their work left an indelible trace marks on Egypt and together with subsequent French commercial penetration, laid a firm foundation for cultural links between France and the Land of the Nile. (1)

The missionaries from the western countries had a great contribution in the development of the cultural literary aspects of Arab countries. These missionaries realised that what the country needed above all was a system of education and a nation's lost inheritance might not be recovered except through its literature. So the first requisite was a supply of Arabic text-books and school manuals. Within a few years they had printed enough books to supply the schools they had founded and other schools

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(1) Gordon: Egypt, p.69

besides their own.

"There was a tendency among the Christians: an awakening of their eastern Christian self-consciousness, a conviction that although they must refuse to become Islamicized and must recreate their spiritual life with the aid of Europe, they had nevertheless a special part to play in the Moslem Orient." (1)

The missionaries rapidly opened schools in various parts of Syria. Their first foundations were in Beirut and Jerusalem. Having remedied the shortage of books, they turned their attention to the problem of training qualified teachers, which they did by converting the high school they had found at Abbey in Lebanon into a training College for teachers. By 1860 they had established thirty-three schools attended by approximately one thousand pupils, of whom nearly one-fifth were girls.

Their growing work in the educational field came in 1866, when they founded the

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(1) A.H.Hourani: Minorities in the Arab World  
p.25

stirrings of the Arab revival owes most to their labours.

Among missionaries, the Jesuits had re-opened two of their former establishments in the Lebanon in 1831. (1)

They founded schools in Beirut (1839), Ghazir (1843), and Zahla (1844), and then extended their range as fast as their resources permitted to neighbouring localities, and eventually to more distant centres like Damascus (1872) and Aleppo (1873), where they had previously worked.

In the field of printing, the Jesuits established their first lithographic press in 1847; but its output was very limited.

The missionaries, thus, had indeed done

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(1) Jesuit and other Catholic schools had existed since the seventeenth century, but it was only in the eighteen-thirties that conditions arose in which their numbers and influence could increase; and it was during the same decade that American Protestant schools became important.

notable work for the development of Arabic literature. The activities of the Catholic missions in those early days (creditable though they were in the circumstances) remained localised and restricted in their influence. Several of their establishments were, if not actually ravaged, at any rate compelled to be closed in the disturbances which intermittently shook the country, notably in 1860. Their contribution to the general progress of education was indeed valuable.

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt was epoch-making in more than one way. It marked the beginning of the break with the past. Along with his other equipment the French invader brought to Cairo an Arabic press which he had plundered from Vatican (in Rome). This press was the first of its kind in the valley of the Nile. The French conqueror used it for issuing a propaganda sheet in Arabic. It developed into the renowned Maṭbaʿt Būlāq (Bulaq Press). The director of the new press was a Syrian, Niqūla al-Masabikī who had spent four years

in Italy, particularly at Milan, where he cast type. In its first twenty years (1822-42) the Bulaq press put out two hundred and forty-three books mostly texts. In this press, translations of French works were also published.

European professors were invited to Egypt, and promising young Egyptians were sent to France, Italy and Austria to pursue their higher studies. Between 1813 and 1849 (the year of Muhammad 'Alī's death) three hundred and eleven such students were sent to Europe at the expense of the State.

Napoleon founded a medical school at Cairo, which is still a going concern. This was headed by a French physician, Clot Bey. Napoleon started a sort of academy of science with a library in Cairo. It has survived upto the present days. Napoleon, moreover, laid the foundation of a literature of academic importance.

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(1) Hitti: History of Arabs, p.745

In the field of translation, Rifa'at al-Tahtāwī's work has the greatest importance. (1) He was one of the early scholars to go to France, chief translator of the school of medicine founded by Napoleon, and editor of "al Waqa'ī al-Misriyya" (Egyptian Events). He pioneered the transmission of western scientific thought to the Arab world. (2) The translation of numerous European books presented many difficulties in its way. The necessity of finding expression for a host of foreign ideas was first felt in Egypt and then in other countries. Foreign ideas for which at first only foreign words were frequently used. Among the early translators, even in al-Tahtāwī's work, we find numerous foreign words used taken over indiscriminately, side by side with pure Arabic words and phrases to express western concepts. (3) Thus the Arabic language had been rendered more

(1) Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ramādī: article "Rifa'at al-Tahtāwī", in "Dā'irat Ma'ārif al-sha'b", No.58, 1959.

(2) Hitti: The Near East in History, p.436

(3) al Dasūqī: Tatawwur al-Maqal al Adabī in "Arabic and Islamic Studies", Massachusetts 1965

adequate and flexible for expressing technical terms.

