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Egypt and Napoléon Displaced

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Abstract
Jean-Léon Gérôme was a French painter and sculptor, associated with numerous artistic movements (from Neo-Greek to Orientalism). This contribution offers a review of the author's works that portrayed Napoleon Bonaparte's experience in Egypt. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that Gérôme's work, contextualised in early 19th century France, and his choice to portray a general and emperor who traced profound changes in European History, is emblematic of art's capacity to transform power into image.

Palabras clave:

Jean-Léon Gérôme; art; power of image; Napoleon; Egypt

Jean-Leon Gérôme (1824–1904) was a well-respected artist in nineteenth-century France. His career spanned much of the second half of the century and was built upon his expertise as both a painter and sculptor. An academician and famous for his opposition to Impressionism, Gérôme has been associated with numerous movements in painting, from the Néo-Grec to Orientalism, but for the purposes of this article we will be looking at his portrayals of Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821), decades after the first emperor's death (Ackerman, 1990)[1]. Of Gérôme's prolific career, the works explicitly portraying Napoléon included views of the leader as a General in Egypt. Although several were created in the 1860s, Gérôme returned to the subject in the 1890s in sculptural format. The paintings followed a return trip to Egypt, having first visited in 1856 (and again in 1862 and 1880). Although Gérôme had made a name for himself as a history painter, he was also adept at portraiture and genre paintings[2]. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of his works was that his history paintings were too anecdotal or rife with historical detail. In treating the Napoleonic subject Gérôme seemed to be pulling together the three areas of history painting, portraiture, and the everyday. He was also famously a leader of Orientalist subjects, based on his many visits to North Africa, including Egypt and often repeated portrayals of the Muslim world in the nineteenth century, such as through documentation of worship practices, architectural sacred sites, and local customs (Ackerman, 2000 e Galichon, 1868, pp. 147-151)[3]. Although likely inspired by the promise of official patronage, since most history painters survived on major works being sold to the government for inclusion in the national collection, there is less information than is desirable on these works, because they were so sought after for some collectors that they passed immediately from production in France to purchase in the United States. Works of art that remain in private collections for extensive parts of their provenance history are frequently more difficult to study because of limited access to the objects and their histories. In the case of this topic, the research has thus far prompted more questions than it has answered. Stylistically, Gérôme

[1] Gérôme became an honorary president of the *Société des peintres orientalistes français* in 1893.
[2] For further information see Ackerman, 1986b; Lafront-Couturier, 1998; and Allan and Morton (eds.), 2010. For perspectives from near the end of his life see Keim, 1912; and Field Hering, 1892.
[3] Scholarship on the artist also had to reconcile trends within the discipline of art history that have devalued academic art, particularly of the nineteenth century. For an updated methodological approach see Adam and Morton, 2010.

treated these subjects with the same exacting style that he applied to all others. For Gérôme, the subject matter and iconography might change, but his Realist methods were representative of truth, so unless he wanted to lie to the viewer, why would he change such a style? He explained it this way: «The fact is, that truth is the one truly good and beautiful; and to render it effectively the surest means are those of mathematical accuracy» (Glessner, 1904, p. 62). First, let us consider the subject of these scenes. Napoléon I was exiled permanently from France in 1815 when the nation transitioned from Empire to monarchy. Napoléon himself died in 1821 in British custody, although his remains were returned to France before his nephew became emperor. In 1848 Louis Napoléon Bonaparte (Napoléon III by 1851), ascended by election to lead France until the end of the Second Empire in 1871[4]. Art historians Albert Boime and Patricia Mainardi have closely studied the art of this period and patronage of the Second Empire, noting that Napoléon III encouraged a cult of his predecessor.

