



LANDMARKS OF ROSETTA ACCORDING TO THE FRENCH TRAVELER SONNINI, AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ITS ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

This research presents an analytical and documentary study of Rosetta in the 18th century, through an examination of the memoirs of the French traveler Charles Nicolas Sonnini. The research aims to highlight the city's strategic and economic importance as a vital link between Cairo and Alexandria, focusing on its defensive system, characterized by towers and northern forts.

The research also delves into the city's morphological and urban characteristics, comparing the residential style in Rosetta with that of Cairo, and analyzing the role of the natural environment in shaping the architecture. The research offers a critical reading of the illustrations (pls. 1, 1a, and 2) that Sonnini included in his memoirs, emphasizing their value as archaeological and architectural documents that complement the written text and enrich the accuracy of the historical documentation.

This research employs a comparative analytical approach to draw comprehensive conclusions about the development of Rosetta and the changes in its urban functions, relying on the memoirs of the French traveler Charles Nicolas Sonnini as a primary source. The research followed meticulous procedural steps, including historical criticism and textual analysis to verify the authenticity of texts by comparing them with archaeological facts. It also involved visual analysis of paintings and illustrations as parallel architectural documents, as well as morphological studies to trace urban development and the relationship between mass, space, and the surrounding environment. This culminated in an integrated research framework that connects the data of the historical text with the current archaeological reality of the city.

The research covers the structure of Rosetta through integrated axes, beginning with a study of its location and strategic role as a commercial warehouse and defensive point between Alexandria and Cairo, along with an analysis of its protective architecture. It then moves to an analysis of the architecture and environment in terms of organization,



ventilation, and integration with the Nile's natural environment. The research continues with an examination of economic life and activities, such as the textile industry and the rice life cycle. It concludes with an archaeological study of sites like Kom El-Afrah and Tell and Zawiya Abu Mandour as architectural and religious models that combine function and beauty. Finally, it includes visual documentation that compares the textual description with Sonnini's drawings to assess its accuracy in capturing architectural elements. The research ultimately presents a comprehensive analysis that highlights Rosetta as a sophisticated urban entity and affirms that Sonnini's memoirs constitute a "scientific reference" documenting a pivotal period in the history of architecture and society in Ottoman Egypt, making them a cornerstone for studies on preserving the city's architectural heritage.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that Rosetta was not merely a coastal city, but a thriving economic and urban center. Its inhabitants successfully integrated historical legacies (such as reused Pharaonic antiquities) with the Ottoman style, creating a unique visual and architectural identity worthy of study and documentation as an integral part of Egyptian architectural heritage.

Keywords: Rosetta, Charles Nicholas Sonnini, travel literature, Islamic architecture, defensive fortifications, towers, Ottoman architectural style, antiquities, Tell Abu Mandour, Abu Mandour Mosque.

Introduction

Importance and Objectives of the Study: This study derives its scientific and historical significance from several key factors, including:

- **The Documentary Value of Travelers' Writings and Drawings:** The importance lies in the fact that Sonnini's writings and illustrations represent a rare "visual and textual document" chronicling the city of Rosetta shortly before the French campaign. This allows researchers to trace the city's urban and architectural changes over time.
- **Bridging the Gap in Early Orientalist Studies:** The study sheds light on an important period of the 18th century (1777-1780 AD), a period preceding the official documentation by the scholars of the French campaign. This helps in understanding the nature of the European perspective (scientific, colonial, and humanitarian) towards regional Egyptian cities outside Cairo and Alexandria.
- **Critical Evaluation of Travelers' Accounts:** The study offers a critical and analytical



reading that cross-references written texts with reference panels (such as those of Tell Abu Mandour) to test the accuracy and objectivity of Sonnini's observations of archaeological sites and to correct any errors that foreign travelers may have made regarding names or geographical locations.

- **Serving the Heritage and Architecture of Rosetta:** This study contributes to enriching the specialized archaeological library on the history of Islamic architecture and urban planning in Rosetta, considered an open-air museum of Islamic architecture in Egypt, and supports efforts to protect its historical identity.

Objectives of the Study: This study aims to achieve the following procedural objectives:

- **Introducing the Traveler and the Context of the Journey:** Shedding light on the figure of Charles Nicolas Sonnini, the motivations behind his scientific journey commissioned by Count Buffon and Minister Bertin, and the historical and political circumstances of his visit to Egypt and Rosetta.
- **Identifying and Classifying Urban Planning Elements:** Interpreting and analyzing Sonnini's records of the urban and defensive components of Rosetta, such as the walls, defensive towers, northern forts, and the layout of roads and residences, in comparison with other Egyptian cities.
- **Documenting and Analyzing Religious and Architectural Monuments:** Studying and documenting the prominent landmarks recorded by Sonnini, most notably Kom al-Afrak and the mound, mosque, and zawiya of Abu Mandour, while explaining their religious and social functions during those periods.
- **Academic Analysis of Paintings and Drawings:** Analyzing Sonnini's paintings and illustrations (such as paintings 1 and 2) in comparison with archaeological evidence and the geographical reality of Rosetta to determine their artistic and historical accuracy.
- **Highlighting Economic and Daily Aspects:** Observing and tracing the economic and commercial activities documented by Sonnini in Rosetta, such as trade between Alexandria and Cairo, and the rice, linen, and textile industries.

Research Methodology and Previous Studies

- This study employs a comparative, analytical, historical-archaeological approach, given the nature of the material, which combines the traveler's literary texts, illustrations, and archaeological remains, this is evident through the following axes:



- The inductive historical method: to trace the chronological and political context of Charles Nicholas Sonnini's journey to Egypt and Rosetta during the period (1777-1780 AD), and to understand the circumstances surrounding the recording and publication of his observations in (1799 AD).
- The descriptive-analytical method: to describe and analyze the texts in Sonnini's writings related to urban planning, residential and defensive architecture, and religious landmarks (such as the Zawiya and Mosque of Abu Mandour), as well as to analyze the details of economic and industrial activities in the city of Rosetta.
- Comparative and Archaeological Methodology: To compare Sonnini's recorded and described landmarks, towers, fortresses, and visual language (Pls. 1 and 2) with existing archaeological remains, historical evidence, and contemporary sources, in order to verify their accuracy and objectivity, and to correct any geographical or architectural ambiguities.

Previous Studies: This study complements a wide range of archaeological and historical studies that have addressed the city of Rosetta and Orientalist travel literature. The most important of these can be highlighted in the following points:

- Studies of Orientalist travel literature to Egypt: Such as the efforts of researchers studying European travelogues and tracing the French, English, and Russian perspectives on the social, political, and urban conditions of Egypt before the French campaign.
- Studies on "traveling spies" and the colonial and scientific motives behind exploratory journeys in the eighteenth century.
- Specialized historical and archaeological studies on the city of Rosetta: Books and encyclopedias concerned with the history of Islamic architecture and urban planning in Rosetta, which document historical houses, mosques, and military fortifications (such as research and encyclopedias related to the history of Rosetta and its architecture).

Specialized academic studies that addressed specific archaeological sites, such as:

- Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The Abu Mandour Zawiya in Kom al-Afrak in Rosetta - Egypt, analytical study in light of the depictions of travelers and archaeological evidence, International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 6, Issue 7, July 2022.
- These studies formed a solid foundation and reference material for analyzing paintings



and comparing them with the archaeological reality.

- What distinguishes this current study: Previous studies have focused either on the general narrative of Sonnini's travels or on the abstract archaeological description of Rosetta's landmarks, while this study is unique in presenting a "comprehensive comparative analytical reading" that combines Sonnini's descriptive texts and his illustrative drawings (plans and urban maps) to deconstruct the elements of urban and architectural planning of the city of Rosetta during a critical period in its modern history.

First: Egypt and Rosetta in the Writings of French Travelers in the 18th Century

1. The Evolution of French Interest in Egypt:

The accounts of European travelers to Egypt and the region continue to fascinate Arab researchers and scholars. Several works have been published on these accounts, some filled with admiration and fascination for these travelers, while others consider them Orientalist works brimming with hostility and incitement against us. These latter scholars viewed the travelers as a group of spies. It is certain that there is a colonial and Orientalist dimension to these accounts, as well as another dimension: humanitarianism. In the 14th and 15th centuries, there were European journeys to the countries of the region, but these were undertaken by individuals for personal reasons, not by groups or delegations. Most of these journeys were for the purpose of pilgrimage and visiting Christian holy sites in Palestine and Egypt, especially the areas visited or passed through by Jesus Christ.

Egypt was a destination for travelers and adventurers¹, as the first written accounts by Western travelers to Egypt date back to the thirteenth century, and were mostly by clergymen who accompanied the Crusades, including a Swiss priest from the city of Basel named Felix Fabri².

¹ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Archaeological study of Zawyat Mohamed Al-Bawab, south of Rosetta, In Light of documents and excavations, International Journal of Cultural Inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCIS), Vol. 2 Issue 4, September 2020, pp. 44-52.

² Mohamed, Hamed Abdullah (2022). Egypt in the writings of the traveler Felix Fabri. Damascus: Noor Hawran for Studies, Publishing and Heritage.

Fabri, Felix (1848). *Fratri Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae sanctae, Arabiae et Aegypti peregrinationem*, in Latin, 1. Meyers, Jean (2000). *Félix Fabri. Les errances de Frère Félix, pèlerin en Terre sainte, en Arabie*



In the 18th century, Egypt attracted the attention of France with its economic wealth. France saw it as the ideal alternative to compensate for its losses in European wars, particularly the Seven Years' War, which resulted in the loss of French possessions in the New World and India. Egypt became the focus of French interest and attention in this century, whereas in the preceding two centuries, France's focus had been on the Ottoman Empire and other Eastern empires, such as the Persian and Indian empires. Therefore, the interest in Egypt during this period stemmed from its status as a province of the vast and powerful Ottoman Empire. We can say that 18th-century travelers provided detailed descriptions of Egypt's political, economic, and social conditions, a far cry from the brief accounts of their predecessors. Many of them were the first to venture into Upper Egypt, recording their observations of its most important monuments and providing accurate drawings, even though they were unable to decipher the inscriptions and writings on these monuments.

