



Word & Image

A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/twim20>

The sediments of history in Napoleonic France

Stephanie O'Rourke

To cite this article: Stephanie O'Rourke (2021) The sediments of history in Napoleonic France, *Word & Image*, 37:1, 6-20, DOI: [10.1080/02666286.2020.1866797](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2020.1866797)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2020.1866797>



Published online: 25 May 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The sediments of history in Napoleonic France

STEPHANIE O'ROURKE 

Abstract This essay uses the work of the French artist Antoine-Jean Gros as a prompt to reconsider the means by which historical meaning was narrated and disseminated in Napoleonic France, analysing several interrelated pictorial, discursive, and material practices. It proposes that several of Gros's large-scale paintings participated in an early nineteenth-century model of historical meaning that was characterized by dispersal and aggregation, by fragmentation and proliferation. The study looks first at the ascendance of history as a popular genre or medium, then at the literal means by which historical signifiers were collected during Napoleon Bonaparte's military campaigns, and subsequently disseminated textually and pictorially, before finally returning to Gros. In doing so, an essentially *cumulative* form of historical meaning emerges that can be traced across a range of locations and modalities in Napoleonic France.

Keywords Antoine-Jean Gros, Napoleon Bonaparte, archaeology, Egyptology, historicism

Napoleon Bonaparte at the centre: right where one would expect to find him *c.*1804. That year, between Napoleon's legal proclamation as emperor (18 May) and his spectacular coronation ceremony (2 December), the prominent young artist Antoine-Jean Gros exhibited a large-scale painting commemorating Napoleon's recent military campaign in Egypt. In the luminous midground of *Napoleon Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa* (1804) (figure 1), Napoleon, having removed a single white glove, reaches out to touch the body of one of his ailing soldiers. Bonaparte's regalia-draped figure, impressive though it is, stands as neither the largest nor the most vividly rendered in Gros's painting. To the right are brightly lit nude men whose pallid flesh is pulled taught against finely detailed musculature. In the foreground, even more nudes—some lying prone and others seated, a jumble of ashen limbs and sallow faces. Bodies, or pieces of bodies, proliferate. Both in the graphic clarity with which their flesh is portrayed and in their scale, the nude bodies challenge the compositional priority ostensibly commanded by Napoleon, drawing attention away from his place at the centre and out towards multiple, rival focal points. One contemporary viewer of the painting complained that the figures in the right foreground, for example, are not 'subordinated to the main subject' of the painting and therefore 'divide' the viewer's interest.¹

This feature—the dispersal and distribution of monumental bodies in the foreground of the painting—is a forceful provocation. Why surround Napoleon with figures who rival him for narrative and pictorial interest? Why is it that Napoleon's presence does not impose some kind of centripetal, unifying order onto the scene? Christopher Prendergast, reflecting on the 'fragmentary, proliferating, potentially unmanageable' narrative multiplicity found in Gros's paintings, gives this feature a name: 'the anxiety of the foreground'.² But however 'unmanageable' present-day viewers may find the composition, *Jaffa* was, for the most part, extremely well received when it was initially exhibited.³ Many critics actively praised the massive bodies piled up in the painting's foreground as well as those found in Gros's subsequent *Battle of Aboukir* (1806).

There was something about this pictorial configuration that was clearly quite functional *c.*1804, something that may have even been central to how the painting conveyed certain kinds of meaning to its viewers. Darcy Grigsby has called *Jaffa* 'a great, epic machine assigned the task of retrospectively representing the Egyptian expedition to the French public'.⁴ It was a 'history painting' in the academic sense of portraying a significant narrative on a grand scale, but more broadly the painting was an engine for producing and disseminating historical meaning—'historical' in the dual sense articulated by G. W. F. Hegel, comprising both the historical 'event' and the narration of that event as a 'story'.⁵

But if *Jaffa*'s task is the production and dissemination of historical meaning, what view of history itself is being presented here? And, more to the point, how are we to understand a model of history that accommodates or even relies upon the kind of fragmentation and proliferation Gros's painting so insistently foregrounds? Making sense of these questions entails thinking expansively about the status and production of historical meaning in Napoleonic France, and, in doing so, locating Gros's painting within a wider field of practices that are pictorial but also discursive and material. The painting prompts us to reconsider some of the mechanisms by which historical narratives were forged under Napoleon, and in particular to attend to the very feature that Prendergast finds so troubling: its layering of multiple bodies, signs and focal points. Susan Siegfried and Stephen Bann are among the scholars who have written extensively about historicism in early nineteenth-century French art—including two important articles on historicism published in this journal.⁶ Inspired by their work and particularly by Bann's engagement with discursive historicism as well as its pictorial counterpart, I suggest that we go even further: that we recognize its embeddedness within a larger and diverse field of cultural practices. I propose that artworks such as *Jaffa* participated in an early nineteenth-century model of historical meaning that was characterized by dispersal and aggregation, by fragmentation and proliferation.



Figure 1. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Napoleon Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa*, 1804. Oil on canvas. 715 × 523 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

In what follows I will indicate just a few of the many ways in which we might trace this broader phenomenon, looking first at the ascendancy of history as a popular genre or medium, then at the literal means by which historical signifiers were collected during Napoleon’s military campaigns and subsequently disseminated textually and pictorially, before returning, at the end, to Gros. Doing so allows us to see several seemingly different practices and strategies as interlocking rather than parallel phenomena. An essentially *cumulative* form of historical meaning emerges that can be traced across a range of locations and modalities in Napoleonic France.

Napoleonic France was also, of course, post-Revolutionary France. Which is to say that in order to plot some of the coordinates of historical meaning in this period, it is essential to begin by acknowledging that a decade of Revolutionary events had specific consequences for how France narrated and

understood its own recent past. Numerous scholars of the post-Revolutionary period have remarked on a profound sense of temporal dislocation by which French historical consciousness at the turn of the nineteenth century was riven.⁷ To a degree, this was intrinsic to republican ideology in the early 1790s, which took aim at centuries of sovereign absolutism while also dismantling the social and religious hierarchies that accompanied the monarchical ruling order. Revolutionary republicanism did not just challenge the authority of the king: it explicitly defined itself *against* the authority of historical precedent in a far-reaching sense. The gradual dissipation and eventual reversal of republican ideals—challenged by civil war, economic volatility, and radical factionalism as well as by war with Europe’s other major powers—culminated in the resurgence of authoritarianism under Napoleon at the century’s close. In less than a decade, several Revolutionary governments had been formed only to be dismantled from within or toppled from without. And although Napoleon heralded a new

era of stability and prosperity for France, the idea of ‘the past’ remained exceptionally fraught: the pre-Revolutionary world order had been repudiated, but the recent past did not seem to offer much in its place, having been marred by years of profound uncertainty and violent factionalism. Describing something akin to historical whiplash, Peter Fritzsche writes of the disorienting effects occasioned by ‘the fragmentation of history and the articulation of historical identity’ amidst the ruins of what had once been the Revolution.⁸

Insofar as this period was characterized by a pervasive sense of temporal dislocation or rupture, it also witnessed the proliferation of new popular genres of historical representation that circulated among an increasingly literate public. An interest in textual and visual representations of the historical past had been growing throughout the eighteenth century and greatly intensified in the Revolutionary turmoil of that century’s close.⁹ The turn of the nineteenth century experienced a drastic increase in the number of novels, prints, paintings, and plays that took the historical past as their subject and were produced for a wide audience. This trend—what Bann has called ‘the rise of history’—named both the expansion of historical narration into a ‘mass medium’ and its ascendance as a humanistic discipline.¹⁰ In the years immediately following the Revolution, the shift had vivid political stakes: writing a history of the recent past necessitated, for both supporters and critics of the Revolution, adjudicating its political legitimacy. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, as Ceri Crossley and others have noted, ‘the recovery of a national history was coextensive with an attempt to understand and account for the French Revolution’.¹¹ Consequently, writing history was a deeply partisan undertaking for counter-Revolutionaries such as Chateaubriand and Joseph de Maistre, a task whose political stakes remained forceful after the Bourbon Restoration of 1815 in the historical texts of liberal thinker Jules Michelet.¹²