Working over 40 years after the time of Napoléon I, Gérôme began representing these subjects in the 1860s, well into Napoléon III's leadership. These portrayals of Napoléon in Egypt catch the emperor when he is still first consul and undertaking one of his first ambitious military campaigns for the Directory government in 1798 (Napoleonic occupation of Egypt lasted until 1801). To refine our focus, this article seeks to consider: why Napoléon, and why Napoléon in Egypt? What is it about Napoléon's time as first consul and military leader in Egypt that held such fascination, especially since we do not have many depictions of Napoléon by Gérôme from other points in his military campaigns or successes? Furthermore, in the painted depictions there is a palpable sense of distance and displacement. What is it about the version of Napoléon who went to Egypt that so intrigued Gérôme? I do not yet have the answer to this question, but for this article I will offer an analysis of these works that explores the possibilities. Focusing on the extant paintings on the subject inevitably limits other avenues of inquiry. The French colonial expansion being attempted in Mexico between 1863–7 was comparable in some ways to the exploration of Egypt in Napoléon I's

[4] For a study of art and patronage in France during the first Empire see Boime, 1990; and Rosenblum, 1975.

accomplishments, while Napoléon III's expanded interests in what is now Vietnam, Cambodia, and China during the 1860s paralleled in some way his uncle's campaigns in Egypt, including the latter's attempt to open up the Suez Canal (1858–69), for example. Indeed, David Todd notes that the second Emperor regained ground in terms of France's imperial, global, and colonial interests, but through informal and trade relations instead of formal annexation of new territories (Todd, 2011, p. 173)[5]. Gérôme had cause to think about the likeness of the first and second empires, especially when he was commissioned to create a contemporary history painting of Napoléon III receiving the ambassadors from Siam, which was quite a distinction, even if the work was not overwhelmingly supported by art critics (it was titled *The Reception of the Siamese Ambassadors at Fontainebleau* of 1865) (House, 2008). By this point in his career, Gérôme was relatively favoured through patronage (and inclusion in some diplomatic and social events hosted by Napoleon III) by the Second Empire's regime and included himself as a self-portrait in the painting (at the tail end of the retinue of ambassadors)[6]. Egypt, even today, retains a certain caché as a land of remote antiquity and mysticism. Its language (captured in the imaginations of most Europeans at the time as hieroglyphs), its religion (antique—being characterised by the polytheistic curiosities of animal-human hybrid gods), its leaders and conquerors (lost to history in famously cataclysmic tragedies: Alexander the Great, Cleopatra Philopator VII, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, the pharaohs themselves), and its treasures have befallen tragic ends, but retained their resplendent glory. Aside from the practicalities of cutting Britain off from its allies and resources in North Africa, Napoléon himself must also have been attracted to Egypt for a little more than military gain. Having been stranded there without a navy, Napoléon's most ambitious military campaign before becoming Emperor of France was marked by isolation and displacement, which is a theme that will become evident in evaluating these works. France and its soldiers were forced into isolation from their native land as they strove to rebuild a navy that could bring them home after crushing defeat by the British navy in Egypt. So despite its cultural triumphs, the French Egyptian campaign under Napoléon was

[5] For a contemporary example of Gérôme's reception by critics see Duret, 1867.
[6] Gérôme's professional successes were many, including receiving the distinction of being made Commander in the Legion of Honour several years after the fall of the regime (1874).

marked by separation and uncertainty, in the name of conquering a land so removed from modern life that it could barely be imagined as a real place. As we will see, the misguided if seemingly noble intentions of Napoléon in Egypt perhaps resonated with the introspection that the French experienced from the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy to the Second Empire. Todd (2011) has dubbed this period of introspection in France's nineteenth-century outlook the French Imperial Meridian, which he argues lasted roughly from 1814–70[7]. Despite scholarly reluctance to study France's colonial world power during this time, it indeed remained perhaps second only to the British Empire in all of the hallmark features by which global influence is measured, including trade, sophisticated alliances, innovation, and cultural influence (*ivi*, pp. 160-161)[8]. According to Todd, «Egypt, for example, could be viewed as a cultural and economic French colony for much of the nineteenth century, even after the establishment of a British protectorate in 1882» (*ivi*, p. 160). Fascination with Egypt was of course as old as the Romans. It might shed light on the nature of the interest in Egypt in the nineteenth century to consider some of the views of Egypt that had been established in nineteenth-century discourse. That discourse was rife with colonial and empirical prejudice, if not overt racism. Rhetoric about Egypt around the time of Gérôme's death shows that for many individuals these prejudices had not dissipated through exposure or time. In one instance, in a treatise dedicated to the western fascination with Egypt, its people were characterised as feminine, passive, and lacking in both manly vigour and critical thinking:

> Docile and obedient, good-humoured and industrious, they are, and always have been, a nation of slaves. Passive in affliction and rendering a ready obedience to the stronger will which rules them, they are entirely devoid of that spirit of manly independence so characteristic of their Bedawïn neighbours, and lacking in the initiative of the newer Western races. […] With such a history, it is little wonder that the Egyptian has many traits which are to be condemned. Oppression has developed in him a propensity to lying and deceit, and, childlike, he seeks to make up for insignificance by noise; and, as is always the case among a persecuted race, vengeance for the cruelty they themselves suffer is wreaked upon the weaker, or on beasts (Talbot Kelly, 1904, pp. 217-218).

