MIRAGE: NAPOLEON'S SCIENTISTS AND THE UNVEILING OF EGYPT

AUTHOR: NINA BURLEIGH

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

Little more than two hundred years ago, only the most reckless or eccentric Europeans had dared traverse the unmapped territory of the modern-day Middle East. Its history and peoples were the subject of much myth and speculation—and no region aroused greater interest than Egypt, where reports of mysterious monuments, inscrutable hieroglyphics, rare silks and spices, and rumors of lost magical knowledge tantalized dreamers and taunted the power-hungry.

It was not until 1798, when an unlikely band of scientific explorers traveled from Paris to the Nile Valley, that Westerners received their first real glimpse of what lay beyond the Mediterranean Sea. Under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Army, a small and little-known corps of Paris's brightest intellectual lights left the safety of their laboratories, studios, and classrooms to embark on a thirty-day crossing into the unknown—some never to see French shores again. Over 150 astronomers, mathematicians, naturalists, physicists, doctors, chemists, engineers, botanists, artists—even a poet and a musicologist—accompanied Napoleon's troops into Egypt.

Carrying pencils instead of swords, specimen jars instead of field guns, these highly accomplished men participated in the first large-scale interaction between Europeans and Muslims of the modern era. And many lived to tell the tale. Hazarding hunger, hardship, uncertainty, and disease, Napoleon's scientists risked their lives in pursuit of discovery.

They approached the land not as colonizers, but as experts in their fields of scholarship, meticulously categorizing and collecting their finds—from the ruins of the colossal pyramids to the smallest insects to the legendary Rosetta Stone. Those who survived the three-year expedition compiled an exhaustive encyclopedia of Egypt, twenty-three volumes in length, which secured their place in history as the world's earliest-known archaeologists. Unraveling the mysteries that had befuddled Europeans for centuries, Napoleon's scientists were the first to document the astonishing accomplishments of a lost civilization—before the dark shadow of empire-building took Africa and the Middle East by storm.

Internationally acclaimed journalist Nina Burleigh brings readers back to a little-known landmark adventure at the dawn of the modern era—one that ultimately revealed the deepest secrets of
about author

Nina is an award-winning author and journalist. She has written four books and has been published in the New Yorker, Time, New York and People, among many other journals and rags. She has occasionally shellacked her hair for television, including Good Morning America, Nightline, and various programs on CNN and C-Span, as well as flogged books on NPR and countless radio outlets.

The daughter of author and artist Robert Burleigh and Berta Burleigh, a teacher who emigrated to the USA from Iraq in the 1950s, Nina was born and educated in the Midwest, has traveled extensively in the Middle East and lived in Italy and France. She covered the Clinton White House for Time and reported and wrote human interest stories at People Magazine from New York. She is an adjunct professor at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and occasionally vents on the Huffington Post.

Nina has lectured around the United States and in Mexico on writing and books, including her most recent, Unholy Business, a true tale of how modern science is being used to support the curious world of biblical relic trade and forgery. Her book, Mirage, published in 2008 by Harper Collins, was selected by the New York Times as an editor's choice and won the Society of Women Educator's Award in 2008.