There is much that could be said about the larger trajectory of French historical philosophy, but what is most immediately relevant is the conceptual status of history in the years during which artists such as Gros were working. After a decade of Revolution, the relationship between past and present seemed to be fragmented, dislocated, or even irreversibly broken. Correspondingly, the task of reinventing that past or forging a new sense of continuity with it had never been more urgent. In practical terms, these years were marked by the proliferation of representational media (both textual and visual) that addressed the historical past as well as the rise of institutions dedicated to collecting and preserving the records of that past, such as the Archives nationales. In more general terms, this coincided with the ascendance of history as an ideological force—both for understanding one’s own life (something that could be called ‘historical consciousness’) and as a political arena in which one could evaluate the legitimacy of the French Revolution. The philosopher Philip Kneec, revising

Hegel’s definition of history as both event and story, thus concludes that in France, ‘humankind circa 1800 came to understand itself as an entity that was both a *product of* history and that which *creates* history’.¹³

Few seem to have understood the dynamic evoked by Kneec better than Napoleon, who explicitly addressed the historical past as part of a multifaceted appeal for political power and authority.¹⁴ But Bonaparte’s historicism was promiscuous rather than academic: it entailed the gathering together of references to multiple historical pasts without respect for their competing or even contradictory political legacies. Although Napoleon was hardly the first French ruler to use historical references as a source of legitimacy and authority, his approach took a uniquely post-Revolutionary form insofar as it reflected an understanding of the historical past as ‘fractured’ or fragmented, as something discontinuous with the present. Consequently, he relied upon the aggregation and layering of references that were multiple, varied, and partial. From dress and pageantry to correspondence and military strategy, the approach was surprisingly piecemeal, amassing bits and pieces—referential fragments—belonging to multiple eras in France’s history, including the Merovingian, Carolingian, and Capetian dynasties.¹⁵ Through a programme of curated anachronism, Napoleon also borrowed the iconography and rhetoric of Greco-Roman antiquity, styling himself after Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, among others. Todd Porterfield and Susan Siegfried aptly characterize the result as a ‘bricolage of historical references’ that was strikingly inclusive and wide ranging.¹⁶

One of the most literal manifestations of this phenomenon can be found in the physical accumulation, on a massive scale, of historical artefacts during Napoleon’s military campaign in Italy in the mid-1790s. The looting of valuable artworks had long been a component of European warfare. Unusual, however, was the strictly quantified and bureaucratic manner in which Napoleon consistently pursued it.¹⁷ His was not a system of pell-mell confiscations, but rather a prescribed form of exchange written into peace treaties that stipulated the transfer of a fixed number of objects as a condition of surrender. In 1796, while a young general under the *Directoire* government, Bonaparte negotiated an armistice with the Duke of Parma that mandated the transfer of twenty paintings, to be selected at the discretion of the French. This practice was subsequently codified as a standard feature of Napoleon’s peace treaties in the following year. Bonaparte would go on to claim, incorrectly, that his systematic confiscation of artworks was unprecedented—an assertion that underscores its importance for his own personal mythology.¹⁸ The procedures through which Napoleon’s troops gathered and transported artworks are well known, but bear repeating, because they

speak to a very real and material sense in which historical meaning was framed in relation to fragmentation and accretion—a way of engaging with the historical past that can be located, moreover, within Gros’s immediate horizon of experience.

Although Bonaparte’s correspondence indicates that he pursued the confiscation of artworks with a sense of purpose and intensity, he had little to do with the actual selection of objects, which was usually left to a commission of savants and artists.¹⁹ Travelling a few days behind Napoleon, these men followed him from Parma to Modena, Milan, Bologna, and Cento in the summer of 1796, identifying the most valuable works and arranging for their transportation. In January 1797, the Commission pour la recherche des objets de Science et d’Art, which included the prominent mathematician Gaspard Monge and the chemist Claude Louis Berthollet, was joined by none other than Gros, then a young artist who had recently earned the general’s favour after producing a flattering portrait of Napoleon leading his troops at the Battle of Arcole (*Bonaparte at the Pont d’Arcole*, 1796).²⁰ Just weeks after Gros joined the Commission, Napoleon signed the Treaty of Tolentino (19 February)—which mandated the single most significant confiscation of artworks from the entire Italian campaign. Over one hundred artworks from the Vatican and

other Roman collections were yielded to the French, including Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, the *Laocöon*, and the *Apollo Belvedere*, which were regarded throughout Europe as among the foremost examples of Renaissance and Greco-Roman classicism.²¹

Ironically, the triumphant collection of artworks often necessitated their initial deconstruction: in order to transport large-scale artworks from Italy to France, many of the pieces had to be partially dismantled. The canvases of larger paintings, for example, were removed from their stretchers (i.e. the wooden scaffold on which the painted surface was mounted) as well as their gilded frames. The fabric canvases were then rolled into cylinders and subsequently stored in water-proofed cases. Panel paintings were sometimes broken into pieces for transportation and extensive efforts were made to detach Renaissance frescoes physically from the walls onto which they were painted—an especially risky and controversial undertaking.²² Marble statues were removed from their architectural niches and separated from their pedestals. The violent physical interventions to which artworks were subjected were even satirized in prints that caricatured Napoleon’s Italian campaign. In George Cruikshank’s print *Seizing the Italian Relics* (1815) (figure 2), a dishevelled-looking French soldier has used a chisel and hammer to separate the *Venus de’ Medici* from her pedestal while Napoleon watches on. Setting



Figure 2. George Cruikshank, *Seizing the Italian Relics*, 1815; from William Combe, *The Life of Napoleon: a Hudibrastic poem in fifteen cantos by Doctor Syntax* (London: T. Tegg, 1815). Engraving. 14 × 23 cm. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

aside the obvious visual pun of an idealized marble nude clasped to the soldier's fumbling and ungainly body, the print registers the manual exertion and disassembly that was essential to the undertaking as a whole. Preserving the material unity or integrity of an artwork had to be weighed carefully against the enhanced mobility promised by its fragmentation. Napoleon's preferences on this score were clear; at one point the general had even suggested that the Roman amphitheatre in Verona be taken apart, stone by stone, and rebuilt in Paris.²³ Disassembled, fragmented, and mobile, such artworks acquired new properties of exceptional value in Napoleonic France: they were remnants of the historical past that could be collected, reassembled, and recombined.

In this context, the means by which such objects were transported to France is quite revealing. Here the layering, piling up, or accreting of historical references was presented to the French public in a highly spectacular and elaborately choreographed manner. The first convoy of confiscated objects from the Italian campaign entered Paris almost completely unnoticed in November 1796. But the third and most important of the convoys, which Gros accompanied part of the way, arrived in June 1797 under entirely different circumstances. This convoy transported the *Laocoön* and the *Apollo Belvedere* from Rome, as well as a wide range of valuable objects including paintings, altarpieces, natural history specimens, precious gems, decorative metalwork, and rare books. Loaded onto purpose-built wagons that were decorated with

trophies and flags, the objects entered Paris at the Port de l'Hôpital (now the Quai d'Austerlitz), their arrival heralded by cavalry and infantry and a procession of civilian scientists, artists and actors. Étienne-Jean Delécluze, an artist who, like Gros, studied under Jacques-Louis David, later recalled the 'encyclopedic character' of the convoy as it arrived in Paris, taking it as a sign that the 'diverse creations of the world' would be 'appropriated by and acclimatized to France'.²⁴ The styling of the procession—which included live animals and a military band—explicitly invited comparison with ancient forms of conquest by the Greeks and the Romans.²⁵ Upon arriving at the Champ de Mars, the convoy was greeted with an official ceremony involving speeches and patriotic songs. It finally terminated at the Louvre on 31 July 1797, although only a portion of the objects were ever publicly displayed there.²⁶