[7] Todd notes the contribution of Hanotaux and Martineau (1930) for their work as editors of *Histoire des colonies françaises et de l'expansion de la France dans le monde*.
[8] Todd also provides a literature review of scholarship on the relationship between France and Egypt in the nineteenth century.

In terms of leadership, the modern era was still a period of struggle for the Egyptians:

> Under the old régime corruption was the rule, while extortion and frightful injustice had ground the life out of the people. Canals were built by their own forced labour, only to enrich the Pasha by bringing water to his land, and for which they themselves had to pay an exorbitant tax. What was the use of working, when every increase of wealth only served as an additional incentive to the rapacious official, whose demands only ceased when the limit of possible extortion was reached? Nor was it wise to lodge complaints or waste time in petitions. Judges were seduced by the bribes of the wealthy, and justice was hardly to be found. Conscription, which pressed unfairly upon the agriculturalists, drained the country of its labourers, who resorted to all kinds of self-mutilation in order to escape what meant to them eternal slavery or death. Their state was altogether pitiable, and one which seemed to give no promise of redress. Whatever the people have thought, or do think, upon the subject, Arabi's rebellion has indeed proved a blessing in disguise, in bringing about our occupation of the country and the institution of a government both sympathetic and impartial (*ivi*, pp. 229-230).

Although R. Talbot Kelly claims that by the turn of the twentieth century conditions have improved in Egypt, his treatise (and others like them) reveals that some believed that the Egypt of the nineteenth century was still hopelessly embroiled in the oppression and dysfunction of the past. It is in this context that we might wish to consider Gérôme's depictions of Napoléon in Egypt. In so many other instances, the first consul and then emperor of France had been considered a liberator of the oppressed. The true perception and reality of liberation can be challenged; nonetheless, for supporters of Napoléon, his military campaigns were viewed as opportunities for older civilisations to embrace the modern Enlightenment and best ideals of the French Revolution. These aspirations for Egypt were in fact prevalent throughout the nineteenth century in French military objectives and diplomacy. Todd notes that France and Britain, as the two greatest world powers at the time, often cooperated throughout the nineteenth century in order to work «in alliance and as the joint representatives of 'western' civilization against 'barbarian' Orientals […]» (Todd, 2011, p. 162).

Interest in the notion of colonial expansion and foreign influence increased in France following the opening of the International Exhibition in 1851 at the Crystal Palace in London. Not to be outdone, in 1864, Napoléon III announced that Paris would host an international exposition in 1867, which became one of the most influential expositions in the modern era. Gérôme participated in that event where

artists were called upon to submit works that would showcase France's eminence as a leader in arts and culture. These international exhibitions of artistic, industrial and cultural achievements played at least a small part in fuelling the desire for empirical expansion to exotic and resource-rich destinations, as Egypt had been in antiquity.

To assess the works in question let us now turn to each to investigate the common threads of iconography.

Figure 1

In *Napoléon in Egypt* (Fig. 1, 1863) Napoléon assumes his role as General of the Army of the Orient, for which he was commissioned to undertake the Egyptian campaign to expand France's interests in North Africa. Riding a camel, Napoléon is positioned in front of his men, leading them through high winds or possibly even a dust storm, based on the hunched postures of the soldiers as they try to shield their eyes from the elements. He is accompanied by his closest aides: «Kléber, Desaix, and Dumas», according to Laurence des Cars (et al., 2010, p. 156). Post first-empire representations of Napoléon have often been interpreted as a sort of apology, or a de-mystifying of the leader, particularly in the work of artists like Ernst Meissonnier (1815–91), who was interested in a defeated and somewhat ridiculous Napoléon. Gérôme's works, however, do not fit in this context, even if there are both positive