As for the French campaign in Egypt¹, it was a military campaign launched by General Bonaparte against Egypt and the Levant (1798-1801 AD). Its aims included establishing a base in Egypt that would serve as the nucleus of a French empire in the East, severing the land route between Britain and its colonies in India, and exploiting Egypt's resources for his conquests in Europe. The campaign lasted three years, ultimately failing and resulting in the return of French forces to their homeland. What encouraged France in this endeavor was a letter sent by Thomas Coubert, a prominent Irish Jew, to his friend Bararas, a member of the Directory government, advising the French to colonize the East and create a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, which would serve as a French foothold within that territory².

Most French consuls serving in Egypt traveled to various Egyptian cities and recorded their observations. In the 18th century, we encounter the phenomenon of consuls

et en Égypte (1480–1483), I, Premier et deuxième traités. Montpellier, l'Université Paul-Valéry et du CERCAM, p. 438.

¹ Herold, Christopher (1986). Bonaparte in Egypt, translated by Fouad Andrawes, Cairo, pp. 11-12.

² Moreh, Shmuel (1995). Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French Occupation, 1798. Markus Wiener Publishing, pp. 27-33. Amini, Iradj (1999). Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian Relations Under the First Empire, Mage. p. 12. James, T. G. H. (2003). Napoleon and Egyptology: Britain's Debt to French Enterprise. Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century. London: British Museum Press, p. 151.



documenting these observations; for example, Father Coppin, who served as vice-consul in Damietta in the 17th century, also recorded his observations from Egypt, but he focused on highlighting the disputes between the consuls and between them and the French community.

Consuls also recorded their observations of Egypt, such as the notes of the French consul Maillet¹, published by the monk Le Masrier under the title "Description of Egypt" - more than sixty years before the publication of the monumental work of the French campaign, "Description of Egypt." Scholars of the campaign adopted the title "Description of Egypt" from Maillet's book, which shed light on the political, economic, and social conditions of Egypt. We can also learn about the state of Egypt between 1771 and 1786 from the letters of the French consul Maure to the French ambassador in Istanbul. In these letters, he highlighted the French attempts to reach an agreement with the Mamluks, establish trade treaties with them, and open the Red Sea route to French ships. These letters played a significant role in urging the government to occupy Egypt. We should also not overlook the letters of Consul Magallon to the French administration, urging them to expedite the campaign.

The writings of French consuls and travelers about Egypt from the beginning of the eighteenth century until the arrival of the French campaign included the French vision of Egypt, what they actually wrote about the observations and exaggerations that some of them recorded, and what actually caught their attention in Egypt, even if it was something that seemed familiar but was strange to them, which caused their astonishment and amazement, even the myths that they conveyed from the common people and other things. Finally, French travelers were influenced by Arab culture, and some of them mastered the Arabic language, notably D'Orville, Fourmont², and Savary³. They explored Islamic heritage and were influenced by the writings of al-Maqrizi, Ibn Daqmaq, and others. They praised Islamic civilization, and during their stay in Egypt, they had access to the Al-Azhar

¹ De Maillet, Benoît. 1750. *Telliamed: or, discourses Between an Indian philosopher and a French missionary, on the diminution of the sea, the formation of the Earth, the origin of men and animals, and other curious subjects, relating to natural history and philosophy.* Osborne, London.

² Fourmont, Louis (1755). *Description historique et géographique des plaines d'Héliopolis et de Memphis*, Paris. Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Fourmont, Étienne". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 10 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. p. 758.

³ Brèves, François Savary (1628). *Relation des voyages de Monsieur de Brèves*.



Library, which they lauded for its role in Egypt and the Islamic world. Fourmont's writings suffice to illustrate this point, stating that Egypt had filled the world with pride and glory through its civilization and monuments. Travels to Egypt in the 18th century differed. Knowledge about Egypt increased, books about it became more readily available, and European writings were characterized by depth and seriousness. It is noteworthy that travelers in that century did not limit themselves to Alexandria and Cairo, but rather explored other Egyptian cities, familiarizing themselves with their society. They ventured deep into Upper Egypt as far as Aswan and traversed the deserts. Their journeys were not fleeting as in the past; some stayed for years, and some even spent twenty consecutive years.

Not all visitors were from France. There was also the Russian monk Hippolyte Vyshinsky¹, who came to Egypt in 1708 after a pilgrimage to the holy sites in the Levant. In Egypt, he visited Rosetta and Damietta, staying for two weeks before heading to the Sinai Peninsula, where he visited Saint Catherine's Monastery. He wrote a book about Egypt in Russian, which was published by Moscow University in 1877. In the 18th century, there were also English travelers to Egypt, mostly clergymen. Some of them wrote studies and advocated for the invasion and occupation of Egypt, and their aims were often commercial and economic, not solely religious.

During this period, there emerged what were called "traveling spies"² who advocated for or paved the way for the invasion of Egypt, which ultimately occurred at the end of the 18th century with Napoleon Bonaparte. The writings of these travelers included studies that incorporated projects and ideas of a colonial nature, such as the idea of connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas with a canal to facilitate trade and passage in the region.

There are those who studied the conflict of political forces in Egypt and the weakness of its governors. The Mamluk princes were fighting, and the pashas were suffering from anxiety because of these conflicts. Some European travelers called for taking advantage of this weakness by attacking and occupying Egypt. This does not preclude the existence of travelers for purely scientific purposes, and religious men who also came for special

¹ Belyakov, Vladimir (2020). Egypt in Russian Eyes, from the 15th-18th centuries AD, translated by Mohamed Riyad, Cairo: The Egyptian-Russian Foundation for Culture and Science, pp. 63-70.

² Zehni, Ilham (1991). Egypt in the writings of French travelers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Center for Documentation and Contemporary History of Egypt, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization.



purposes, such as the French monk Claude Fourmont, who visited Egypt in 1747 AD. He came from a family that was interested in antiquities and orientalism¹, and he stayed in Egypt for four years². Then he returned to it again in 1754 AD. He mastered the Arabic language and studied the works of Al-Maqrizi, especially Al-Khitat and his book Al-Suluk, as well as the works of Ibn Daqmaq. He was greatly impressed by them and was keen to write about them and introduce them to the French and European reader, and he achieved what he wanted.

The French became increasingly interested in al-Maqrizi and translated his works. Among the scholars who visited Egypt was Father d'Oval, one of the few to visit al-Azhar University. He met many of its scholars, discussed various issues with them, and learned about the educational and teaching systems at the venerable institution. He also acquired numerous Arabic manuscripts. This trip was supported by the Vatican, and its primary objective was to enrich French libraries with Arabic manuscripts and works.

In the early 19th century, following the publication of "Description of Egypt" and the significant changes that occurred during Muhammad Ali's reign, the number of travelers increased due to greater openness, especially after the world became aware of Pharaonic civilization and Champollion deciphered the Rosetta stone and the ancient Egyptian language in 1822. Travelers flocked to explore this hidden world, particularly after Muhammad Ali's policies restored security, encouraging exploration of Egypt and its southern regions. Not all of those who came were from France; there were Russians, English, Swiss, and other Europeans³. They were mostly clergymen, and some of them had studies and calls for the necessity of invading and occupying Egypt. Their goals were mostly commercial and economic, not just religious.

Therefore, it is essential to consult the writings of European travelers who visited Egypt in the 18th century, particularly British and Russian travelers. The writings and drawings of French travelers are more accurate and comprehensive. I also observed that French travelers frequently corrected the errors of other travelers, such as in the location of cities.

¹ Raël (2005). Intelligent Design (Message from the Designers, U. S.: Nova Distribution, pp. 123-135-136.

² Fermon, Claude & De Voorde, Marcel Van (Editor) (2017). Nanomagnetism: Applications and Perspectives,

³ Rakha, Sa'eed (2019). The City of Rashid in the Eyes of Travelers and Orientalists (during the 16th-19th centuries AD), Cairo: Arab Nation Foundation for Publishing and Distribution, p. 15.



The French travelogues formed a continuous chain, each complementing the others, and I have not found such a large number of travelers in any other European country besides France. Furthermore, it is important to compare the writings of French travelers and consuls about Egypt, as some of them produced valuable scientific studies, such as Grange's study on the Nile's estuaries and branches, Volney's study of Egypt's topography, and Father Sicard's observations on the Wadi El Natrun region.

2. French Interest in Egypt and Scientific Expeditions Before the French Campaign

The 18th century witnessed a fundamental shift in the nature of French interest in Egypt. It moved from a fleeting or religious interest -as in previous centuries- to a strategic, scientific, and systematically expansionist one. This shift was linked to a confluence of political and economic factors that made Egypt the "ideal alternative" for France's colonial ambitions.

A. Geopolitical and Economic Motives: France's loss of its possessions in the New World and India following the Seven Years' War led to an imbalance in French trade and colonial interests. Consequently, the French Directory turned its attention eastward, and Egypt -with its unique location as a link between continents- became the focus of its interest. It was no longer viewed merely as a province of the Ottoman Empire, but as a base for a French empire in the East and a strategic means of blocking Britain and its colonies in India.

