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a cura di
VIRGLIO ILARI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Leibniz's Last Crusade: The Philosopher as a Strategist

Leibniz's *Consilium Aegyptiacum* and its afterlife

by EMANUELE FARRUGIA

ABSTRACT. Among the works of Leibniz, those written as a young advisor to the Prince Elector of Mainz reveal unusual political sensitivity. However, his suggestion to the Sun King to conquer Egypt instead of attacking the Netherlands went unheeded, without leaving any trace in the French archives. Actually, the British rediscovered Leibniz's plan and used it as a tool of information warfare against France. Later, during the 1840 Oriental Crisis, the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* resurfaced in France in an anti-British pamphlet. The Prussian General von Minutoli and the US Navy officer Alfred T. Mahan assessed Leibniz's paper from different strategic perspectives.

KEYWORDS: PHILOSOPHER, COALITION, DIPLOMACY, LEVANT, EGYPT, RED SEA, INDIA, ROUTE, TRADE, SHIP, TREATY, EXPEDITION, PLAN, INFORMATION WARFARE, PROPAGANDA, PAMPHLET, STRATEGY, STRATEGIST, SEA POWER.

Introduction

In 1671, Leibniz addressed a memorandum to Louis XIV, which became later known as the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*¹, urging him to occupy Egypt. Most likely, Leibniz's purpose was to prevent the imminent invasion of the United Provinces (Netherlands) and to divert French expansionism towards the Eastern Mediterranean. At the time, his memo fell on deaf ears and could not stop the French war machine. In fact, according to Foreign Secretary Arnauld de Pomponne, « the Crusades had been out of fashion since the times of Saint Louis».

Leibniz's project went into oblivion until 1803, when an anonymous British pamphleteer published a summary, based on manuscripts found at the Hanover's

¹ Gottfried W LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, V- Consilium Aegyptiacum, 1671-1672, N.10*, IV, I (Vierte Reihe: Politische Schriften; Erster Band: 1667-1676) Akademie der Wissenschaften, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1923.

Royal Library. The pamphlet was part of a British propaganda effort to counter the growing French influence in the Mediterranean.

In the course of the XIX Century, in the wake of a revival of Leibniz's studies, the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* resurfaced in France during the 1840 Oriental Crisis. A French political pamphlet with a strong anti-British tone reproduced Leibniz's plan together with a fake Franco-Russian invasion plan of India, allegedly drafted in 1800.

Two strategic thinkers, the Prussian General Heinrich Menu von Minutoli, in 1841, and the US Navy officer Alfred Thayer Mahan, in 1890, counterfactually evaluated the rationale of Leibniz's plan and reached different conclusions.

The first goal of this article is to briefly recap the history of Leibniz's policy paper through its successive drafts and explore its rationale within the political context of Louis XIV's wars.

Secondly, it will be traced its afterlife in the XIX Century and its exploitation as a tool of information warfare by the British after the Peace of Amiens and forty years later by a French scholar, during the Oriental Crisis of 1840.

Finally, the different assessments of Leibniz's plan, by Minutoli and by Mahan, will offer the opportunity to compare the views of two different schools of strategic thought: the Prussian school, focused on land power, and the Anglo-Saxon school, focused on sea power.

1 Leibniz's Plan

The origins of Leibniz's proposal to Louis XIV can be traced back to the years of French expansion eastward, between the War of Devolution and the Dutch War² (1667-1678). In fact, the Kings' policy aimed at securing France's eastern border behind a screen of fortresses and at increasing its influence within the Holy Roman Empire.