and negative undercurrents to his representations. Here we see, like Jean-Antoine Gros (1771–1835) before him (Napoléon I's main military painter) that Gérôme was navigating the complexities of Napoléon's identity. As the dust storm surrounds his men, Napoléon remains the only figure in the group who continues to look up and out. His gaze is, in fact, fixed ahead, while all of his men are in a protective posture, hiding their faces from the wind and sand, which whirls around them, even obscuring the horizon line. Although not terribly glamourous, as a Realist Gérôme attempted to show both the discomfort and fortitude necessary to conduct such a campaign. The undertone of making the General a hero in these scenes was possibly spurred on by Gérôme's good friend and co-traveller Frédéric Masson (1847–1923), who would become an avid historian of the first emperor (authoring many books), which may have piqued his friend's interest in the subject[9]. While it may not be certain that Gérôme intended to communicate something specific here, his portrayal of Napoléon was as a determined leader. It is precisely because of his ability to overcome displacement and distance from his cultural, intellectual, and militaristic history that Napoléon's accomplishments are complemented by the events in Egypt. Notable, however, is the awkwardness of the task. Napoléon and his men straddle the saddles of their camels in unnatural poses. Their uniforms and Napoléon's signature hat also underscore the oddity of such signs of western civilisation in these environments and circumstances. In every way the scene shows how unpleasant it was to go to these distant lands; and, in every way the scene shows the isolation of Napoléon and his men through the wall of dust that has descended upon them.

Napoléon had taken on an enormous challenge with the Egyptian campaign, which was, in part, designed to obstruct British access to North Africa and gain influence for France. For the past two centuries the efforts of Napoléon while in Egypt have been acknowledged as critical to the history of French interest and the birth of Egyptology. It was during the Napoleonic campaign, for example, that steps were taken towards decoding hieroglyphics, such as through the discovery of the *Rosetta Stone* (ca. second-century BCE). Similarly, historian Jean-François Champollion

[9] Masson wrote on many aspects of Napoléon's life, but in particular his histories were unusual for their focus on Napoléon as a lover, husband, and man. Masson also wrote considerably about the Emperor's wives. Titles include: Napoléon *et les femmes* (1894) and Napoléon *inconnu* in 1895.

(1790–1832) almost single-handedly founded the field of Egyptology based on the expedition and findings. Although it is not entirely clear which moment of Napoléon's campaign is depicted in Gérôme's scene, it most calls to mind the trudge across the desert that he and his troops were forced to make after losing one third of the army at a failed attempt to take a fortress at Acre defended by a coalition of British and Ottoman troops. The work was first sold to the American patron Henry Probasco in 1867, by virtue of Gérôme's father-in-law, who had become his agent of sorts.

Figure 2

Gérôme's *Œdipus* (Fig. 2, 1863–86, exhibited at the Salon of 1886) also has an intriguing historical context. For this composition the painter places Napoléon in front of the largest known sculpture in human history, facing down the visage of a pharaoh used to portray the power of absolute monarchy. There is a political undertone here that may or may not have been intended or acknowledged in the artist's time, which is that Napoléon was (and he himself) touted the campaign as one through which the Egyptians would find freedom from thousands of years of oppression, largely wrought through a system of absolute monarchy. Napoléon was professing to help topple that kind of government, even if by today's standards his apologies for slavery in Egypt (and later, not to mention other parts of the French