B. The Phenomenon of "Traveling Spies" and Consular Reports: The 18th century was marked by the phenomenon of French consuls documenting their observations of Egypt's political, social, and economic conditions. These consuls were no longer confined to diplomatic duties but had become "field observers". Consul Maillet, for example, presented in-depth studies shedding light on the structure of Egyptian society. These studies predated the publication of the famous "Description of Egypt" by more than sixty years, and even scholars of the French campaign quoted from his writings. The letters of consuls such as Murre and Magallon also played a crucial role in urging the French government to expedite the occupation of Egypt. By documenting the conflicts among the Mamluk princes and the weakness of the governors, their travels served as a preparatory tool for the invasion.

C. Purely Scientific and Orientalist Journeys: Despite the political dimensions, the 18th century also witnessed journeys of a serious scientific and humanitarian nature. A number of French travelers were influenced by Islamic culture, mastering the Arabic language and



becoming acquainted with its historical and architectural heritage, particularly the works of al-Maqrizi and Ibn Daqmaq. The name of the monk Claude Fourmont stands out here; he resided in Egypt for many years, immersing himself in the study of Arabic manuscripts. He praised Islamic civilization and Al-Azhar, presenting a picture of Egypt that filled the world with "pride and glory".

D. The Nature of Writing in the Eighteenth Century: The writings of travelers in this century were characterized by depth and methodology. Descriptions were no longer superficial as they had been by their predecessors. These travelers ventured deep into Upper Egypt as far as Aswan, traversed the deserts, and recorded detailed drawings of monuments whose inscriptions they could not yet decipher. They provided accurate morphological and geographical descriptions. These travelers formed a "multi-linked chain," each link complementing the others. The French were ahead of their English or Russian counterparts in terms of the volume and depth of their writing.

In short, the period before the French campaign was a phase of intensive "knowledge accumulation," as Egypt became a large laboratory for French travelers and scientists, who, with their data, drawings, and maps, laid the foundational rules that later enabled Bonaparte to implement his military and scientific project in Egypt.

3. The Nature of Writing in the Accounts of French Travelers and Their Motives (Scientific, Colonial, and Humanitarian).

The writings of European travelers -and the French in particular- who visited Egypt in the 18th century were not one-sided. Rather, their motives and aims varied and diverse. Scholars have been divided in their evaluation of these works; some have viewed them with admiration and fascination as pioneering scientific endeavors, while others have seen them as Orientalist works filled with hostility and incitement, bearing an espionage character. In reality, these writings were shaped by three main dimensions: the colonial dimension, the scientific dimension, and the cultural and humanitarian tendency.

A. Colonial Motives (Travelers as Spies and the Preparation for Invasion): The 18th century witnessed the emergence of a group known in historical literature as "travelers as spies," whose writings paved the way for the military invasion and occupation of Egypt. Their works contained projects and ideas of a strategic colonial nature; the idea of connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas with a canal to facilitate trade routes was proposed, a concept later reflected in French colonial planning. These travelers also studied



the political power struggles in Egypt, closely observing the conflicts between Mamluk princes and the suffering of Ottoman pashas. Their reports concluded that the political weakness and internal divisions should be exploited to conquer Egypt. This colonialist approach was reinforced by the advice of prominent figures such as Thomas Coubertin, who advised the French administration to colonize the East.

B. Purely Scientific Motives (Exploration and Documentation): Despite the strong colonial dimension, this does not negate the existence of travelers who came to Egypt for purely scientific and intellectual purposes. The writings of these travelers in the 18th century were characterized by depth and seriousness, surpassing the brief and superficial descriptions of their predecessors. These scholars did not confine themselves to coastal cities like Alexandria or the capital, Cairo, but rather traversed the regions of Egypt, familiarizing themselves with its society. They ventured deep into Upper Egypt as far as Aswan and crossed the deserts, providing detailed descriptions and accurate drawings of the most important monuments (despite their inability at the time to read the inscriptions). The traveler Charles Nicolas Sonnini is a prime example of this approach. He came on specific scientific research assignments commissioned by French institutions and scholars (such as Count Buffon), providing a precise and documented account of the natural, urban, and economic environment, as clearly demonstrated in his meticulous observation of the landmarks of Rosetta.

C. Humanitarian and Cultural Motives (Interaction with Islamic Heritage): This dimension represents the bright and balanced aspect of French travel literature. Many travelers demonstrated a genuine humanitarian inclination and a deep admiration for Arab and Islamic culture. Some, like D'Orville, Fourmont, and Savary, were keen to master the Arabic language, which allowed them direct access to sources of Islamic heritage. They were influenced by the writings of great historians such as al-Maqrizi and Ibn Duqmaq, and worked to translate and introduce them to European readers. Their extended stays in Egypt -which lasted for years in some cases- allowed them to visit major religious and scientific institutions, most notably Al-Azhar Mosque, where they learned about its educational systems and engaged in discussions with its scholars. These travelers praised Islamic civilization, with Fourmont even explicitly acknowledging in his writings that "Egypt has filled the world with pride and glory through its civilization and monuments." These three motives formed an integrated whole. The writings of French travelers served



as a mirror reflecting the ambitions of the French Empire on one hand, and the passion of scholars to discover the secrets of the East on the other, as well as a human and cultural appreciation that laid the foundations for serious scientific Orientalism open to the Arab and Islamic heritage.

4. Rosetta's Strategic and Commercial Position between Alexandria and Cairo from the Perspective of Travelers

The city of Rosetta held a unique and exceptional position in the writings of European travelers -particularly the French- in the 18th century, due to its strategic geographical location on the Rosetta branch of the Nile and its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. For these travelers, Rosetta was not merely a passing stop, but a vital link and a strategic hub for trade and movement between the capital, Cairo, and the city of Alexandria.

A. Geographical Location and Strategic Defensive Approaches: Travelers viewed Rosetta as the last remaining northwestern stronghold protecting the entrance to the Delta. In this context, the traveler Charles Nicolas Sonnini clearly documented the nature of the approaches and defensive positions surrounding the city, noting the towers and fortifications scattered around its periphery. These included small brick towers that served as guides for travelers and provided shelters and prayer rooms for Muslims, as well as the ancient fortresses located north of the city (such as Fort St. Louis and the fortifications opposite it on the riverbanks), which were designed to defend the river entrance and protect the waterways from any military incursion.

B. Rosetta, "Egypt's Paradise," and its Architectural Excellence: Travelers lauded the unique environmental and architectural characteristics of Rosetta, with some even calling it "Egypt's Paradise" due to its pleasant environment, clean and healthy air, and fragrant orchards that surrounded it. Sonnini and other travelers were particularly struck by the quality of Rosetta's residential architecture, noting that its houses were far superior to those in Cairo in terms of layout, riverside location, and unique architectural style that combined simplicity and beauty, offering a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of larger cities.

C. The Commercial Hub and Arteries of Economic Activity: Rosetta served as the commercial artery linking Cairo and Alexandria. Sonnini described it as "the warehouse of trade between Cairo and Alexandria," a bustling hub of activity and thriving trade exchange. In addition to its role as a port for transporting goods, the city was distinguished



by its own industrial and craft activities, such as:

- Textile manufacturing and dyeing: It was famous for producing spun cotton dyed red using dyes extracted from neighboring regions, combing linen for canvases, and dyeing silk for oriental garments.
- Rice cultivation and export: Travelers meticulously documented the stages of rice cultivation, harvesting, and drying in terraces in homes and public squares, as well as how the grains were separated from the chaff using ox-drawn sledges. They also documented the milling and bleaching processes using basins and salt to ensure preservation and export, making Rosetta an irreplaceable agricultural and economic center.

European travelers realized that controlling Rosetta, or understanding its urban and economic nature, was key to controlling Egypt's internal and external trade. This made it a focus of intelligence and scientific reports prior to the French campaign.

Second: The Historical Context and Expedition of Charles Nicolas Sonnini

1. Introduction to the Explorer Charles Nicolas Sonnini and the Context of His Journey to Egypt

Charles Nicolas Ségisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt was a French nobleman and naturalist. He was one of the most prominent French naturalists and explorers of the 18th century, in addition to belonging to the aristocracy. He received a high-level education, specializing in natural history and related sciences, which attracted the attention of leading scholars of his time and scientific and political institutions in France. He was influenced by the prevailing scientific climate of the time, which aimed to explore the Islamic and Eastern world not only for purely geographical purposes but also to gather economic and natural data that would serve France's strategic interests.

By order of King Louis XVI, he embarked on an expedition to Africa with Baron de Totte. However, Sonnini remained in Egypt and did not venture further, touring the city's antiquities. Sonnini came to Egypt between 1777 and 1780. In his book, he states: "I traveled to Egypt on commission from Count Buffon to conduct several studies to present to Minister Bertin." He published his account of his journey to Egypt in three volumes, accompanied by drawings of Egypt, its monuments, and its agricultural wealth. Although the book describes Egypt to the scholars of the French expedition that sank there, Sonnini's



account is considered one of the most important reference works on Egypt in the 18th century. His travelogue was published approximately twenty years later, in 1799¹.

Sonnini's journey to Egypt came at a time marked by escalating French interest in Egyptian and Eastern affairs; particularly after France lost significant portions of its New World and Indian colonies in the Seven Years' War. This led France to view Egypt as an ideal strategic alternative to compensate for its economic and commercial losses, and as a potential center of its influence in the East.

In this context, Sonnini embarked on his journey to Egypt on a direct official commission. He stated in his writings: "I traveled to Egypt on the orders of Count Buffon to conduct several studies to present to Minister Bertin." This commission from the renowned naturalist Count de Buffon and Minister Bertin reflects the nature of the trip, which combined academic and scientific objectives with commercial intelligence. Sonnini was tasked with exploring natural resources, plants, and animals, as well as observing the country's economic and urban conditions.