The reception of these confiscated works, which was widely covered in mainstream French newspapers, was commemorated in a series of prints and artworks. Between 1811 and 1814, a Sèvres porcelain service was also produced to mark the occasion, including a large vase encircled with a depiction of the procession (figure 3). The vase's clever decoration plays on the sheer novelty of bringing together large-scale statues from different locations and especially the 'animation' or movement of that which was formerly immobile. Books and manuscripts, piled atop one another, affirm the scholarly status of the undertaking; Napoleonic France is portrayed as a great repository for the world's knowledge as well as its masterpieces. But



Figure 3. Antoine Béranger and Achille-Joseph-Étienne Valois, *Etruscan Vase: Arrival in Paris of Objects Destined for the Musée Napoléon*, 1813. Painted porcelain. Cité de la céramique, Sèvres. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Cité de la céramique, Sèvres)/Martine Beck-Coppola.

there is something particularly suggestive about the profusion and clutter commemorated on the vase: the anachronism of the objects brought together, the plurality of cultural traditions they stand for, and, above all, the spatial layering by which these objects, as the sediment of multiple historical pasts, accumulate under the sign of Napoleon. The Sèvres set was but one component of a much larger decorative scheme dedicated to glorifying the confiscation of artworks during the Italian campaign. Although Gros's mentor David was one of the few public figures openly to lament the removal of the artworks from Italy, two of his students—Gros and François Gérard—accepted commissions from Dominique Vivant Denon to make paintings of the convoy to decorate ceilings in the Louvre.²⁷ Denon was a diplomat, artist and savant who went on to become the Directeur-Général of the Louvre after his return from Egypt. Whereas Gérard was tasked with portraying the arrival of the procession in Paris, Gros's contribution was to be allegorical: *The Emperor Giving the Masterpieces of Ancient Sculpture to France*.²⁸ Neither commission was realized before Napoleon's fall in 1814–15.

The confiscation and transfer of artworks during the Italian campaign was not simply a form of plunder. It was a vast and carefully managed programme that entailed the physical accumulation of material signifiers from diverse geographical and historical contexts. A programme that, moreover, necessitated the object's initial dis-location and even its de-construction. In the late 1790s, Napoleon's ascendant cultural and political authority found its signature expression through a bricolaged gathering together, on a massive scale, of emblems from multiple, remote historical pasts. Coinciding, then, with the ascendance of history as a discursive 'mass medium' in France was the spectacular collection and display of foreign historical artefacts on an unprecedented scale.

If Bonaparte's Italian campaign enabled the French to engage with a great number of monuments from the ancient past, the historical depth of what constitutes antiquity was itself significantly enlarged during the activities accompanying his subsequent invasion of Egypt (1 July 1798). The Egyptian campaign witnessed the implementation of new practical and intellectual procedures for recovering a non-classical ancient past, especially in the nascent field of archaeology, which was actively promoted by Napoleon. Archaeological research—particularly in Italy—had been accelerating over the course of the eighteenth century, most notably with the start of major excavations at Herculaneum in 1738 and the rediscovery of Pompeii in 1748. However, it was not until the very end of that century in Egypt, and later in Italy, that Napoleonic scholars would 'set the standard' for what would later be codified as modern, quantitatively driven archaeological fieldwork.²⁹ This standard consisted of an extensive effort to come to grips with a historical past of profound temporal antiquity through the

gathering together of various kinds of fragments—amassing *information* about that past through the systematic analysis, measurement, and representation of its material remnants. And in a sense, as I will suggest below, the archaeological dossier itself became a form of aggregating material fragments, of situating them within some kind of larger knowledge system.

In the light of Napoleon's elaborate and multifaceted engagement with history, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first ever large-scale archaeological study took place during Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt (and Syria), which began in 1798. The primary objective of the campaign was to disrupt British access to India and the Mediterranean, while also laying the groundwork to turn Egypt into a French colony. No doubt inspired by the Greek king's conquest of Egypt in the fourth century BCE, Bonaparte modelled aspects of his campaign after Alexander the Great. Alexander famously took scholars and philosophers with him when he went east, and Napoleon did the same: hundreds of civilians accompanied Bonaparte's army, including over 150 scholars. These included mathematicians, geographers, naturalists, architects, engineers, draughtsmen, physicians, and printers. Foremost among them were Monge and Berthollet, who had helped to oversee the selection and transportation of confiscated artworks during the Italian campaign. In August 1798, Napoleon founded a new Institut d'Égypte, comprising a smaller group of elite scholars and scientists, with Monge as their president and Bonaparte serving as vice-president. Based on the Institut de France, the country's preeminent learned body, the Institut d'Égypte was tasked with collecting and disseminating technical knowledge about Egypt, as well as tackling some of the challenges more relevant to administering it as a future colony.³⁰ Some of their concerns were quite practical: how to manufacture gunpowder more easily; how best to cultivate certain crops; how to produce alcohol and paper using indigenous plants; and other ways to improve the country's industries.

This was but a portion, however, of the vast body of scholarly research being undertaking at all points of the campaign. In addition to the targeted research of the Institut, over one hundred men routinely collected specimens, made sketches, conducted experiments, took measurements, drew maps, and shared their findings. Their research spanned the modern-day fields of mineralogy, geography, geology, botany, zoology, demography, history, and anthropology, and has been regarded by many as the first systematic scientific study of Egypt by Europeans as well as the foundation of nineteenth-century Egyptology.³¹ Beyond the sheer breadth of information that was being collected about modern and ancient Egypt, the research was unusual for its implementation, on a large scale, of technical, often quantitative, analysis. Measurements had been a mainstay of antiquarian study and restoration since the mid-eighteenth century, but in the final years of that century an increasingly rigorous and instrument-driven quantitative analysis dominated the sciences that, in turn, transformed archaeological practice.³²

Many of the Napoleonic scholars who undertook the study of ancient sites—particularly monuments and architectural structures—were originally trained in engineering, surveying, and technical draughtsmanship. Their emphasis on precise measurements and their ‘meticulous, systematic way’ of recording information about and sketching ancient sites became a new standard that would be followed by future Egyptologists and archaeologists.³³ (Nevertheless, there is little doubt that, however ‘scientific’ their ambitions, their work was laden with orientaling assumptions.³⁴) When encountering ancient architectural monuments, for example, sketches would record their present-day appearance, elevation, various structural properties, and detailed studies of their isolated features as well as projections as to what they may have looked like in the past, alongside precise and extensive measurements. The coupling of technical draughtsmanship with exacting quantitative data—‘we measured each part of these edifices with rigorous precision’, the official account of the expedition would later insist—produced a vast and unprecedented body of information about Egyptian antiquity and would later be codified as standard archaeological practice.³⁵

Underpinning this research was a broader shift in European intellectual thought concerning the relationship between the Earth’s depths and its historical development. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the concept of ‘stratigraphy’ was gaining ground in British, French, and German research on geology.³⁶ Stratigraphy concerns the study of layers, or strata, of rock, and operates according to the principle that layers of sediment accumulate laterally over time. Different horizontal strata of rock, layered atop on another, thus represent different moments in the history of the Earth. Following this principle, one can determine diachronic and synchronic relationships based on material distributed along vertical and horizontal vectors: to see what came before, one would look deeper into the rock bedding; to see what happened at the same time, one would look laterally across the same band of rock. Stratigraphy, which is now a mainstay of modern archaeology, palaeontology, geology, and evolutionary biology (as well as, Whitney Davis has shown, psychoanalysis and art history) found an enthusiastic French champion in the figure of Georges Cuvier.³⁷ Together with his collaborator Alexandre Brongniart, Cuvier used the fossil record to create a definitive stratigraphic analysis of the geological region around Paris in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Stratigraphy names a way of thinking about layering *as* an expression of the temporal succession of past epochs. Yet it is important to note that Napoleon’s scholars did not excavate in Egypt. Nevertheless, his scholars would have routinely confronted evidence of the relationship between material layers and the passage of historical time because the ground level was much higher around key sites than it is today. The Sphinx, for example, was buried in sand to the base of her neck. In many

cases, the men would encounter merely the upper-most portion of vertical columns whose depths remained submerged in centuries’ worth of dirt, rock, and sand. Faced with partial or fragmented structures, draughtsmen would still often use the accessible remains to create architectural projections and floor plans of what the buried or destroyed monuments would have looked like when they were originally built. The layout of ancient cities was similarly deduced through the study of their surviving walls and ruins. Stratigraphy enabled the scholars to endow space and depth with temporal duration. Running alongside French archaeology in Egypt, then, was a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between the historical past and its material remains: layers—of rock, of fossils, of man-made artefacts and structures—collect over time. They are a material index of history itself.