Empire) would be difficult to fathom (Cole, 2007, pp. 178-180)[10]. If one requires a match worthy to face one's own courage and talents, the enormity and history of the Sphinx speaks to the strength and determination of Napoléon as its foe. Of course, the Egyptian campaign was disastrous in many ways; as mentioned, it eventually led to Napoléon and his troops being stranded in Egypt without a way to get home after the French navy had been destroyed by the British under Horatio Nelson (1758–1805) at the Battle of the Nile 1–3 August 1798. However, this does not diminish for military historians the prior epic Battle of the Pyramids fought between Napoléon's troops and the Mamelukes on 21 July 1798, which was a resounding victory. Although we do not see a battle scene in detail in Gérôme's painting, we do nevertheless know that the location of Napoléon and the Sphinx's mystical confrontation is in fact the site of the Giza Pyramids, since the Sphinx sits out in front of the pyramid complexes at Giza. The reference to a battle without the painting actually being a battle scene likely reflects views of battle painters in nineteenth-century France, where they were often dismissed for being both unoriginal and propagandistic (Locke Siegrid, 1993, pp. 246-251). We do, however, see Napoléon's soldiers waiting in formation on the battlefield, so distantly that they appear like shadows in the desert landscape. The use of scale was perhaps intended to reinforce how difficult the conditions were and how challenging the task. It was known that the Mamelukes were a formidable force because of their willingness to fight until the end, while the French troops battled intolerable heat, lack of water, and dust (Ireland, 1828, pp. 140-141). One account of the Battle of the Pyramids described it this way:

> This operation was executed so opportunely, and with such vigour and effect, that, at the moment the redoubt was forced, the cavalry were on the spot to cut off the enemy's retreat to the fort, and their rout was therefore complete. The enemy, confused and terror-struck, beheld death on every side; the infantry charged them with the bayonet; the cavalry cut them down with the sabre: no alternative but the sea remained. To this sad resource the routed enemy fled, as a last refute. Ten thousand men committed themselves to the waves; showers of musketry and grapeshot followed them:—never did so terrible a sight present itself; not one man survived! […] the Commander-in-Chief of the

[10] Cole provides an important study of Napoléon's experiences in Egypt as well as how the French campaign in Egypt was viewed then and since. His biographical approach is not focused on art history, but the book is also valuable for its collection of portrayals of Napoléon in Egypt by diverse artists. Cole's study, however, does not address works by Gérôme, despite inclusion as illustrations.

> Turkish army, and two hundred men, were made prisoners; about two thousand remained dead on the field of battle (*ivi*, pp. 147-148).

There are other interesting parallels between Napoléon and the Sphinx, in part because Gérôme is perhaps deliberately conflating the Egyptian sphinx, which is an occult guardian of the pharaoh's resting place, with the Greek sphinx, who guards a passage by asking passers by to answer riddles. The epic size of the sculpture, facing Napoléon in the brilliant and unforgiving sun, seems to illustrate the intellectual challenges ahead of him to devise a successful and innovative military strategy for the battle. Although Gérôme's Napoléon is dwarfed by the expanse of desert and only partially visible top of the Sphinx, the proportions speak to the influence that Napoléon had on French history and culture. A single man had turned the tide of global history by opening up access to ancient cultural traditions and knowledge. The sense of isolation and stature of the characters was in the minds viewers, such as R. W. Glessner, who describes the painting this way: «The idea of a little Napoleon, on horseback, posing in the solitude of his own dignity and the loneliness of the expanse of all Egypt's desert, the silent, solemn Sphinx looking down on his minuteness; this though was noble» (Glessner, 1904, p. 61). Perhaps the intellectual exchange that seems to be occurring between the two figures also relates to the cultural rather than military legacy of the campaign; Napoléon had taken 154 scholars from diverse disciplines to Egypt and the result led to the initiative becoming famous for its contributions to academic disciplines.

Perhaps most poignant of the representations on this subject is the painting of Napoléon as General in Egypt titled *Napoléon in Cairo* (Fig. 3: 1867–8).

Figure 3

The scene shows the young leader alone, except for a foreign attendant in the background with the horses, telling us that Napoléon has dismounted from his horse. The general's attire reveals that he has begun to adopt some of the customs of local interest, while his faded and dusty boots indicate that this is not an excursion for show. Lost in his own thoughts, having removed a single glove, Napoléon looks off into a vista that we cannot see. As curators at the Princeton University Museum have noted, the Mameluke burial monuments in the background perhaps point to the notion of dynasty and memorial, since they recall the shape of Napoléon's own tomb monument in Paris. The iconography of death in the scene creates a subtext of loss and regret. However, the primary emphasis is once again on an intellectually and emotionally distanced and displaced Napoléon, whose isolation is not necessarily bad, as it helps to configure him as a military and political genius who is lost deep in thought while he plans his strategies and surveys the region for the battle. The aura of displacement also reinforces the colonial assumption of difference and separateness between the French and the Mamelukes. It may show the duality of absolute power in rulership presumed to be represented by the eastern

style of leadership that Napoléon was supposedly helping the Egyptians to push out, versus the post-Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary stability and democracy that the French were trying to instate at the time.