2. The Journey and His Writings

A. Scope of the Journey: Sonnini began his initial journey to Africa with Baron de Totte, but his itinerary settled in Egypt, where he spent a period between 1777 and 1780. During this time, he explored various regions of Egypt, not only the coastal cities but also visiting many major Egyptian cities, most notably Rosetta (Rosetta), recording detailed and comprehensive observations of its urban landscape and economy.

B. Publication and Scholarly Impact: Although Sonnini undertook his journey in the late 1770s, his famous book about his travels was not published until nearly two decades later, specifically in 1799, in three large volumes under the title: "A Journey to Upper and Lower Egypt," accompanied by numerous paintings and illustrations of monuments, riches, and landscapes. The timing of the book's publication coincided with the French campaign led by Napoleon Bonaparte against Egypt (1798-1801 AD), which made his writings a valuable visual and textual reference for the campaign's scholars and planners, and a primary source for documenting the urban condition of the city of Rosetta before the beginning of the nineteenth century.

¹ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The Abu Mandour Zawiya in Kom al-Afrah in Rosetta - Egypt, analytical study in light of the depictions of travelers and archaeological evidence, International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 6, Issue 7, July 2022, p. 11.



3. Sonnini's Visit to Rosetta

In his writings about Rosetta, Sonnini said: “This city, located in the far northwest of the country, overlooking a sea of warm waters, makes one relish the warmth. There is a small brick tower that warns you of the need to leave the country; and there are other small towers that you see to the northwest, which serve as a guide to entering a shifting plain. Most importantly, the city of Rosetta, surrounded by accumulated sand from west to west, is indistinguishable until you enter the first street. Before you arrive, you will notice eleven small towers, some larger than others, but inside they form shelters for travelers and places of prayer for Muslims.”

It is likely that this small brick tower is what Danville calls Casa Rosa in his map of Egypt. Rosetta is a pleasant, densely populated city, simple in construction but beautiful. It is modern, and if it does not have buildings of imposing architecture, it does not display anything at all to amaze. The Nile floods its walls on the eastern side; It transforms into a rushing river due to the water it supplies as it flows into canals and irrigation ditches, and is held back by the barrier that separates it from the swamp at its point of discharge. It does not possess the dangerous speed of great rivers, but rather carries with it the tranquility enjoyed by those who have crossed that part of Africa¹.

I am well aware that the ancients derived the Delta's base from the Canopic branch of the Nile; but since this Canopic branch was buried, and the land between it and Rosetta was uninhabited, the Delta, associated with the idea of fertility, was no longer derived from the Poleptine branch, the Rosetta branch. The beauty of the landscape is such that here, cities play with vibrancy in their tall, pointed towers; there, lakes and canals expand, an inexhaustible source of fertility; everywhere there are different forms of vegetation, perpetual spring, and ever-renewing, infinitely diverse fertility. Rosetta is, in a way, the most tranquil place in Egypt. Nothing is known there of those unsettling phenomena that disturb the peace of other cities².

Under this delightful heat, against a backdrop of refreshing and wonderfully green landscapes, Rosetta was a perfect destination. We arrived there on the 22nd of the month, at

¹ Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, Vol.1. London, printed for John stockdale, Piccadilly, pp. 207-208. Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Voyage dans la Haut et basse Egypt*, London: John Stockale Piccadilly.

² Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. pp. 211-212.



four in the afternoon, and were not delayed in the slightest. I went to the home of the French Vice-Consul, Monsieur de Troy, whose refined taste in literature gave him a certain charm; I accepted his offer of accommodation. This town lies close to the Nile and, like all the other villages of Rosetta, is built of brick. The locals call it Rosetta, the Arabic name it has borne since the time of the geographer Al-Idrisi in 1153 AD, which the Europeans transformed into Rosette. Not Rosette, as it is commonly written now. I agree that Rosette is more difficult to pronounce, and it evokes a more pleasant and delightful image, reminiscent of a fragrant perfume.

Some have mistakenly believed this site to be Canopus, but this is incorrect. The Canopic branch is a separate branch of the Rosetta branch, and the ruins of Canopus are located in Abu Qir. No traces of ancient ruins can be found in Rosetta itself. However, it is certainly not far from the site of the ancient city of Boulbitine, mentioned by Strabo and Ptolemy, which lay on the banks of the Nile, near the mouth of the Boulbitine branch. It is, without exaggeration, the most delightful city in Egypt, unparalleled anywhere else. Its houses are far superior to those of Cairo, its riverside location, its unique architectural style, and the lush gardens that surround it are all remarkable. Yet, when it comes to proper names, they are derived from the Arabic name, "Rosetta." Its commanding position in the Delta, its clear view of the rich agriculture, the fragrant orchards that surround it, and the fresh, clean air it breathes have rightfully earned it the title "Paradise of Egypt." Rosetta is considered one of the most beautiful cities due to the large number of hotels offering comfortable accommodation for travelers. Who wouldn't have imagined that no precautions were required for a traveler to be comfortable upon arrival in Rosetta, and that all they had to do was check into the first guesthouse that caught their eye? But they would have been sorely disappointed, because there is absolutely nothing of the sort in the city¹.

On the 24th of October, I went to an old, ruined fort located some distance north of Rosetta. It, like another fort on the opposite bank of the Nile, was designed to defend the river's entrance. At present, both forts are only a league from the river. The fort I am referring to was built in the style of the old one. This fort, attributed to St. Louis during the Crusades, was almost entirely destroyed; cannon pieces had been added, but it was no longer fit for service at all. Much older relics were used in its construction; the stones, decorated with hieroglyphs, were to be filled in. I drew some of these ancient stones and

¹ Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt. pp. 219-220.



sent them to Minister Bertin, along with several others whose fate I know no more¹.

We mounted the mules and felt the sand dunes and the barren, shifting wall that surrounds Rosetta. To the west, we entered a plain dotted with towers or columns, and then we reached Lake Al-Ma'adiyya. After leaving Al-Ma'adiyya, we retraced our steps, where a dam or embankment had been built along its length to hold back the water. The sandy ground was at the level of the road, and on this dam stood towers positioned from center to center².

The next day, I traveled about half a league south of Rosetta to see a tower called the Tower of Canopus, named after the city of Rosetta, which once occupied the site of ancient Canopus. This tower was built in modern times on a small hill, forming the western bank of the Nile. It is square, half-ruined, and what remains is a harbinger of impending ruin. At its base, the inhabitants of this region carved out a road to Alexandria. From the top of the tower, the view stretches in all directions, its boundaries defined only by nature. The vast plains transform into a verdant carpet, unparalleled anywhere else, and we can see a tableau like this, the magnificent patterns of nature vividly displayed before our eyes.

At the foot of the tower, on the edge of the Nile, stands a mosque dedicated to a saint named Abu Mandour, whose name means "Father of Sight." If he is indeed Abu al-Nur, then he is a terror to evildoers, for without him they would have long ago controlled Rosetta's life. The Muslims' faith is based on the belief that Abu Mandour is the enemy of all forms of wickedness, and women who are influenced by him come to supplicate to him and perform a nine-day ritual under his shadow. It is very rare for them not to be granted this ritual. Devotion to this powerful saint is commonplace and no ship docks at his designated place without the sailors offering sacrifices to the sheikh, so that they may attract the weak and gain his favor.

A photograph of the ground at the foot of Canopus Tower was taken ten or twelve years before I arrived in Rosetta. A Turk who lived there had excavated the ground around this tower and found beautiful granite columns. Some of these columns lay on the banks of the Nile, opposite the French House, while others had been abandoned for various purposes. Judging by their appearance, they belonged to the ancient city of Boulbitine, whose final location is marked by Canopus Tower. Opposite the Abu Mandour Mosque, on the banks

¹ Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. pp. 304-305.

² Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. pp. 344-345.



of the Nile, there are two or three houses. It is called al-Ma'adiyya because it is located in the heart of the typical Delta region¹.

On the west bank of the river, a short distance from the aforementioned mosque lies a large village called Al-Jadida, and the surrounding area is rich in vineyards. This village supplies Rosetta and Alexandria with their grapes. Vine leaves are also an important commodity in Egypt, frequently used by young people to wrap large balls of minced meat, a common dish.

Regarding trade in the city, Sonnini noted that Rosetta served as a hub for commerce between Cairo and Alexandria, bustling with life, activity, and ease of trade. It also had its own specialized trade sectors, such as spun and red-dyed cotton, sourced from neighboring regions; combed linen for linen cloth; dyed silk for oriental garments; and others.

Concerning rice cultivation and export, he wrote: "When I arrived at the end of October, they were busy drying this precious grain, a healthy and widely consumed food. It was spread out on terraces in houses and in public squares." Rice is sown in Lower Egypt from March to May. During the Nile's flood season, the fields are covered with water. To retain the water for as long as possible, small dams are built around each field, each with a high ridge that prevents the water from overflowing. For the plant to thrive, its roots must be constantly submerged. Rice takes about six months to mature and is usually harvested in mid-November.

To separate the grain from the chaff, Sonnini described a process that took place in large, clean areas. The rice was laid out in thick layers, and then a type of cart, made of two pieces of wood—almost like the sledges used to carry loads on the pavements of our cities—and oxen-drawn machines moved slowly in a circular motion over the rice pile, separating the grain from the chaff. The grain is then spread out to dry. Several men walk side by side, each taking a step forward into a layer of grain, so that in a few moments the entire mass is moved, exposing the grain underneath, the dried rice is then taken to the mill.