On this basis we might assume that the relationship between stratigraphic thought and the Egyptian campaign is implied rather than direct. But Cuvier’s work points to a fertile point of contact between geological research, conceptions of the historical past and the Napoleonic study of Egypt. Although Cuvier remained in Paris during the expedition, his research on fossils made him an obvious candidate to study the mummified animals sent back to France from Egypt over the course of the campaign. Such mummies attracted a great deal of public attention and would eventually become the focal point of a major debate between Cuvier and his former instructor Jean-Baptiste Lamarck concerning evolution. (Cuvier’s study of the mummified ibis, a bird that was sacred in Ancient Egypt, led him to conclude incorrectly that animals do not evolve over time.³⁸) During this period, Cuvier’s understanding of stratigraphy was developing alongside his belief that animal life is governed by a ‘correlation of parts’; in other words, he claimed that an organism’s various parts are so deeply interlinked that if one part were to change, then the entire organism would die.³⁹ Setting aside the particularities of his comparative anatomy, this idea alludes to a profound and binding relationship between the part and its whole. After all, Cuvier’s research was, in his own words, dedicated to using fragments to draw conclusions about lost wholes:

I have been obliged to learn the art of deciphering and restoring these remains, of discovering and bringing together [...] the scattered and mutilated fragments of which they are composed, of reproducing in all their original proportions and characters, the animals to which these fragments formerly belonged.⁴⁰

Indeed, the ‘fragment’ is often described in Cuvier’s writing as his primary conduit for engaging with the natural world’s deep history. It is an idea directly relevant for his work on stratigraphy, insofar as it presumes that the fragment can reveal a great deal of information about the organism, the historical epoch, or the rock strata to which it belonged. Cuvier’s work attests not

only to a very real intellectual and material exchange between Napoleonic archaeology and stratigraphy but also constitutes an important and somewhat unexpected context in which yet another kind of historical meaning was being articulated in terms of fragmentation, accumulation, and layering.

The unprecedented body of archaeological information Napoleonic savants produced about Egypt functioned in a manner not entirely dissimilar to the plundered artworks that had been brought to France from Italy a few years earlier. This was in no small measure due to the fact that the French had been compelled to hand over the majority of their Egyptian antiquities, including the now-famous Rosetta Stone, to the British when they surrendered to Lord Nelson in 1801. (From 1799 to 1806 ‘virtually nothing’, Cecil Gould claims, ‘entered the Louvre as a result of conquest’.⁴¹) Like the artworks triumphantly transported to Paris, this information needed to be presented in a manner that reflected its significance and rarity: as a book of exceptional quality, scale, and breadth titled *Description de l’Égypte*, totalling no fewer than twenty-three volumes containing almost nine hundred engraved plates. Although it was a government-sponsored book published by the official press of the French Empire, *Description* was neither the first nor the most widely read account of the French expedition. That prize went instead to *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte*, by Denon. Each book purported to narrate the recent history of the campaign and the more ancient history of Egyptian civilization in a manner that affirmed Bonaparte’s authority, but they adopted strikingly different models for doing so. And it is here that we can begin to see text and image deployed in very specific ways to produce and disseminate historical meaning under the sign of Napoleon.

Denon’s *Voyage* (1802), as a first-person account of a journey, fell within a longer tradition of travel writing, whose popularity blossomed in the eighteenth century.⁴² The book’s broader ambitions were explicitly stated in the dedication: ‘To combine the radiance of [Bonaparte’s] name with the splendour of the monuments of Egypt, is to associate the glorious pomp of our time with the mythical times of history.’⁴³ In other words, to conjoin Napoleonic power in present-day France with the historical depths of Egyptian antiquity. The book described Denon’s personal experiences and major events in the military campaign and offered an overview of past and present-day Egypt, accompanied by dozens of engraved illustrations of its landmarks and notable features. The illustrations, which retained some of the artistic conventions of topographical landscapes, also employed a kind of standardized visual taxonomy that has been explored in depth by the art historian Abigail Harrison Moore. As Moore points out, ‘Denon reconstructed Egypt’s archaeology using a scientific system of standardization’ that asserted French superiority and made the

ancient artefacts appear legible and even familiar to French readers.⁴⁴

The text adopted a related strategy for unifying Denon’s somewhat sprawling account: a distinctive authorial voice. The opening lines of the book underscore its rootedness in Denon as a witness and protagonist, a highly personal frame through which Napoleonic exploits will be filtered. It begins: ‘All my life I had desired to travel to Egypt.’⁴⁵ In the two volumes that follow these lines, Denon evokes the specific textures and smells of sumptuous meals, the tension and suspense of military manoeuvres, and the magnificence of newly uncovered monuments. The preface singled this out as one of the book’s appealing features. ‘Although the style of the traveler is often neglected,’ the publisher of an 1807 edition noted, ‘this travel diary is none the less full of charm. Denon has been able to combine enthusiasm with precision, and delight with erudition’.⁴⁶ Denon’s account, it continued, is ‘lively, animated and pleasant, without being devoid of sensibility. We can distinguish above all the frankness and the candor with which he paints the excesses of the French army of Egypt’. The text is richly embroidered with personal observations and lyrical embellishments, often conjuring up a particular scene or mood alongside more factual descriptions. Monuments, for example, are described in terms of their specific architectural features, but are also endowed with the traits we now expect to find in orientalizing accounts: ‘secrecy’, ‘splendour’, ‘decay’, and various kinds of half-forgotten ancient grandeur. Insofar as Denon’s project endeavoured to forge a link between Napoleonic power and ‘the mythical times of history’, it did so by integrating a significant amount of information into an account that was highly personal, narrative, and chronological.

The official publication that resulted from the Egyptian campaign could not have been more different. Initiated by Napoleonic decree in February 1802, *Description* compiled the vast body of information that had been collected by the scholars who had accompanied the French army (and who had remained in Egypt for two years after Napoleon had returned to France), under the supervision of an eight-person commission. It was in *Description* that the deliriously cumulative nature of this archaeological project was fully manifested. Far grander in size and appearance than the text by Denon, its remit was also more encyclopaedic. Volumes were dedicated to cataloguing Egypt’s ancient monuments and history, as well as its present-day condition: its industries and agriculture; its religion, social structure, dress, and customs; its insects, fish, and mammals; its climate and topography; and so on. The text was accompanied by ten volumes of dedicated illustrations, ranging from topographical landscapes and genre scenes to the kind of technical drawing practiced by the expedition’s engineers.⁴⁷ As Edward Said has memorably argued, the book’s ambition was to render Egypt ‘totally

accessible to European scrutiny'.⁴⁸ The illustrations, numbering over three thousand in total, have been described by Said, Grigsby, and others, as foundational documents in the visual imaginary of European orientalism.⁴⁹ The full 'imperial' edition—printed in unwieldy 'elephant folio' and bound with wooden covers—took over twenty years and almost four hundred engravers to complete, the first volumes of which were presented to Napoleon in 1808. A second edition of the text, reflecting on the significance of the undertaking, asserted that the book, 'dedicated to the description of so many gigantic monuments, is itself a colossal work in literature'.⁵⁰

Both the text and the images of *Description* were plural and varied in their structure. Describing the plates, the first volume informed its readers that engravers endeavoured to 'reunite as many drawings as possible onto each plate'.⁵¹ Yet, it reassured them, the images 'have been distributed with order and symmetry', making every effort to 'provide

uniformity [...] to a whole which is composed of a multitude of parts contributed by a great many people'.⁵² As this passage makes clear, those responsible for the book were keenly aware of its profound heterogeneity. Symmetry can indeed be found in the layout of many of the plates, such as the illustrations of ancient Roman Antinopolis from volume IV (figure 4), in which floor plans, elevations, profiles, and decorative details are brought together, despite their dramatically incompatible treatment of scale and entirely different systems of pictorial notation. The volume of information, and of multiple *kinds* of information, compiled within a single plate attests not only to the technical rigour of the analysis but also provides a small window onto the vertiginous quantity of data contained within the illustration program as a whole.