Some of Napoléon's contemporaries viewed his interest in Egypt as both strategy and liberation. In William Henry Ireland's early nineteenth-century account of Napoléon's experiences in Egypt he quotes from a letter supposedly written by Napoléon. The letter underscores the sense that France's interests in Egypt were much more than political or military—they were about spreading freedom, but by force, if necessary. Napoléon wrote that

> To morrow I set out to repair to Menouf, from when I shall make different excursions into the Delta, to the end that I may myself witness the injustice which is committed, and acquire a knowledge of the men of the country.// I recommend it to you to maintain confidence among the people: remind them frequently of my love for Mussulmen, and that to that my purpose is to confer happiness upon them. Acquaint them that I have two great means to conduct men; — persuasion and force; with the one I gain friends, and with the other I destroy my enemies (*ivi*, p. 153).

Of particular interest in this painting is the importance of costume to Napoléon's political identity. While I have touched on the allusions to depth of thought and the difficulties of military life seen in the leader's worn boots, removed glove, and dusty but complete military costume, there are other subtexts that can be explored. Viewing costume as iconography in depictions of Napoléon, which matched Gérôme's Realist agenda through attention to historical detail, the military costume in this scene speaks to a well-known part of Napoléon's leadership views, particularly with respect to austerity and economy. Ever the military man, Napoléon viewed costume in terms of its political functions within France's economy and international relations. In his time, Napoléon had made decisions that he believed were in favour of France's interest, irrespective of the consequences for luxury and vanity. For example, his wife Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763–1814) lamented her husband's decision to ban the importation of English muslin, which otherwise was a popular material in women's fashion. But, being at war with England, Napoléon was loathe to have French dollars enrich the coffers of France's enemy. Muslin was therefore banned. But Napoléon's preference for national, conservative fashion was also rooted in the importance of France's role as a revolutionary leader and the necessity of austerity in times of warfare. Before Napoléon became first consul,

France's enemies (particularly those with monarchies) had declared war on her people for having assassinated the King and Queen of France.

A move towards common-sense fashion (if not in practice at least in theory) that emphasised the embellishment necessary to relay identity politics of the wearer as a citizen of France was also prevalent leading up to Napoléon's instatement as consul. As Helen Ingersoll explained at the end of the century, French fashion following the Terror tended to reject the excessive frivolities and luxuries of the ancien regime, preferring instead classically inspired costumes that demonstrated a break with what were the perceived excesses of the past (Ingersoll, 1895, p. 250). Napoléon's position on the matter stood in stark contrast to the reputation and public identity of his first wife, who under the Directory was known as one of the Merveilleuses or women in high social and political standing who adopted the fashions of antiquity, including 'barely there' clothing that drew much attention. Joséphine and her friend Therèse Tallien (1773–1835) were amongst those famous for such flirtation through costume. As Napoléon's wife, Joséphine continued to be a trend-setter through her fashionable image (*ivi*, pp. 253-254). On the other hand, as Ingersoll notes, Napoléon could be quite supportive of using costume for political purposes. He did encourage Joséphine and those at court to dress in fine materials and fashions, as long as it was in the service of reflecting the wealth and splendour of the French empire. Political iconography could be seen in the post-Egyptian campaign context. For example, Ingersoll indicates that acquisition of cashmere and the establishment of trade with Egypt following Napoléon's campaigns led Joséphine to frequently wear cashmere (Kashmir) shawls (*ivi*, p. 254)[11]. Such displays of influence are common in political dress, which leads us to notice the local cultural components of Napoléon's costume, which layers the General's formal French uniform with the allusion to a Roman-emperor-like cloth of honour in local colours and possibly regional military uniforms worn around his waist. This could reference the aforementioned trade in cashmere shawls, but may show his respect for local cultural traditions as well as being a tribute to victory. The costume certainly emphasises Napoléon's masculinity, although this was not uncommon in depictions of heroic men. Nineteenth-century viewers would have found the phallic

[11] For further readings see Maskiell, 2002.

emphasis in his portrayal, both in Napoléon's revealing trousers, as well as in the weapon that he carries, an expected element of the cult of masculine genius that the painting celebrates.

