

Napoleon in Egypt transcript

Bonjour tout le monde, on va en Egypt aujourd'hui. I'm going to talk to you about a very, very, very famous Frenchman. Who is the most famous Frenchman you know? No, I'm not going to talk to you about a football player at all, I'm going to tell you a story about a French man called Napoléon Bonaparte.

Napoléon Bonaparte is famous for becoming Emperor of France under the name Napoléon Premier in 1804. He is also très célèbre for losing the Battle of Waterloo against the British armies led by the Duke of Wellington on 18th of June 1815 precisely, but that's another story.

In 1798, before he became Emperor, Napoleon was sent off by the French Government on a huge army expedition to the land of Egypt. Pourquoi? Because, France was at war with Britain, oh no, and rather than fighting the British armies directly, Napoléon thought that one way of weakening Britain was to cut off the roads to its colonies in India by sending French troops to the Middle East. Now, it turns out also that everything Egyptian was very much in fashion in Europe at the time with everybody trying to imitate Egyptian style. However, not much was known yet about the ancient Egyptian culture.

And so it was that Napoleon set off on this great expedition with lots of soldiers but also a group of 167 scientists and artists. Well, it turns out that the expedition was a total military disaster but a huge cultural and scientific success which still has an impact on the world today.

The scientists and artists who accompanied Napoleon decided to explore and describe everything that they encountered on Egyptian soil such as tombs, temples, mummies, artefacts and so on. All that research was compiled into twenty volumes which includes some incredible drawings. These books form the basis of Egyptology as we know it today.

Napoléon himself had given special instructions to his men not to destroy any of the ancient Egyptian remains that they would find in their way, the soldiers were pretty respectful indeed and it was actually one of them, Pierre-Francois Bouchard, who in 1799 discovered one of the most famous artefacts to come out of Egypt, the Rosetta Stone, which is now housed in the British Museum in London.

Other soldiers were a bit less respectful and also wanted their names to go down in history so they carved out messages on Egyptian pyramids and temples next to the ancient hieroglyphs, yes nowadays we would call these messages 'graffiti'. Do you know what they wrote? Things like, 'Bonjour, je m'appelle Robert' or 'Jacques est en Egypt, 3 juillet 1798'. One of them, probably a very unhappy soldier even wrote 'Napoléon est une vache', not very nice is it? C'est tout pour aujourd'hui, à plus.