Whereas Denon could use a highly personal narrative voice to unify his text, *Description* pointedly lacked a larger ordering principle to which its diverse contents could be subordinated.

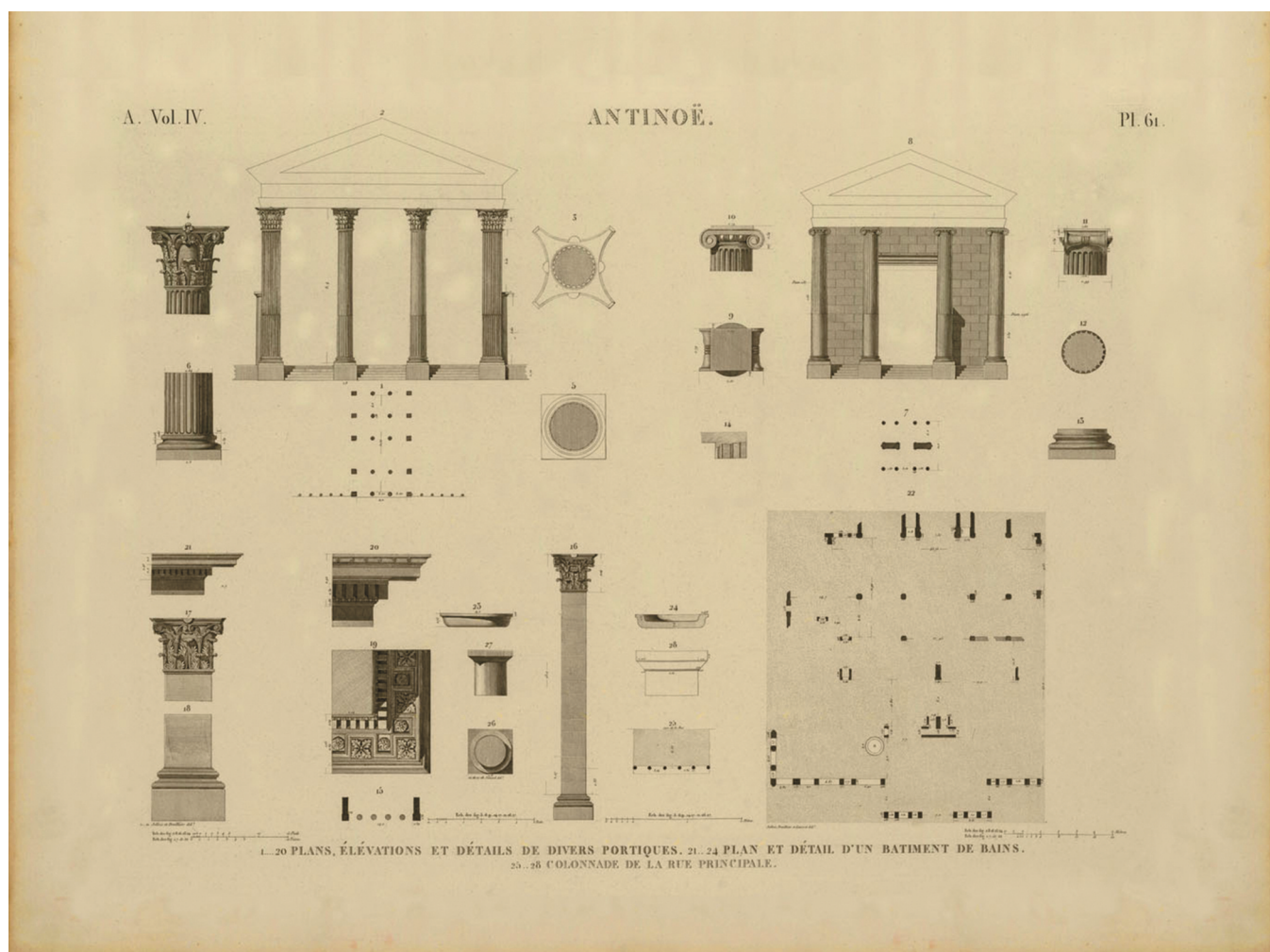


Figure 4. *Antinoë*: plan, elevations and sections of various porticoes, a bathhouse, and the main colonnaded street; from *Description de l'Égypte*, vol. IV: *Antiquités* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1817), pl. 61. Engraving. 100 × 81 cm. Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections.



Figure 5. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Napoleon on the Battlefield of Eylau*, 1808. Oil on canvas. 521 × 784 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

The text itself contained observations, studies, numerical charts, and historical accounts by dozens of authors, many of whom were uncredited. Although these texts were grouped by subject—bird species, for example, or agriculture—there is little in the way of narrative transition between different kinds of information, different authors, and differently organized texts. The book could not make use of the chronological structure found in Denon’s account, for volumes were published according to the order in which they were completed—consequently, it was not uncommon for two volumes on the same topic to be published up to a decade apart. Nor could *Description* revert to the kind of unifying stylistic, editorial, or philosophical framework on which the great encyclopaedias and atlases of the eighteenth century relied.

Instead, I would argue, it is the text’s very plurality that animated the project. Whereas Denon’s text was univocal, narrative, and sequentially ordered, *Description* was polyphonic, stylistically plural, and non-sequential. These features came to the fore in the dedication to the book’s second edition, which described its objectives as follows:

to observe and *reunite* all of [Egypt’s] natural productions; to form exact and detailed maps of the country; to *collect* ancient fragments; to study the earth, climate, and physical geography; and finally, to *gather together all the results* that interest the history of society, science, and the arts.⁵³

As the italicized terms make clear, the animating principle of the book is essentially additive in nature; it is a gathering-together of information that is insistently plural, that is so diverse that the only principle under which it can be unified is the principle of accumulation itself.

In some regards, the archaeological enquiries undertaken on Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign were not entirely dissimilar to the novels, prints, and plays proliferating in post-Revolutionary France that Bann has associated with ‘the rise of history’.⁵⁴ These various forms of media took as their subject the remnants of an inaccessible past—material and conceptual fragments that can be aggregated but which retain their partial, piecemeal form. Such remnants can be assimilated within a larger, unifying structure, but only insofar as that structure can accommodate their plurality and heterogeneity. In the case of *Description*, this was

manifested as a monumental dossier of information; and within that dossier the plates themselves are dizzying compilations of multiple *kinds* of information and different *modes* of representation. Broadly speaking, the archaeological activity that supplied this information was motivated by stratigraphy, which articulated a new way of thinking about temporal accumulation and material accumulation as commensurate, even co-extensive phenomena. Napoleonic archaeology (including subsequent excavations and restorations in Rome) marshalled various kinds of aggregation in pursuit of historical knowledge.⁵⁵

The nascent field of archaeology emerged as an important arena in which historical meaning was being reconceptualized and represented in early nineteenth-century France. Bonaparte's sponsorship of both the project and the dissemination of its findings underscores its relevance for his pursuit of political authority. Yet, when it came time to narrate the Egyptian campaign to the French public, Napoleon did not rely solely on the expedition's archaeological achievements, nor on the impressive *Description*, to communicate its success. He also turned to large-scale history painting. It was a decision that was hardly surprising given the cultural prominence accorded to the public display of art at the Paris Salon, and a decision that aligns, moreover, with Bann's observation that 'looking at pictures' was the most important 'formative ingredient in the historical-mindedness of the generation that followed the French Revolution'.⁵⁶ All of which brings us back to Gros and to history painting—not because Gros's art ought to be reinterpreted through its historical proximity to the rise of modern archaeology, but because his art comes into view as yet another site, a particularly influential site, in which post-Revolutionary historical meaning was being forged through forms of dispersal and aggregation — even, perhaps, through the dispersal and aggregation of forms.