Figure 4

Lastly, in Gérôme's *Napoléon entering Cairo* (Fig. 4, 1897), which is a small but commanding equestrian portrait (complete in both bronze and ivory)[12]. Interestingly, Gérôme's friend Masson had been publishing histories of Napoléon since the 1870s, but had completed numerous new books on Napoléon around 1894–5; perhaps this was part of the impetus to return to the subject that had marked some of the artist's career during the 1860s. Gérôme would go on to depict a series of great men in equestrian portraits, but the one of Napoléon was first in the series. Here, the saddle blanket and other accoutrements for the horse's bridle tell us we are looking at a foreign context. Napoléon remains relatively aloof, but measures up to comparable representations of Roman emperors. Equestrian portraits had been known even outside of Italy by the Early-Modern period to have been a special

[12] The version shown at the Salon of 1897 was purchased by the French government that same year.

accomplishment of Roman artists. The statue of Napoléon bears considerable similarity to the orator/rider type, such as Marcus Aurelius on Capitoline Hill in Rome (ca. second century CE). Gérôme would likely have seen the former on trips to Italy (he spent time in Rome). Here, Gérôme's characteristic realism is evident in the horse's animated expression—he is playing with his bit and prancing. Since this work was almost 80 years after Napoléon, it is not clear that it corresponds to any specific groundswell of interest in Napoleonic legacies. Rather, it seems to draw more from Gérôme's interest in experimentation with different materials, especially the polychrome works, such as those that appear at the Musée d'Orsay, as opposed to being motivated by a cult of the emperor (Ackerman, 1986a and Papet, 2009)[13]. Underscoring the theme of victory (in the version at the Musée Anne-de-Beaujeu) the sculpture stands on top of a pseudo-Egyptian temple structure led by a bronze goddess of Victory while a scribe sits at the base of the temple. As Edouard Papet (2010, p. 157) has noted, the Emperor's victorious battles are duly listed, including Cairo for the Battle of the Pyramids, along with the names of the then General's companions.

What unites these portrayals, particularly in the painted versions, is that Napoléon, for Gérôme, seems distanced, displaced, and removed from those around him, in the same way that Egypt seemed to have been isolated and displaced from the modern world. In each painting Napoléon is relatively isolated from the picture plane. Gérôme emphasises the internal psychology of the figure, who does not connect strongly with the viewer. Such aloofness is not atypical for depictions of leaders who are expected to provide a sort of formal distance with the viewer. However, it is pronounced enough as to serve a purpose. Perhaps by the 1860s Napoléon had become somewhat of an enigma. Although many of his soldiers were still involved with public life in Paris during Napoléon III's leadership, it might have seemed by the 1860s that Napoléon had become impenetrable and possibly therefore inaccessible. At the same time, memoirs of his leadership continued to glorify, whether through fact or embellishment, the successes and heroism of the first Emperor. In particular, Ireland explains that it was at the very time of

[13] On the polychrome tradition into which the equestrian portrait fits see also Blühm, 1996. For the issue of critical reception of polychrome see Héran, 2004.

Napoléon's Egyptian campaign (during the height of the corruptions of the Directory), and his eventual return from Egypt upon the shores of Marseilles, that the French people were looking to him as a source of hope in the face of ongoing leadership corruption and governmental failure under the Directory. These apologies for his expansionism and decision to leave his troops in Egypt to resolve problems in France suggest that these failures were somewhat inconsequential to the legacy of the Egyptian campaign. This tone is notable in the following passage from Ireland:

> So much was the unexpected return of Bonaparte from Egypt looked upon as the auspicious omen of the end of the reign of anarchy, that when the news of his arrival reached Marseilles the event was celebrated with a general illumination, bonfires, and other demonstrations of joy. […] [T]he general sensation among all who desired to see the return of order within, and of victory without, was to look up to him as the only person from whom these benefits were to be expected (Ireland, 1828, p. 156).