In Egypt the principal sources from which European thought radiated were the technical schools founded by Muhammad 'Alī, and the educational missions which he despatched to Europe. These schools, modelled on European lines, often under European supervision, had as their first aim the training of physicians, administrators, lawyers and technical experts of all kinds, who were necessary for the carrying out of the Pasha's ambitious projects.

Many European travellers began to visit the East, and an ever-increasing number of Egyptian students entered the universities of Western Europe, studying the culture and technique of the West, and at the same time arousing a new interest in Arabic culture among the Westerners.

#### Medical Education.

During the reign of the Mamluks science and art in Egypt fell to their lowest ebb.

Medicine in particular degenerated into a combination of charlatanism and superstition. The Egyptians at that time appeared to have lost all connection with their brilliant past.

Lane (1) speaks of the Egyptians Physicians in the following words:

"The Egyptian Medical and Surgical practitioners are mostly barbers, miserably ignorant of the sciences which they profess, and unskilful in their practice ..... Many of the Egyptians, in illness, neglect medical aid; placing their whole reliance on Providence or on Charms." (2)

During the three years of occupation of Egypt by the army of Napoleon, French savants were given great facilities to explore Egypt scientifically. A commission was delegated to prepare a plan for organising a civil hospital. This scheme was implemented.

About the effect of Napoleon's invasion

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- (1) Edward William Lane (1801-76) is called the Grand Master of Arabic Studies.
- (2) Lane: The Manners and Customs of the Egyptians, p.223

on the medical education, Lane writes:

"..... a number of young men, natives of Egypt are now receiving European instruction in medicine, anatomy, surgery, and other sciences, for the service of the government."  
(1)

Now discussing the effects of Napoleon's invasion in the field of literature, it could be safely assessed that Napoleon sowed the seed of modern civilization in Egypt. He established two schools, one theatre, one library, one academy for research, one press, a large number of laboratories and started two magazines viz.

(1) al-Ashūr al-Misrī, Weekly (2)

(2) Barīd Misrī

The adoption of innumerable elements of western civilization had far-reaching effects on the development of Arabic literature. Ahmad Hasan al Zayyat, the famous litterateur says:

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(1) Lane: The Manners and Customs of the Egyptians, p.223

(2) This weekly magazine was called al-Ashūr because it was weekly and a week in French democratic calendar had ten days.

"What a lamp can do to remove darkness was done by Napoleon in Egypt. The dark clouds were removed from the horizon of Egypt and people became able to realize that "they were in the 19th century but the West was in regard to Egypt like a learned man standing before a dumb animal looking at it with contempt. (1)

The French brought with them an Arabic printing press. The French leader considered the written words as more powerful than armament and gunpowder. The Arabic printing press thus introduced was the first to be used in Egypt. (2) It was a real starting point of a new phase in Egypt's culture. It had a wide impact upon the intellectual and political evolution of Egypt in the nineteenth century. "The French savants did researches in their different branches and wrote such a detailed description of Egypt that

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Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat: Tārīkh al-Adab al-Arabī, p.416

(2) al-Rafi<sup>ī</sup>: Tārīkh al-Harakat al-Qawwaiyya, p.120

their combined work still remains a valuable source of knowledge". (1)

The development of the journalistic press in Egypt, from 1828 onward, played an important role in the transformation of Arabic prose, and in the introduction of a new, simple, and clear style. Scientific works were translated followed by literary ones, and the Arabic classics were published in accordance with modern European methods.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the creative use of the classical Arabic language had almost entirely ceased. (2) The medieval writer scorned simplicity, and repelled the simple by adopting a style, strewn with obscurities and graced with literary allusions and

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(1) Dhaki Najib Mahmūd: The Land and People of Egypt, p.65

The French established an official press and started publishing the "Courrier de L'Egypt, a monthly scientific and economic journal which reported findings and discussions of the members of the Institute.

(2) A.H.Hourani: Syria and Lebanon, p.36

erudite wit. But the spread of education and increasing literacy of the population itself created a demand for simple, easily intelligible and interesting books. The problem was essentially the same, though more complicated than that which confronted English writers at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which Defoe, Addison and Steele successfully solved and led the way in breaking up the stately periods of Caroline press.

The student who begins the study of Arabic and a foreign language simultaneously finds that he can make more progress with the latter, and embrace its cultural heritage and neglects Arabic. In the western literature he finds intellectual vigour and conformity with the present, and a spirit, a life, and a virility which he does not find in Arabic.

Thus considering the effects of invasion, we can say that "the French expedition was more academic than military." (1)

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It can ultimately be judged a military failure. The scientific and educational consequences of his adventure for Egypt and Europe both were monumental.