At the end of the 1790s, following a decade of Revolutionary upheaval, the production of large-scale history paintings was in sharp decline, with few artists taking up explicitly national themes or recent events.⁵⁷ All that began to change, however, c.1800. Under Napoleon, funding for the arts was increased and the French state once again became a significant source of major commissions for works portraying national subjects. Bonaparte was characteristically shrewd in his patronage; he became a regular visitor to the Paris salons and also participated in selecting themes for the biennial competitions, or *concours*, for major commissions. Under the supervision of Denon, who directed state patronage of the arts following his return from Egypt, artists were tasked with glorifying military victories and other recent events that would enhance Bonaparte's political standing. Gros's *Plague-Stricken in Jaffa* was among the first major works to demonstrate the renewed viability of large-scale history painting under

Napoleon. In the years that followed its completion, the proliferation of such works testified to what Bruno Foucart has called 'the great alliance between Napoleon and the painters of his history'.⁵⁸ Delécluze, a fellow pupil of David, complained that 'each exhibition was cluttered with a crowd of large, medium, and small frames which commemorated even the most insignificant aspects of the life of the Emperor Napoleon'.⁵⁹ As David O'Brien has shown, history painting in particular was transformed into a powerful vehicle of state propaganda.⁶⁰

Gros was, by any metric, the most successful of the many 'painters of Napoleon's history', having received the largest number of commissions for large-scale paintings of contemporary events. Beyond the logistics of funding and patronage, however, Gros and his peers faced a more abstract challenge: namely, how to endow recent events—which had traditionally been regarded as unsuitable for the beaux arts—with what Michael Marrinan calls 'historical authority'.⁶¹ Although much of the relevant art-historical scholarship has focused on the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy after Napoleon's fall (which lasted from 1815 to 1830), Siegfried and Bann have both indicated that artists appealed to several rhetorical modes in order to produce historical meaning in their paintings.⁶² Looking specifically at Gros, Siegfried would argue that a painting such as *Plague-Stricken in Jaffa* relies on an 'affective' mode of representation that appeals to the drama and immediacy of the events being depicted, rather than presenting a more distant scene that provides a relatively legible narrative overview. But if, as Hegel observed, the historical event can never be separated from its narration, it bears recalling that in *Jaffa* we see history not simply being 're-presented' but being actively forged.

Looking across discursive and pictorial practices suggests some of the ways in which a painting such as *Jaffa* was called upon to stabilize historical meaning.⁶³ In the case of the Egyptian campaign, narrating the expedition proved challenging for Napoleon. During his earlier Italian campaigns of the mid-1790s, he had exerted a significant amount of control over how events were described and disseminated.⁶⁴ Taking advantage of the phenomenal expansion of the popular press in France during the Revolution and a corresponding rise of literacy rates, Bonaparte had carefully managed the timing and content of military dispatches to galvanize political support back in France; he even owned two small newspapers dedicated to reporting on the Armée d'Italie. Napoleon also encouraged his men to narrate their own 'histories of the Italian campaign', requesting in 1797 that each regiment produce a written account of its experiences.⁶⁵ These efforts were part of a sophisticated machinery whereby Bonaparte endeavoured to manage 'the content and the flow of historical information across the empire', and to endow his narrative accounts with, to borrow from Marrinan again, 'historical authority'.⁶⁶

In the Egyptian campaign of 1798–1801, however, correspondence between France and Egypt travelled irregularly and unpredictably due in part to a series of strategic setbacks

engineered by the British. For significant periods of time, contact between France and its army was cut off altogether. To make matters worse, in the absence of a regular stream of military dispatches from Egypt, French newspapers published contradictory information and partisan speculation, shrouding the ‘facticity of events’ in a cloud of uncertainty, hearsay, and rumour. One rumour proved particularly damaging for Napoleon’s reputation, and persisted even after the general had returned to France with much fanfare. It was said that while retreating from Jaffa, Napoleon had ordered his doctors to poison French soldiers struck down by the plague in order to hasten the retreat. A British account published in 1803, Robert Wilson’s *History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, made a similar allegation that lent credibility to the rumour in France.⁶⁷ Seen in this light, Gros’s *Jaffa* can be read as a calculated response to the problem of historical narration in Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign.⁶⁸ It specifically contradicted the claim that Napoleon had treated his plague-ridden soldiers poorly, and it more generally served Napoleon’s need to assert control over the narration of his expedition. But if the narrative legacy of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign was multiple and dispersed, so too, it would seem, were the pictorial devices deployed to shore up that legacy in Gros’s painting—and especially the fragmentation and distribution of monumental bodies around the perimeter of the canvas. Napoleon may occupy the central midground, but other bodies and visual focal-points remain forcefully present. Rather than locate the painting’s aggregate of bodies within a unified, abstract ordering principle, Gros relies on planar compression to unite them into a single, albeit heterogeneous, entity. What if this effect were characteristic of, rather than antagonistic towards, a particular way of forging historical meaning in early Napoleonic France? Recognizing the painting’s embeddedness within a wider and diverse set of strategies—pictorial, discursive, and material—at work in the production and dissemination of Napoleonic history, a set of interrelated strategies come into view, strategies characterized by effects of dispersal and aggregation, of fragmentation and accumulation.

These strategies are even more forcefully evident in Gros’s subsequent *Napoleon on the Battlefield of Eylau* (1808) (figure 5), a monumental painting that portrays Napoleon touring a battlefield the day after an encounter between the French *Grande Armée* and the Imperial Russian army in February 1807. The battle was both exceptionally bloody and conspicuously futile; accounts of it that reached Paris compared the field of battle to the merchandise on view at a butcher’s shop. Gros’s painting commemorates not the battle itself but its aftermath. Napoleon is shown visiting the battlefield on the following morning, generously offering clemency and healing to the defeated Russian soldiers rather than execution. Napoleon rides forth placidly, his eyes turned heavenward while a wounded Cossack reverentially bows and reaches out to

touch his imperial insignia. The emperor is flanked by his entourage, who survey with equanimity the scene of carnage before them. Like *Jaffa*, *Eylau* appeals to Napoleon’s humanitarianism with reference to the tradition of the *roi thaumaturge*, the royal healing-power attributed to early modern French kings. And, as we might expect from Napoleon’s self-mythologizing practice, this allusion was but one among several to historical precedents.

Reflecting on Gros’s art several decades later, the painter Eugène Delacroix would aptly describe *Eylau* as a painting ‘made of 100 paintings’, whose disparate elements ‘seem to draw the eye and the mind everywhere at the same time’.⁶⁹ The layering of artistic citations was hardly unique to Gros. Indeed, for many scholars this practice did not reach its fullest expression until several years later with the work of Jean-August-Dominique Ingres.⁷⁰ But one of the striking features of *Eylau* is the sheer clutter of references. Prendergast and more recently Marnin Young have endeavoured to make sense of the painting’s heady citational plurality, which includes historical references to Jesus Christ, the Roman Emperor Trajan, and Henry IV, alongside artistic allusions to Michelangelo, Raphael, Peter Paul Rubens, and others. ‘Such referential layering’, Young writes, stabilizes Napoleon’s historical identity and his significance in the painting through ‘a sort of massive overdetermination’.⁷¹ Prendergast even compares this referential ‘bricolage’ to ‘a form of “plunder”, cognate perhaps with Napoleon’s looting of the museums of Europe’.⁷² Prendergast’s observation is an especially provocative one because it compels us to recognize a certain symmetry between different kinds of artistic accumulation—from painterly appropriation to actual looting, from concentrated pictorial density to sprawling material bulk. In each case, an artistic referent is separated (sometimes violently so) from its former context and inserted into a new configuration that brings together multiple, diverse objects, meanings and forms. Predicated on the fragmentation and mobility of these figures, it is a strategy that is essentially cumulative in its operation.