Perhaps a factor in portrayals of Napoléon in distant Egypt was the new reality for the French people (particularly Parisians) that had crept upon them due to the work of Napoléon III. With significantly expanded infrastructure through the railway and industrialisation, it had become much more possible for upper and middle-class individuals to travel. Although they would not have been going to Egypt and this would not have been the Oriental Express–the French people were experiencing increasing independence and freedoms when it came to learning about the world. A spirit of exploration and a quest for knowledge seemed to have taken hold for many French people. Related to the concept of new access to travel and moving about was the ability to see things from other cultures. Gérôme himself was well known within the École for his interest in travel and archaeology. Two of the three paintings in question demonstrate that field of study by representing features that fall within archaeological study, including the sphinx as well as the Mameluke burial sites. Gérôme's works underscore quite eloquently the confrontation between leadership styles in emerging western democracies versus the perceived systems of the past, while illustrating certain facts about leadership: i) it is lonely ii) it requires intellectual acuity and focus iii) it has implications for future generations, and iv) it invariably creates distance between the leader and his/her constituents.

Another possible impetus for Gérôme's treatment of the theme of Napoléon displaced is that success in the École was greatly influenced by Napoléon III's

support. For Gérôme, his involvement in the state-sponsored École des beaux-arts would have been an important part of his status and income. He was elected as Professor of Painting at the École in 1865, which was competitive to secure at the time. John House has provided one of the few studies that considers the relationship between Napoléon III and Gérôme; however, the article does not actually explain in detail what the points of contact might have been, or other important trends in official patronage besides the Siam ambassadors scene. The work bears little relevance to those of Napoléon I, except as a point of comparison. Unlike the Siam painting Gérôme's paintings of Napoléon I typically capture the emperor in activities that demonstrate a high tolerance for discomfort and a low tolerance for complaints. Napoléon III by contrast does not feature prominently in Gérôme's *œuvre*.

Although there are still questions to be answered, there is one additional commonality that is notable for this article in the thematic treatment of Napoléon in Egypt by Gérôme. Naturally the patron with the most interest in Gérôme's works as a history painter of the École would have been Napoléon III, who would have been a presumptive buyer in the absence of commissioned arrangements. The latter's own interest in the history of Rome's first emperor Julius Caesar is especially appropriate in considering this link. Indeed, Napoléon III even penned his own multi-volume history of Julius Caesar, whom he admired. Gérôme had also treated the subject of Julius Caesar, although perhaps in a different manner, when he captured the emperor's death in *The Death of Caesar* in 1867 (made the same time as most of the Egypt scenes considered here). What unites Napoléon I and Julius Caesar as role models for Napoléon III and Gérôme was that both were indelibly marked by their experiences in Egypt, where conquest of one of humanity's oldest civilisations was accomplished in both cultural and political terms. In both instances inheritance of Egypt's grandeur and pedigree enhanced their rise to power. Both leaders showed courage and strength in foreign expansion that would bring their nations favourable assets. Moreover, by focusing on the early part of Napoléon's leadership Gérôme could celebrate French history in a way that was more meaningful than mere military conquests.

But Gérôme himself also had a share in this history of foreign travel and cultural conquest. Although artists like Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) had started to undertake alternative trips to the Grand Tour, including to places like North Africa, it was still a major undertaking and exotic for artists to do so. Gérôme's work, documenting the religious and everyday life of those in places like Egypt, has often been dismissed by art historians as colonial interests for the sake of exotic fantasies that fetishise the Oriental. Nevertheless, Gérôme was interested in truth, and even if his scenes were carefully choreographed, we know from his interest in photography and reliance on direct study that he was an explorer in a way that many painters were not in his own day. So, courageous determination to visit the unexplored, as well as dedication to the collection of knowledge and cultural artefacts, united Napoléon I, Gérôme, Julius Caesar, and it seems also Napoléon III. Although many other historical points of reference deserve further attention on this topic, a cult of isolated exploration and leadership in displaced contexts could very well be a common denominator in Gérôme's Napoleonic scenes. Egypt and Napoléon shared much in common; France and Egypt were perfect foils for each other regarding the struggles of western and eastern nations to modernise. For his part, Napoléon became an ideal symbol for the sacrifices that would need to be made to get there. The teleological readings that the works show are of course not unusual for the time, but they indicate that France had yet to complete its transformation and that perhaps, for Gérôme, understanding how to navigate the discomfort of displacement and isolation that comes with change might be important to securing it.

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