This mill consists of a wheel turned by oxen, which moves several cylinders. At the end, there is an iron cylinder near the foot, which grinds the grain below. A man works to bring the rice from under the cylinders, and he must be careful of any deviations, as they risk breaking his hand if he cannot pull it out quickly. After this process, the rice is taken from

¹ Sonnini, Charles Nicolas (1799). *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*. pp. 362:364.



the mill and sifted in the open air. This is done simply by filling a small sieve with as much grain as the man can hold. This cleaned rice is then ground a second time to whiten it. It is then thrown into basins with salt, which contributes significantly to whitening and, primarily, to preserving it. After this, it is prepared and sold. Regarding urban planning elements and architectural features, he noted a small brick tower warning of the need to leave the country; other small towers, located to the northwest, served as guides to a shifting plain. He also mentioned eleven small towers, some larger than others, which housed shelters for travelers and places of prayer for Muslims. It is likely that this small brick tower is the one Danville calls Casa Rosa in his map of Egypt.

North of Rosetta, there is a ruined ancient fortress, and another on the opposite bank of the Nile. The fortress I am referring to, generally built in the style of the older one, utilized much older materials; the stones are decorated with hieroglyphs.

South of Rosetta, there is a tower called the Canopic Tower, named after the city of Rosetta, which once occupied the site of ancient Canopus. This tower was built in modern times on a small hill, forming the western bank of the Nile. It is square in shape. Some mistakenly believed this site to be Canopus, but this is incorrect. The Canopic branch is a separate branch of the Rosetta branch, and the ruins of Canopus are located in Abu Qir. At the foot of the tower, on the edge of the Nile, stands a mosque dedicated to a saint named Abu Mandour, whose name symbolizes "the father of vision." He also noted that the houses are far superior to those in Cairo, situated on the riverbank, and boast unique architectural styles. Opposite the Abu Mandour Mosque, on the banks of the Nile, are two or three houses.

It was mentioned that Rosetta was a trading hub between Cairo and Alexandria, and it also had its own specialized trade, such as spun and red-dyed cotton, which was sourced from neighboring regions, as well as linen, silk dyes for oriental clothing, and other goods.

The text also described the process of separating rice grains from chaff and whitening them. It explained that rice was spread out in wide, clean areas, laid out in thick layers. A type of cart, pulled by oxen and made of two pieces of wood, moved slowly in a circular motion over the rice pile, separating the grains from the chaff. The grains were then spread out to dry in the open air before being taken to the mill. The mill consisted of a wheel turned by oxen, which in turn moved several cylinders. At the bottom, there was an iron cylinder, close to the foot, which ground the rice. The rice was then taken from the mill and



sifted in the open air. This cleaned rice was ground a second time to whiten it by throwing it into basins with salt, which significantly contributed to the whitening process and, more importantly, to preserve it. After this, it was prepared and sold.

Third: Rosetta from Sonnini's Perspective (An Analytical Study)

1. Sonnini's Geographical and Urban Description of Rosetta and its Surroundings

The geographical location of Rosetta was a central focus of the study by the traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini. He provided a detailed description of its topographical features and strategic location, considering it a city situated in the far northwest of the country, enjoying a temperate climate on the banks of the Nile.

A. Topographical Features and Strategic Location: Rosetta is distinguished by its location, with the Nile encircling its eastern walls. In this part, the river flows "calmly," unlike the rapid currents of great rivers, lending the city a sense of tranquility. Sonnini emphasized that Rosetta is not merely a coastal city, but rather the "gateway to the Delta," controlling vast expanses of fertile land. It is surrounded by sand on its western side, making it a city that is only clearly discernible upon approaching its first streets, thus giving it a natural protective character.

B. Defensive Approaches and Fortification System: Sonnini, during his travels, observed a functional defensive and architectural system comprised of several elements:

- **Defensive Towers (Observation Towers):** The traveler noted the existence of a series of brick defensive towers, numbering around eleven in size, spread out in a northwesterly direction. One of these is likely what is known as 'Casa Rosa' in Danville's geography. These towers served dual functions; in addition to their military and guidance role, acting as guides for travelers and alerting them at the entrances and exits of the country, they also provided shelters for travelers and places of prayer for Muslims, thus embodying a unique integration of security needs with humanitarian and religious functions.
- **Northern Forts:** On October 24th, Sonnini visited an ancient fort located north of Rosetta and noted the existence of another fort on the opposite bank of the Nile. He described these forts as being designed "to defend the river entrance." He noted an important archaeological observation: these fortresses were not built solely from modern materials, but also incorporated much older artifacts, including stones decorated



with hieroglyphic inscriptions. This demonstrates the continued use of ancient architectural elements in Islamic fortifications.

- **Canopic Tower (Abu Mandour):** Located south of Rosetta, this tower was built in modern times on a small hill (Kom al-Afrah) to form the western bank of the Nile. Sonnini described it as a square tower, half of which had collapsed at the time. It served as a prominent observation point, offering a panoramic view in all directions without natural boundaries, making it an integral part of the city's defense and surveillance system.

C. The Nature of the Borders and Shifting Plains: Sonnini drew attention to the unique geographical features of Rosetta's borders, particularly to the west, consisting of shifting plains and sand dunes. These natural formations, along with the dams and canals built to divert water, helped create a natural defensive barrier and protect the city. Carefully positioned towers, "center to center," stood along the canals and dams to ensure security and navigation.

Through this description, Sonnini emerges as a researcher who went beyond mere observation, seeking to understand the "architecture of defense" employed by the city in the 18th century. Would you like to move on to the section on "Residential and Environmental Characteristics of Rosetta"?

2. Residential and Environmental Characteristics of Rosetta According to Sonnini Compared to Cairo

The traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini offered a critical reading and detailed comparison of the architecture in Rosetta. He did not merely describe the structures but also connected the architecture to the surrounding environment, noting Rosetta's architectural and environmental superiority over Cairo in the eyes of European travelers at the time.

A. The Quality and Distinction of Residential Architecture: Sonnini praised the quality of residential architecture in Rosetta, considering it "far superior to the houses of Cairo." He based this preference on its unique layout, characterized by a simple and beautiful architectural style, far removed from the complexities and congestion of large cities. Furthermore, its strategic location directly on the banks of the Nile provided it with enchanting views and excellent natural ventilation, reflecting a sophisticated architectural and environmental understanding in utilizing the waterfront to improve the quality of housing and daily life.



B. Environment and Climate: Rosetta, "Egypt's Paradise": Sonnini linked the architectural style to the surrounding environmental characteristics, confirming Rosetta's deserving of the title "Egypt's Paradise." It was distinguished by its healthy environment, where the fresh air was constantly renewed by the Nile breezes and green spaces and by a unique architectural harmony with the fragrant orchards surrounding it on all sides. This gave the residential architecture a tranquil, rural character, far removed from the hustle and bustle of large cities and the disturbances that disrupt their peace.

C. Materials and Construction Techniques: Sonnini explained that Rosetta was built mostly of brick, which was natural given the building materials available in the region. Despite the simplicity of the materials, the engineering skill in using them to build houses, fortresses, and zawiyas (such as the Abu Mandour Zawiya) produced an architecture with a distinctive character that combined functional solidity with visual aesthetics.

D. Functional Architecture (The Zawiya of Abu Mandour as a Model): In his analysis of architecture, Sonnini presented a detailed analytical description of functional architecture, using the Zawiya of Abu Mandour as a model. This model highlights the characteristics of religious buildings and their annexes, evident in their distinctive architectural elements: the onion-shaped dome with ribs, the three-tiered minaret, and the use of muqarnas (stalactite-like decorative elements). The two-story annex served as a sitting area on the first floor, which was furnished with wooden benches, while the second floor was used for living quarters. This illustrates the diverse uses and functions of Rosetta's architecture, which integrated worship, residence, and public service.

Sonnini considered Rosetta a model of a city that successfully created an "ideal residential environment," balancing aesthetic qualities, environmental comfort, and economic functionality, this, in his view, made it superior to Cairo, which suffered from urban density and overlapping structures, making his experience there less smooth than his time in Rosetta.

3. Economic Life and Commercial and Industrial Activities in Rosetta

In the 18th century, Rosetta was not merely a cultural hub or a defensive center, but a vibrant economic center and an indispensable commercial hub on Egypt's economic map. The traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini documented this tireless activity, recording the complementary roles the city played in trade between Cairo and Alexandria and in manufacturing industries.



A. Rosetta: "The Warehouse of Trade" and Geographical Intermediary: Sonnini described Rosetta as the "warehouse of trade" linking Cairo and Alexandria, representing a vital link that infused life and movement into the arteries of Egyptian trade. Its strategic location as a gateway to the Nile and the Mediterranean Sea helped transform it into a center for the redistribution of goods and products, giving it a major competitive advantage in river and sea transport.

B. Textile Industry and Trade (Linen, Cotton, and Silk): Sonnini noted Rosetta's prominence in the textile industry and trade as a significant economic pillar. This included the combing of linen to produce linen tapestries, and the city's excellence in producing spun cotton dyed red from neighboring regions to meet the high demand for oriental clothing. Furthermore, silk dyeing was a key activity in the production of luxury garments, reflecting a well-developed network of skilled artisans and thriving economic activity within Rosetta society.

C. The Rice Economy: Cultivation and Processing: Sonnini's documentation of the rice economy, from cultivation to processing, is among the most detailed in travel literature. He provides a comprehensive technical description, encompassing the agricultural cycle, which extends from March to November and relies on the Nile's flooding and water-retaining dams to ensure the roots remain submerged throughout the growing season. He describes the innovative methods used to separate the grain from the chaff using wooden sledges pulled by oxen, followed by open-air cleaning. He then details the mechanized processing using ox-powered mills that turned grinding wheels, followed by a final bleaching process using salt. This salt played a dual role in improving the rice's appearance and preserving it from spoilage, making it ready for export and storage.