In addition to this richly citational practice, *Jaffa* and *Eylau* share something else: a foreground densely populated with bodies whose presence—at more than twice life size—is staggering. The commission for *Eylau* (overseen, again, by Denon) called for several predetermined compositional elements: the painting was expected to include: Napoleon and his gesture of clemency; a young Lithuanian hussar on the left who pledges his allegiance to the emperor; some number of wounded figures in the foreground; and an overview of the battlefield in the background.⁷³ Gros, having won the commission through a *concours*, set the scene in a landscape encrusted with snow, a bleached blank expanse against which the dark-hued figures of the soldiers stand out. As in *Jaffa*, bodies of the dead and dying fill the foreground, but here their presence is

multiplied and vertically layered. On the left various men minister to injured soldiers. On the right, too, wounded Russians resist and draw back as French surgeons attend to their wounds.

In the centre of the composition, set apart by a perimeter of white snow, lies a compact pile of dead soldiers unceremoniously splayed out atop one another. A surviving soldier reaches up towards Napoleon. Beneath this cluster of prone limbs and contorted poses, the head of a single French soldier is barely discernible. Their dense layering has an almost stratigraphic effect, as if the bodies are in the process of solidifying into a kind of landscape. The compression and sedimentation of their forms mingles with layers of fallen snow. On each side of the composition, bodies in pieces are being tended to; in almost every instance, this is pictured as the application or tying of white fabric to the wounded body—cloth whose bleached, taut surface cannot help but recall the very canvas upon which it is painted. Gros's task is an analogous one, of using an expanse of white fabric to gather together that which has been separated. Gros's bodies accumulate. They settle on top of one another in layers, forming corporeal striations that crystallize into a new solid mass.

If we take *Eylau*, like *Jaffa*, to be an important site in which historical meaning was being stabilized and disseminated under Napoleon, the monumental, proliferating bodies that occupy the foreground and margins of the painting are central to its operations. (Widely assumed by twentieth-century scholars to be problematic—recall that Prendergast terms it 'the anxiety of the foreground'⁷⁴—the extremely large, graphically rendered bodies that pile up around Bonaparte were not, Young reminds us, detrimental to the success of the painting in articulating Napoleonic history when it was first publicly exhibited in Paris.⁷⁵) When considered alongside a range of other material and rhetorical practices, the paintings come into view as yet another site in which history is *accumulated*. This is not to say that we ought to use the confiscation of artworks or the rise of archaeology as a privileged interpretative framework for understanding Gros's paintings. Rather, we can identify a wide and diverse range of activities in Napoleonic France that each in its own way responded to the temporal rupture associated with the events of the French Revolution.

'A loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of the permanent.'⁷⁶ This is what the nineteenth century inherited: a sense of irreversible dislocation from a once-continuous past. Or rather, this is how it was described by Linda Nochlin when speaking of the conceptual and aesthetic importance of fragmentation for nineteenth-century modernity. What we encounter in Gros's paintings, however, is the gathering together, on a massive scale, of bodily fragments—and, indeed, of artistic citations from the past. In the years immediately following the end of the Revolution, effects of loss, decay, dislocation, and rupture

were met with commensurate acts of collection, recomposition, layering, and accretion. Above all, these practices were historical; historical facticity, inseparable from the act of its narration, was forged through material, pictorial, and conceptual forms of aggregation. In their multiple voices their irrepressible heterogeneity, fragments could be brought into provisional alignment under the sign of Napoleon, only to be dispersed and recombined in the years that followed.

ORCID

Stephanie O'Rourke  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6823-4282>

NOTES

1– Anon., 'Sur le Salon de Peinture', *Le Revue philosophique, littéraire et politique* (2 October 1804): 47. All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

2– Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros's La Bataille d'Eylau* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 97.

3– Marnin Young, 'Napoleon Disfigured: Nation, Identity, and War in Antoine-Jean Gros's *Battle of Eylau*', *Nineteenth Century Studies* 26 (2012): 1–25, at 8–10.

4– Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, 'Rumor, Contagion, and Colonization in Gros's *Plague-Stricken of Jaffa* (1804)', *Representations* 51 (Summer 1995): 1–46, at 2. Grigsby's sophisticated and powerful reading of the painting in relation to rumour and contagion, and its subsequent discussion in *Extremities*, greatly informs the present analysis. Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 65–164.

5– G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 60. 'History' as a term was used much more broadly in turn-of-the-century France than it is today. For an overview of its changing meaning and use, see Donald R. Kelley, ed., *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

6– Michael Marrinan, 'Literal/Literary/'Lexie': History, Text, and Authority in Napoleonic Painting', *Word & Image* 7, no. 3 (1991): 177–200; Susan Siegfried, 'Ingres and the Theatrics of History Painting', *Word & Image* 16, no. 1 (2000): 58–76. The present article is very much inspired by the arguments in these studies.

7– Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne, 1995); Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simoniens, Quinet, Michelet* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Philip Knee, *L'Expérience de la perte autour du moment 1800*. Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2014); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

8– Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, 5.

9– On the relationship between pictorial and textual representations of history in this context, see Susan Siegfried, 'Visualizing History in Eighteenth-Century France', *Representations* 145 (2019): 80–106.

10– Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, 4. Mark Salber Philips has suggested that this was part of an attempt to recapture a feeling of continuity with the past in order to combat the estrangement and disorientation felt by many; Mark Salber Philips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 2.

11– Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism*, 3.

12– On de Maistre and his legacy, see Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794–1854* (Ithaca: Cornell

