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The Egyptian Campaign of 1798

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Still known as a passing remark in cultural history is the campaign of the French against Egypt in 1798 because of the finding of the Rosette Stone in the Nile Delta, with which Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyph script in 1822. Apart from that, for Europe - except for Great Britain - this military operation itself has rather fallen into oblivion, as the conquest of Egypt and the Levant finally ended with a debacle; thus the French historians were not really interested in reporting on the matter elaborately or appreciating it excessively in history books. The Holy Reich, Prussia and Russia had not been involved in this battle. Nevertheless, this campaign was of geostrategic importance. The superiority of tactical command competence and combat skills explains the immense losses the Orientals had to put up with frequently in the battles against the European armies. If France had wanted to survive as a nation, she would have been in need of a different management other than the often irresolute and inconstant directorate. In times of greatest danger an authoritarian leader was required, which Napoleon considered realised in his figure, totally in the sense of a Greek tyrant who had always been designated in times of war. With the revolt of 1797 he became First Consul of the Republic and ended the Second Coalition War in 1804. Not until this point of time the question arose whether Napoleon had not experienced a development until his emperor coronation in 1804 which had transfigured him in strategic respect, driving him into megalomania, which finally caused the fall of his Empire. For Egypt, this invasion had been the first attempt of the Europeans to settle down in the Orient since the crusades. This was successful solely because of the technical and military superiority of the Europeans. Both the Ottomans, above all the Mameluks, had refused the technical development in Europe insofar as - although they used the new service weapons as well - they rejected them as being dishonourable, perfecting the duel on horseback as the highest form of fighting. Thus, the way of fighting originating in the Orange Army Reform decisively contributed to military superiority.

Due to the precise establishment of a colonial administration Egypt was torn out of a stagnation which had lasted for centuries, and was suddenly directly confronted with European modernisation. This marked the beginning of a process of separatism from the Ottoman Empire, which admittedly was executed not until 1914, but which had begun to become effective as early as 1805 with Governor Muhammad Ali Pascha and with the since 1802 predominating British influence, which finally led to the takeover as a de-facto-colony in 1882. After violent power struggles, in the course of which the Albanian Muhammad Ali prevailed, the Mameluks were altogether eliminated in the so-called "Mameluc Massacre" of 1811. The country was modernised, and especially after the construction of the Suez Canal (1859 to 1869) remained a plaything for the European powers.