D. The Social Dimension of Economic Life: Sonnini did not overlook the social dimension of economic activity. He connected industry to details of daily life, such as the use of "vine leaves" in cooking. These leaves were an important material, frequently used by young people to wrap minced meatballs, demonstrating the integration of the agricultural and food sectors in the city and their impact on the lifestyle.

Sonnini has shown that the economic strength of Rosetta stemmed not only from its location, but also from the "value-added chain" established by its inhabitants; starting with sophisticated agriculture, passing through manufacturing industries (milling and bleaching), and reaching foreign trade, which made Rosetta a model of a developed local



economy in the Ottoman era.

Fourth: Architectural and Religious Monuments and Landmarks in Rosetta as Described by Sonnini

1. Northern Defensive Fortresses and Reused Pharaonic Antiquities

The defensive system in Rosetta, particularly its northern fortresses, was a vital element in securing the river entrances and controlling navigation. The traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini provided a detailed description of these fortifications in his memoirs, revealing layers of historical significance embedded in their structure.

A. Location and Defensive Function: Sonnini noted the existence of a ruined ancient fortress located north of Rosetta, with another fortress opposite it on the east bank of the Nile. He explained that the strategic purpose of these fortresses was to "defend the river entrance," as they formed an advanced security gateway for the city. By the time of Sonnini's visit in the late 18th century, both fortresses were located approximately one league from the river mouth, indicating the topographical changes that had occurred along the coastline over time.

B. The Fort (Style and Deterioration): Sonnini described the northern fort as "almost completely ruined," reflecting its declining military role during that period. Although he noted that "pieces of cannons" had been added in an attempt to restore its effectiveness, they were no longer of any significant military use.

C. The Phenomenon of Reuse of Antiquities (Spolia): The phenomenon of reuse of antiquities was one of Sonnini's most prominent archaeological observations regarding the construction of Fort Saint Louis. He emphasized that its construction relied not only on contemporary materials but also incorporated much older stones into its walls, stones whose hieroglyphic inscriptions were embedded within the structure. He not only observed this but also documented it by drawing these ancient stones and sending them to Minister Bertin in France, along with other artifacts. This represents an early documentation of the transfer and documentation of Egyptian antiquities prior to the official French campaign.

D. Historical and Architectural Significance: This description reflects a unique architectural phenomenon in the history of Islamic architecture in Rosetta: the "reuse of architectural elements" (spolia) from ancient archaeological sites (such as Pharaonic or Greco-Roman ruins) in the construction of military fortifications and mosques. This



practice was not merely an economical solution to conserve building materials, but also a means of imbuing the new structures with an air of grandeur and solidity, taking advantage of the size and quality of the ancient stones.

Sonnini provided valuable visual and historical testimony confirming that Rosetta's forts served as historical "memory repositories." On the one hand, they played their role in protecting the river, and on the other, their walls preserved inscriptions and stones from bygone eras, making them a focal point linking ancient Egyptian history with Ottoman-era defensive fortifications.

2. Kom El-Afrah and Tell Abu Mandour (Origins and History)

Kom El-Afrah and Tell Abu Mandour areas are among the most important archaeological and topographical sites in Rosetta. These are not merely sand dunes; they are historical landmarks that encapsulate layers of human settlement, and were documented by the traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini as one of the city's most prominent features.

A. Location and Historical Origins: Tell Abu Mandour is situated above Kom al-Afrah, a high sand dune characterized by its gradual slope towards the north and east, overlooking the Nile River. Historically, this site was associated with the ancient city of Polybataeus (Metelis), mentioned by ancient historians such as Strabo and Ptolemy as an important city located on the banks of the Nile near the mouth of the Boulbitine branch (the Rosetta branch). Sonnini explained that this hill formed the western face of the Nile and served as a strategic location for controlling maritime traffic.

B. The Archaeological Debate: The "Tower of Canopus" and its Relationship to the Ancient City: In his memoirs, Sonnini raised a historical debate regarding the site's identity. He noted the belief held by some that this was the site of ancient Canopus, a notion he clearly refuted, asserting that the true ruins of Canopus were located in Abu Qir. Instead, he suggested that this mound was the final resting place of the ancient city of Boulbitine.

Sonnini based his hypothesis on excavations carried out by local residents 10 to 12 years prior to his arrival. These excavations unearthed beautiful granite columns lying on the banks of the Nile. Based on their style and appearance, these columns dated back to the Greco-Roman period, thus supporting the hypothesis of an ancient city existing beneath this mound.

C. The Functional Development of the Site (From Ancient Origins to the Modern



Era): The site of Kom El-Afrah underwent functional transformations over time. It represented a cultural settlement dating back to ancient times, known as the city of Bolbetine. In the modern era, a watchtower and defensive structure called the 'Canopic Tower' was built atop the hill. Later, during the Islamic era, it transformed into an important religious and architectural center with the construction of the 'Mosque and Zawiya of Abu Mandour' at its base. This imbued the site with profound sanctity and linked it to the popular belief in the saint Abu Mandour as the city's protector, which effectively contributed to the site's preservation and protection across generations.

D. Topographical Significance: Tell Abu Mandour constitutes an exceptional viewpoint. Sonnini described it as offering a panoramic vista, limited only by the boundaries of nature itself. This natural elevation not only provided military protection but also created a captivating panorama of the Nile, the island, and the surrounding green plains, making it a "natural tableau" that attracted travelers and researchers to document it through drawings and paintings.

Kom El-Afrah and Tell Abu Mandour areas derive their value from being an "open-air chronological record." They combine the archaeological remains of ancient cities (Bulbatin), defensive fortifications (Canopus Tower), and religious landmarks (Abu Mandour Mosque), making the site fertile ground for comparative analytical studies that connect travelers' accounts with the existing archaeological reality.

3. Zawiya and Mosque of Abu Mandour: A Descriptive and Analytical Study of Architecture and Religious Elements

Sonnini documented the Zawiya and Mosque of Abu Mandour, meticulously detailing its architectural features and providing archaeological analysis. The Zawiya and Mosque of Abu Mandour represent a unique model of Islamic architecture in Rosetta, where religious function is seamlessly integrated with defensive fortification and architectural beauty. Charles Nicholas Sonnini's detailed description (supported by pls. 1 and 2) allows us to interpret the features of this monument from an analytical perspective.

A. Location and Architectural Design: The Abu Mandour Zawiya stands on a stone embankment overlooking the Nile, granting it visual and strategic prominence. It comprises two main sections, including a mosque whose entrance is located on the eastern side, centered on a massive triple arch. Its facade is characterized by right-angled recesses and pointed arched entrances and windows. A stepped minaret rises, consisting of a square



base followed by an octagonal story culminating in the muezzin's chamber and surrounded by a wooden railing. Above this is a cylindrical story, topped by an onion-shaped dome with ribs and a crescent, reflecting the ingenuity of Ottoman architecture. An annex to the north consists of two stories. The first story serves as a courtyard with wooden benches for travelers to rest, while the second story was used for living quarters via an external staircase. This highlights the mosque's social function as a center for both hospitality and worship.

B. Technical and Structural Characteristics: The technical and structural characteristics of the architectural complex are evident in the reliance on columns consisting of a base, shaft, and capital to define open spaces, such as courtyards overlooking the Nile, connecting the interior spaces with the breathtaking landscape. Furthermore, the extensive use of pointed arched windows in both the mosque and the annex is a hallmark of Rosetta architecture, contributing to efficient ventilation and natural lighting, well-suited to the coastal climate.

C. Spiritual Dimensions and Popular Belief: The shrine of Abu Mandour represented a spiritual center of gravity in the popular consciousness, earning him the title "Abu al-Nazar" (Father of Sight) or "Abu al-Nur" (Father of Light) as the city's protector against dangers. This is reflected in Sonnini's observations of social customs associated with the mosque, such as sailors, travelers, and women offering sacrifices and vows and devoting themselves to worship under his shade to receive blessings and protection. This made the place a vital point of interaction among different social classes.

D. Comparative Analysis (Between Sonnini's Text and the Archaeological Evidence): The comparative analysis between Sonnini's text and the archaeological data contained in his drawings on plates 1 and 2 revealed that the mosque represented an integrated architectural complex. It combined the spiritual aspect, embodied by the mosque and minaret, with the service aspect, evident in the annex and seating areas furnished with benches. Furthermore, it possessed a defensive aspect, represented by its location overlooking the Nile, which served as a vantage point for observation and protection.