- University Press, 2011). On Michelet and broader trends, see Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism*. The seminal work on this subject remains Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).
- 13– Knee, *L'Expérience de la perte*, 81 (added emphasis).
- 14– On how Napoleon attempted to shape his public image through 'myth' and 'legend', see Frédéric Bluche, *Le Bonapartisme: Aux origines de la droite autoritaire (1800–1850)* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1980). For more recent work on this see, Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta, 2004).
- 15– Alan Forrest, 'Propaganda and the Legitimation of Power in Napoleonic France', *French History* 18, no. 4 (2004): 426–45; Wayne Hanley, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda, 1796 to 1799* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
- 16– Todd Porterfield and Susan Siegfried, *Staging Empire: Napoleon, Ingres, and David* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 29.
- 17– Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 42.
- 18– *Ibid.*, 45.
- 19– Hanley, *Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda*, 177; see also Gould, *Trophy of Conquest*, 42.
- 20– On Monge and the *Commission*, see Sabine Lubliner-Mattatia, 'Monge et les objets d'art d'Italie', *Bulletin de la Sabix* 41 (2007): 92–110.
- 21– Greco-Roman artefacts had a particular valence in this context because they were seen as emblems of cultural power that were not closely associated with the pre-Revolutionary French ruling order; Abigail Harrison Moore, 'Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon and the Transference of Images of Egypt', *Art History* 25, no. 4 (2002): 531–49.
- 22– Cathleen Hoeniger, 'The Art Requisitions by the French under Napoléon and the Detachment of Frescoes in Rome, with an Emphasis on Raphael', *Conservation, exposition, restauration d'objets d'art: Revue électronique* (2012). Retrieved August 28, 2020, from <http://journals.openedition.org/ceroart/2367>.
- 23– Tim Clayton and Sheila O'Connell, eds, *Bonaparte and the British: Prints and Propaganda in the Age of Napoleon* (London: British Museum, 2015), 61.
- 24– Étienne-Jean Delécluze, *Louis David, son école et son temps* (Paris: Didier, 1855, repr. Paris: Macula, 1983), 206.
- 25– Gould, *Trophy of Conquest*, 65.
- 26– A Galerie des Antiques dedicated to the display of Greek and Roman statues opened in November 1800, although it only ever displayed a fraction of the confiscated works. Works were put on view at several locations around Paris, and surplus artworks were distributed to newly founded regional depots in Lyon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg and elsewhere, but many simply remained in storage. On the importance of the Louvre as a stage for communicating political ideals and shaping a new public citizenry, see Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 27– Delécluze, *Louis David*, 208.
- 28– Lubliner-Mattatia, 'Monge et les objets d'art d'Italie', 36.
- 29– Nina Burleigh, *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 182. On the lack of consensus about archaeological practice in the mid-eighteenth century, see Nancy Ramage, 'Gods, Graves, and Scholars: 18th-Century Archaeologists in Britain and Italy', *American Journal of Archaeology* 96, no. 4 (1992): 653–61.
- 30– For an English language account of their activities published in 1800, see *Memoirs Relative to Egypt, Written in that Country during the Campaigns of General Bonaparte, in the Years 1798 and 1799, by the learned and scientific men who accompanied the French expedition* (London: R. Phillips, 1800).
- 31– Burleigh, *Mirage*, 184; see also Bob Brier, 'Napoleon in Egypt', *Archaeology* 52, no. 3 (1999): 44–53.
- 32– For more on this shift, see David Cahan, *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- 33– Burleigh, *Mirage*, 168–69.
- 34– Moore, 'Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon', 531–49.
- 35– 'Preface', in *Description de l'Égypte ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française*, 23 vols (Paris: Impr. Impériale, 1809–29), 1 (1809): vii.
- 36– Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Martin Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Nicolaas Rupke, 'Caves, Fossils and the History of the Earth', in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 241–59; Stephanie O'Rourke, 'Staring into the Abyss of Time', *Representations* 148 (Fall 2019): 30–56.
- 37– Whitney Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
- 38– Caitlin Curtis, Craig D. Millar and David M. Lambert, 'The Sacred Ibis Debate: The First Test of Evolution', *PLoS Biology* 16, no. 9 (2018): e2005558, <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.2005558>. Cuvier and Lamarck both compared fragments of mummified ibises that were estimated to belong to periods three thousand years apart, and presented the mummies to the French Academy in 1802. Neither man found evidence that the ibis had changed over this period, which Cuvier took as proof that animals do not evolve. Lamarck countered that three thousand years was too short of a period for discernible change.
- 39– William Coleman, *Georges Cuvier, Zoologist: A Study in the History of Evolution Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).
- 40– Georges Cuvier, 'Preliminary Discourse', in *Recherches sur les Ossemens Fossiles* (Paris: Chez Deterville, 1812), trans. R. Kerr, 1–181. *Essay on the Theory of the Earth* (London: John Murray, 1813), 1–2.
- 41– Gould, *Trophy of Conquest*, 91.
- 42– For an overview of this genre, see the anthology by Elizabeth Bohls and Ian Duncan, eds, *Travel Writing 1700–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 43– Dominique Vivant Denon, *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte* (Paris: P. Didot l'aîné, 1802), n.p.
- 44– Moore, 'Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon', 532.
- 45– Dominique Vivant Denon, *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte, pendant les campagnes de Bonaparte, en 1798 et 1799* (Paris: S. Bagster, 1807), 1.
- 46– 'Preface', in Denon, *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte* (1807), vii–xii.
- 47– To facilitate the engraving process, the prominent engineer, artist and officer Nicolas-Jacques Conté (one of the foremost savants on the Egyptian expedition) had invented an engraving machine to fill in the sky in various prints. Conté's death in 1805 prevented him from supervising the project beyond its initial stages. For an excellent discussion of this, see Richard Taws, 'Conté's Machines: Drawing, Atmosphere, Erasure', *Oxford Art Journal* 39, no. 2 (2016): 243–66.
- 48– Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), 83.
- 49– Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Colossal: Engineering the Suez Canal, Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, and Panama Canal* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2012), 20–31.
- 50– 'Dedication', in *Description de l'Égypte*, 2nd edn, 37 vols (Paris: Impr. de CLF Panckoucke, 1821), 1: n.p.
- 51– 'Avertissement', in *Description de l'Égypte* (1809), 1: 2.
- 52– *Ibid.*
- 53– 'Dedication', in *Description de l'Égypte* (1821), 1: n.p.
- 54– Stephen Bann, 'Two Kinds of Historicism: Resurrection and Restoration in French Historical Painting', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 4, no. 2 (2010): 154–71, at 156.
- 55– On French archaeology in Rome, see Ronald Ridley, *The Eagle and the Spade: Archaeology in Rome during the Napoleonic Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 56– *Ibid.*

- 57– O'Brien, *After the Revolution*, 2. Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting*, has written about this extensively in relation to Gros. O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 2.
- 58– Bruno Foucart, 'La Grande Alliance de Napoléon et des peintres de son histoire', in *Napoléon, images et histoire: peintures du Château de Versailles, 1789–1815* (Paris: RMN, 2001), 12–24, at 14.
- 59– As quoted in Forrest, 'Propaganda and the Legitimation of Power', 443.
- 60– O'Brien, *After the Revolution*, 2.
- 61– As Siegfried notes, 'Before the Revolution, current events simply were not represented at the official Salon'; Susan Siegfried, 'Naked History: The Rhetoric of Military Painting in Postrevolutionary France', *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (1993): 235–58. Marrinan, 'Literal/Literary/"Lexie"', 181.
- 62– Siegfried, 'Naked History'; Siegfried, 'Ingres and the Theatrics of History Painting'; Bann, 'Two Kinds of Historicism'; Richard Taws, 'The Dauphin and his Doubles: Visualizing Royal Imposture after the French Revolution', *Art Bulletin* 98, no. 1 (2016): 72–100.
- 63– Such an approach is particularly indebted to Marrinan, 'Literal/Literary/"Lexie"'.
64– On this, see Hanley, *Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda*; and Forrest, 'Propaganda and the Legitimation of Power'.
- 65– Philip Dwyer, 'Napoleon Bonaparte as Hero and Saviour: Image, Rhetoric and Behavior in the Construction of a Legend', *French History* 18, no. 4 (2004): 379–403, at 383.
- 66– Marrinan, 'Literal/Literary/"Lexie"', 177, 181 (original emphasis).
- 67– It has been suggested that Gros's painting was a 'direct response' to Wilson's allegations; Clayton and O'Connell, *Bonaparte and the British*, 44.
- 68– See David O'Brien's excellent research on this painting and its relation to Napoleonic propaganda. There is some ambiguity regarding whether this was an official commission from Napoleon, but there is no doubt that it was officially sanctioned. The painting's completion was carefully monitored by Vivant Denon; O'Brien, *After the Revolution*, 94.
- 69– Eugène Delacroix, 'Peintres et sculpteurs modernes, III, Gros', *Revue des deux mondes* 23, no. 5 (1 September 1848): 649–73, at 663.
- 70– Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Patricia Condon, *Ingres, in Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of J.-A.-D. Ingres* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Siegfried, 'Ingres and the Theatrics of History Painting'; Susan Siegfried, *Fingering Ingres* (New York: Blackwell, 2001).
- 71– Young, 'Napoleon Disfigured', 21. The polysemous nature of the classical nude, at this moment, was widely felt beyond France; Cora Gilroy-Ware, *The Classical Body in Romantic Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020).
- 72– Prendergast, *Painting War (II)*, 8.
- 73– For an excellent summary of the commission, see O'Brien, *After the Revolution*, 160–64.
- 74– Prendergast, *Painting War (II)*, 97.
- 75– Here I follow Young, 'Napoleon Disfigured', in arguing against an assumption within the art-historical scholarship that the foreground of Gros's painting is problematic, proposing that the foreground was a key part of, rather than antithetical to, the signifiatory programme of the painting.
- 76– Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor for Modernity* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 23.