In Sonnini's writings, the Zawiya and Mosque of Abu Mandour represent "living architecture," which cannot be understood in isolation from its social and spiritual function. His precise descriptions of the muqarnas, pointed arches, and annex reflect an early European appreciation for this style and confirm that the site was central to Rosetta's

identity - religiously, socially, and architecturally.



pl. 1. Tell Abu Mandour and the old mosque 1777 (Sonnini in 1799 AD)



pl. 1a) Tell Abu Mandour and the Old Mosque 1777 (Sonnini in 1799 AD)

In this painting, which was drawn from the east bank of the Nile, Kom al-Afrāh appears as a high sandy hill sloping towards the north and east. The painting is dominated by the Zawiya of Abu Mandour, which stands on a stone platform overlooking the water directly. The Zawiya consists of a mosque topped by a dome and a minaret. The entrance is located in the east and is centered on a stone crowned with a triple (Medani) arch. Above the door is a window. The facade to the right of the entrance is occupied by windows with pointed arches. The minaret consists of a square base topped by an octagonal story ending with muqarnas that support the muezzin's chamber, which is surrounded by a wooden railing. Above this is the third cylindrical story, which is topped by the onion-shaped dome with ribs and above it is the crescent. The second section of the corner is the annex on the northern side, consisting of two floors. The second floor features two rooms supported by columns, representing the first floor. The northern room has three windows, while the southern room has four windows in the eastern wall and two in the southern wall. Each

column consists of a base, shaft, and capital. Three columns are visible towards the east, defining a courtyard that represents the first floor, which was used for seating and furnished with wooden benches. The second floor served as the living quarters, accessed by a staircase to the west.



pl. 2. General View from the Top of Abu Mandour Hill, 1777 (Sonnini, 1799)

General View from the Top of Abu Mandour Hill (pl. 2), this painting was drawn from the top of Kom al-Afrah. The hill slopes down towards the zawiya (Sufi lodge) to the east. The Nile River and the island are also located to the east. Zawiya Abu Mandour overlooks the Nile and consists of two sections. The first is the mosque to the south, showing the minaret and dome. The minaret has three stories: the first is square, the second is octagonal, and the top is adorned with muqarnas (stalactite-like decorative elements) supporting the muezzin's platform. The dome is onion-shaped with ribs and is topped by a crescent. The western wall of the mosque has three arched windows. The second section shows a two-story house, with the rooms on the second floor also having arched windows. As for the second painting, Sonnini drew it from above Kom al-Afrah, showing the hill sloping towards the corner in the east. As for the corner of Abu Mandour, it overlooks the Nile and consists of two parts. The first is the mosque in the south, and the minaret and the dome appear. The minaret has three floors, the first is square and the second is octagonal, ending at the top with muqarnas that carry the muezzin's chamber. The dome is onion-shaped and ribbed, and the crescent is above it. The western wall of the mosque has three arched windows. As for the second part, a two-story house appears, and the rooms of the second floor also have arched windows.

Fifth: An Analytical Study of Urban Planning and Urban Features



Charles Nicholas Sonnini noted several elements of urban planning and urban features, as follows:

He pointed out that there is a small brick tower warning you of the need to leave the country; and there are other small towers to the northwest, serving as guides to a shifting plain. Before you reach it, you will notice eleven small towers, some larger than others, which inside form shelters for travelers and places of prayer for Muslims. It is likely that this small brick tower is what Danville calls Casa Rosa in his plan of Egypt.

He noted that the houses are much better than those of Cairo, located on the riverbank, and that their buildings have a unique architectural style.

He visited an old, ruined fortress located far away, north of Rosetta, as well as another fortress on the opposite bank of the Nile.

To the south of Rosetta is a tower called the Canopic Tower (Abu Mandour Tower), named after the city of Rosetta, which occupied the site of the ancient Canopus. At the foot of the tower, on the edge of the Nile, stands a mosque dedicated to a saint named Abu Mandour, symbolizing the Father of Light. A painting of the floor at the foot of the Canopic Tower was also captured. Opposite the Abu Mandour Mosque, on the banks of the Nile, are two or three houses.

A painting of Abu Mandour Hill and the old mosque (pl. 1) and a general view from the top of Abu Mandour Hill (pl. 2) are also included.

Through an analytical study of the writings of the traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini, the elements of urban planning and architectural features of Rosetta can be identified. He stated:

- There is a small brick tower that warns you of the need to leave the country.
- There are other small towers that you will see to the northwest, serving as a guide to entering a shifting plain. Before you arrive, you will notice eleven small towers, some larger than others, but inside they form shelters for travelers and places of prayer for Muslims.
- This small brick tower is probably the one that Danville calls Casa Rosa in his map of Egypt.
- Its houses are much better than those of Cairo, and its location on the riverbank and its buildings have a unique architectural style.
- On the 24th of October, I went to a ruined old fortress located far away, north of Rosetta.



It, like another fortress on the opposite side of the Nile, was designed to defend the river entrance. Nowadays, both the fortress and the fort are only a league from the river. The fortress I am referring to was built in the style of the old one.

- This monastery, attributed to Saint Louis, was almost completely destroyed during the Crusades. Parts of cannons were added to it, but it was no longer fit for service at all. Much older remains were used in its construction; the stones there were intended to be filled with hieroglyphic-inscribed stones.
- South of Rosetta, there is a tower called the Tower of Canopus, named after the city of Rosetta, which occupied the site of the ancient Canopus. This tower was built on a small hill, part of a larger hill that forms the western bank of the Nile in this section. It is square, half of it has collapsed, and what remains is a sign of impending ruin. At the bottom, the inhabitants of this area had carved an opening into a portico, which, according to them, led to Alexandria. From the top of the tower, the view extends in all directions, with no limits other than those set by nature.
- At the foot of the tower, on the edge of the Nile, is a mosque dedicated to a saint named Abu Mandour, nicknamed "Abu al-Nazar" (Father of Sight). A painting of the floor at the foot of the Tower of Canopus was captured.
- Ten or twelve years before his arrival in Rosetta, a Turk who lived there excavated the ground around this tower. Beautiful granite columns were found here. Some of these columns lay on the banks of the Nile, opposite the French residence, while others had been abandoned for various purposes. Based on their appearance, they belonged to the ancient city of Boulbitine, whose final location is marked by the Tower of Canopus.
- Opposite the Abu Mandour Mosque, on the banks of the Nile, are two or three houses.
- A drawing (pl. 1) of Tell Abu Mandour and the old mosque. This drawing, made from the east bank, shows the Nile River. On the west bank lies the Zawiya of Abu Mandour, behind which is Kom al-Afrah, surmounted by a four-story tower. This is part of the Abu Mandour fortress atop the hill.
- The Zawiya of Abu Mandour consists of a mosque whose entrance faces east. It is situated in the center of a stone structure crowned by a massive pointed arch. This arch rests on two pillars on either side, from which a frieze extends, wrapping around the arch and the entrance block. The southern facade features right-angled recesses. To the right of the main entrance is another entrance, also with a pointed arch, opening



southward and surmounted by an arched window.

- The Kom al-Afrah complex appears as a high sand dune sloping north and east. The painting prominently features the Zawiya of Abu Mandour, situated on a stone platform overlooking the water. The Zawiya comprises a mosque topped by a dome and minaret. The entrance is located on the east side, centered on a stone crowned with a triple arch (Madaini). Above the door is a window. The facade to the right of the entrance features windows with pointed arches. The minaret consists of a square base surmounted by an octagonal story ending in muqarnas supporting the muezzin's chamber, which is enclosed by a wooden railing. Above this is a cylindrical third story topped by an onion-shaped, ribbed dome surmounted by a crescent. The second section of the Zawiya is the two-story annex on the northern side. The second story contains two rooms supported by columns, representing the first floor. The northern room has three windows, while the southern room has four windows in the eastern wall and two in the southern wall. Each column consists of a base, shaft, and capital. Three columns are visible to the east, defining a courtyard that represented the first floor, which was used for seating. The second floor served as living quarters, accessed by a staircase to the west.
- General View from the Top of Abu Mandour Hill (pl. 1): This painting was created from atop Kom al-Afrah. The hill slopes down towards the zawiya (Sufi lodge) to the east, and the Nile River and the island are also located to the east. Abu Mandour Zawiya overlooks the Nile and consists of two sections. The first is the mosque to the south, showing the minaret and dome. The minaret has three stories: the first is square, the second is octagonal, and the top is adorned with muqarnas (stalactite-like decorative elements) supporting the muezzin's platform. The dome is onion-shaped with ribs and is topped by a crescent. The western wall of the mosque has three arched windows. The second section shows a two-story house, with the rooms on the second floor also having arched windows.
- As for the second painting that Sonnini drew (pl. 2) from above Kom al-Afrah, the hill sloping towards the corner appears in the east. As for the corner of Abu Mandour, it overlooks the Nile and consists of two parts. The first is the mosque in the south, and the minaret and the dome appear. The minaret has three floors, the first is square and the second is octagonal, ending at the top with muqarnas that carry the muezzin's chamber. The dome is onion-shaped and ribbed, and the crescent is above it. The western wall of



the mosque has three arched windows. As for the second part, a two-story house appears, and the rooms of the second floor also have arched windows.

2. Analytical Study of Sonnini's Plates and Illustrations

A systematic study of Plates 1 and 1A, focusing on visual and archaeological interpretations consistent with your approach to studying "Rosetta Architecture":

Analysis of the Plate of Tell Abu Mandour and the Old Mosque (pls. 1 and 1A)

Plates 1 and 1A are of paramount visual importance, as Charles Nicholas Sonnini presents a detailed panoramic view of the Kom El-Afrah area and the Abu Mandour corner, allowing the archaeologist to observe the site's structural condition in the late 18th century (1777 AD).

A. Visual Interpretation of the Plate (Composition and Perspective): Sonnini strategically chose a carefully considered viewpoint from the east bank of the Nile to depict the dynamic relationship between the sandy hill and the buildings erected upon it, highlighting the site's topographical elevation above the river level. He positioned the Abu Mandour corner, built upon a solid stone foundation, as a visual focal point, suggesting the robustness of the architectural foundations in the face of the Nile's currents.

B. Architectural Analysis of the Elements in the Painting: The painting reflects a remarkable precision in depicting architectural elements through the deconstruction of the mosque's integrated mass. At its center stands an onion-shaped dome with ribs, a towering minaret with a square base and an octagonal story adorned with muqarnas (stalactite-like decorative elements), and a muezzin's chamber with a wooden railing, reflecting Ottoman architectural taste. The main entrance appears on the eastern side, crowned by a triple-arched portico topped by a window, consistent with the layout of historical Rosetta entrances. Furthermore, the two-story annex to the north is depicted, showcasing a system of columns supporting the rooms of the second floor, which are open with multiple windows, thus embodying the Rosetta tradition of integrating residential and religious services.

C. Documentary Value and Archaeological Analysis: The tablet has proven to be of high documentary value in archaeological analysis by depicting the nature of the Kom al-Afrah as a sloping sand dune. This explains the engineering challenges faced by the Rosetta architect in establishing the mosque on sandy soil using a stone pavement. Beyond the general landscape, it records precise details, including the distribution of windows—



three in the northern chamber and four in the southern—as well as the external pathways, such as the staircase leading to the second floor to the west. This provides a deep understanding of the movement of users within the zawiya and the distribution of spaces.

D. Comparison Between the Tablet and Archaeological Reality: The tablet demonstrates Sonnini's accuracy in documenting architectural proportions. The relationship between the mosque, the minaret, and the attached house in the tablet corresponds to the known archaeological plan of the zawiya. Furthermore, the depiction of the wooden benches in the courtyard proves that the mosque served a social function beyond religious rituals, acting as a place of rest and social interaction for travelers and sailors.

Paintings 1 and 1a are considered visual evidence of the development of Rosetta architecture in the 18th century. This confirms that the "Zawiya of Abu Mandour" was not merely a religious building, but a "defensive service complex" designed to harmonize with the river's natural features and the hill's location. It also reveals Sonnini's meticulous attention to detail in architectural descriptions that might otherwise be missed by textual accounts alone.

The traveler Charles Nicholas Sonnini documented a view of Rosetta in Plate No. (2), which offers a strategic panoramic perspective of the city and its surroundings.

Analysis of the General View from the Top of Abu Mandour Hill (Pl. 2)

Plate 2 derives its archaeological value from representing a "Bird's Eye View" captured by Sonnini from the summit of Abu Mandour Hill. This perspective is not merely artistic, but also a topographical and strategic survey illustrating the relationship between the city's natural formations and existing architectural elements.

A. Visual Reading and Topographical Composition:

- Visual Extension: The plate reflects the nature of Rosetta as a site surrounded by topographical contrasts; the hill stands out as an elevated area that visually dominates the surrounding plains and the banks of the Nile.
- Distribution of Urban Blocks: The plate shows how Rosetta's buildings are scattered among green spaces (orchards) and waterways, confirming Sonnini's observation about the city's "paradise-like" nature, where architecture blends seamlessly with nature.

• B. Strategic Elements in the Landscape:

- The Nile as a Lifeline and Movement: The painting highlights the course of the Nile as



a dominant element in the visual composition, illustrating how ships and boats were an essential part of the city's daily life, thus underscoring Rosetta's economic role as a trading port.

- Fortifications as Spatial Markers: The landscape reveals the strategic distribution of defensive structures (towers) on the horizon, which aligns with Sonnini's description of towers positioned "from center to center" to protect roads and control the Delta's entrances.
- **C. The Analytical Significance of the Top View: From this perspective (drawn by Sonnini from atop the hill), we can deduce several archaeological facts:**
 - Harmonious Urban Planning: The city appears as a compact but not haphazard mass, with the interplay of raised roofs, minarets, and domes reflecting the architect's ingenuity in managing the climate (natural ventilation) and orienting the buildings.
 - Boundaries: The painting clearly delineates the city's boundaries, where built-up areas end and orchards and sand dunes begin, illustrating that Rosetta was a city "surrounded" by a natural defensive environment, as Sonnini noted in his text about the sand dunes to the west protecting the city.
- **D. Documentary and Research Value:**
 - Record of the Past: The painting documents the city's condition before the radical transformations it underwent in the 19th century. It provides evidence of the density of green spaces and the nature of Nile navigation during the Ottoman era.
 - Interrelationship between Text and Image: Painting No. (2) provides a visual interpretation of what Sonnini wrote about Rosetta as a "storehouse of trade" and the "gateway to the Delta." From this elevation, the site's importance in monitoring any movement coming from the sea or heading towards Cairo becomes clear.

Plate No. (2) is a fundamental reference for understanding the "urban fabric" of Rosetta; it does not depict buildings as separate entities, but rather as part of an integrated geographical-defensive system. This top-down perspective confirms Sonnini's vision of the city as a living entity, breathing through the Nile, fortified behind hills and towers, and perched atop the economic system of the Rosetta branch.

3. Comparing Texts with Illustrations: Evaluating Historical and Archaeological Accuracy

Charles Nicholas Sonnini is an early example of the traveler-researcher who combines



textual and visual documentation, creating a state of integration and intersection in his memoirs. Examining the relationship between his texts and illustrations reveals several levels of accuracy and analysis:

A. Accuracy of Architectural Description (The Illustrations as "Architectural Plans"): Sonnini's illustrations are not merely impressionistic scenes, but rather technical documents.

- **Consistency:** In his description of the Zawiya of Abu Mandour (Illustrations 1 and 1a), the text focuses on functions (mosque, annex, sitting room), while the illustrations present the structural plan (arches, columns, minaret).
- **Accuracy:** The illustrations demonstrate a high degree of accuracy in conveying architectural proportions (such as the tiered structure of the minaret), making the text and illustration complement each other; the text explains "why it was built this way" (function), while the illustration shows "how it was built" (form).

B. Discrepancies between Text and Visual Imagery (Scientific Credibility): Despite the remarkable accuracy, slight gaps appear between the text and the drawing. These gaps stem from the nature of fieldwork in that era:

- **Visual Abstraction:** Sonnini sometimes tends to "simplify" in his drawings the decorations or intricate architectural details (such as complex muqarnas) to suit the engraving and etching style used in printing books at the time. This makes the text more detailed in describing the "ornament," while the drawing is more detailed in describing the "mass."
- **Decorative Alterations:** In some paintings, Sonnini may add elements that complement the scene (such as boats or people) to give an impression of dynamism and movement. This constitutes a "social context" that enriches the text rather than contradicting it, but it requires the archaeologist to distinguish between the "static element" (the building) and the "moving element" (daily life).

C. Archaeological Documentation (Reused Artifacts): Here, the value of integrating text and drawing as a research tool becomes evident:

- **The State of the Fortresses:** Sonnini's text describes the fortresses as "dilapidated," and his illustrations confirm this through lines reflecting the collapse and ruins. This correspondence lends significant credibility to his archaeological testimony.
- **Archaeological Finds:** When Sonnini drew the artifacts (hieroglyphic stones), his



drawings were accurate enough to allow scholars to later identify the nature of the inscriptions, making his drawings a kind of "early archaeological survey" predating rigorous academic methodologies.

D. Evaluating Accuracy from a Contemporary Archaeological Perspective: By comparing what Sonnini documented with the contemporary reality of Rosetta, we find:

- **Topographical Accuracy:** His drawings successfully documented the waterways and topographical elevations of the city in a manner consistent with modern maps, confirming that Sonnini relied on the "surveillance of a surveyor" and not merely the "vision of an artist."
- **Historical Accuracy:** His texts served as a "balance" for his drawings; When he describes the city as a "storehouse of trade," his paintings reveal details of boats and docks that confirm this activity, indicating that he did not paint from imagination but rather depicted what he observed with a discerning eye.

In short, Sonnini's texts represent the "analytical aspect," while his drawings constitute the "documentary aspect." His historical and archaeological accuracy lies in his ability to capture the "structural essence" of the buildings. Despite the artistic simplification imposed by 18th-century drawing techniques, the scholarly value of these drawings lies in their faithful reflection of the written descriptions, making his memoirs an indispensable source for any architectural or historical archaeological study of Rosetta.

Conclusion: The Scientific and Documentary Value of Sonnini's Journey in Urban Heritage Studies

The conclusion highlights the scientific and documentary value of Charles Nicholas Sonnini's journey as a fundamental reference in urban heritage studies of Rosetta:

In concluding this analytical reading of Charles Nicholas Sonnini's memoirs about Rosetta, we find that this work represents more than just "travel literature"; it is a comprehensive field survey that was ahead of its time and provided the historical and architectural library with an indispensable document for understanding the city's structure during the Ottoman era.

A. Methodological Integration: Text as Analysis and Visuals as Document: The research has demonstrated that Sonnini's strength lies in his integrated methodology. The text provides a socio-economic and functional interpretation of urban development (why was it built? How did people live? What were the economic roles?), while the paintings



and drawings provide architectural and topographical documentation (how was the architecture formed? What is the relationship between mass and space?). This harmony makes his memoirs a "living archive" of the city at a pivotal historical moment.

B. Rosetta as a Model of Harmonious Architecture (Environment + Function): This study confirms that Sonnini successfully identified the "genius of place" in Rosetta. He recognized that the city was not the product of mere urban chance, but rather the result of a delicate balance between:

- **Defensive Strategy:** through a system of towers and fortresses that accommodated historical accumulation (reuse of antiquities).
- **Environmental Efficiency:** through residential architecture that harnessed the Nile and breezes to achieve thermal comfort, which distinguished it from Cairo in the eyes of travelers.
- **Economic Growth:** through the meticulous documentation of rice and textile industries, which made Rosetta a vibrant center, not merely a historical city.

C. Strategic Importance in Contemporary Archaeological Research: The value of these notes today transcends their historical significance; they represent a "baseline" that researchers and planners can use to:

- **Understand the city's layers:** through his observations of the ruins (bulbain) and archaeological finds.
- **Reconstructing visual history:** By comparing his drawings with contemporary reality, this aids in the restoration and preservation of architectural heritage.
- **Studying "vanished architecture":** Sonnini documented landmarks and towers that may have been affected by time or modern urban expansion.

Sonnini's journey to Rosetta was not merely an exploratory trip, but a "detailed examination" of a developing urban community. He succeeded in immortalizing Rosetta's architectural and social identity, leaving us a visual and textual legacy that transforms our city into an "open-air museum," requiring us -as researchers and academics- to protect and deeply understand it. This research is but one link in an ongoing chain of documentation, which we hope will contribute to reviving awareness of Rosetta's importance as a cornerstone of Egyptian architectural heritage.