The build-up of the *Pré Carré*³ was a long-term objective of Louis XIV's Grand Strategy and it provoked, as a reaction to the danger of French hegemony, the formation of a powerful anti-French Coalition, later dubbed *The Grand*

2 Paul SONNINO, *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003

3 Gregory HANLON, *European Military Rivalry, 1500–1750: Fierce Pageant*, Routledge, Oxford, 2020



Christoph Bernhard Francke (1665–1729), ritratto di Leibnitz (1695), Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Brunswick (Wikimedia Commons)

Alliance.⁴ Leibniz was only 21 years old, in 1668, when he entered the service, as a secretary, assistant, librarian, of Baron Johann Christian von Boineburg. Boineburg was a diplomat and in 1658 he had been the main architect of the first League of the Rhine (*Rheinbund*). Acting at the time as chief negotiator of the Prince Elector of Mainz, Archbishop Johann Philipp von Schönborn, he had forged a military alliance among France and some States of Western and Northern Germany.

Although the Rheinbund had been created against the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, in 1663 it sent an expeditionary corps in support of the Emperor's war against the Ottomans. Actually, it was Boineburg who had asked for a coalition of Christian powers against the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the Rhenish and French contingent took part in the battle of Sankt Gotthard bei Mogersdorf, contributing to a major victory by the Habsburg forces, under the command of Field Marshal Raimondo Montecuccoli.⁵

After having fallen into disgrace with the Prince Elector for one year, Boineburg returned to the diplomatic parquet in 1668, when he took part in the election of the King of Poland as Envoy to Warsaw of the Count Palatine Philip Wilhelm of Neuburg.

Since he could learn the craft of diplomacy from a professional, Leibniz started to draft some policy papers under his supervision. His policy paper in support of the Count Palatine's candidacy to the throne of Poland, the *Specimen demonstrationum politicarum pro eligendo Rege Polonorum novo scribendi genere ad claram certitudinem exactum*⁶(n.1), under the pseudonym of «Georgius Ulicovius Lithuanus», was a kind of «geometrical demonstration» of the grounds for Philip Wilhelm to become King of Poland.

Philip Wilhelm, after careful examination, let publish only the conclusions of the paper, the *Syllogismus Polono-Politicus*, which, however, was not distributed in time for the election due to delays in the printing process. Philip Wilhelm's

4 Jeremy BLACK, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon: The Fate of a Great Power*, Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 1999

5 A. WESS MITCHELL, *The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire, 1700–1866. A Study In Interstitial Time Management*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2018.

6 Gottfried W. LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Georgius Ulicovius Lithuanus, 1669, 46-98, N.1, IV, I (Vierte Reihe: Politische Schriften; Erster Band: 1667-1676)* Akademie der Wissenschaften, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1923.

candidacy eventually failed like those of the other foreign contenders and a Polish nobleman was elected as King of Poland.

Under Boineburg's instructions, Leibniz's attention turned to the West. The outcome of the War of Devolution and of the Treaty of Aachen had alarmed the Prince Elector of Trier, who started envisaging a common front against France. The occasion for Leibniz's next policy paper, *Securitas Publica*⁷(n.5-9)⁸, was the meeting of Schwalbach in July 1670. There, the Prince Elector of Mainz, the Prince Elector of Trier, and the Duke of Lorraine discussed the French threat to Lorraine and the question of their possible accession to the Triple Alliance, made up of Britain, Sweden and the United Provinces of the Netherlands.

Boineburg, who was wary of a confrontation with France, due to the inherent weakness of the Holy Roman Empire, commissioned to Leibniz the drafting of a policy paper for the Prince Elector. Soon after the meeting, Leibniz wrote the first part of his paper, where he suggested a cautious line of action based on a realistic assessment of the weakness of the German principalities and of the Holy Roman Empire, which he dubbed «*Spielball*» (playing ball) in France's dangerous game.

He also stressed the need to minimize risks for the Electorate, refraining from any action that France might see as a provocation, such as the accession to the Triple Alliance.

Already in the first part of *Securitas Publica*, he introduced a concept later developed in the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*: French expansionism could be diverted towards the Mediterranean.

According to Leibniz, since the times of Saint Louis, France had been «destined by God's Providence» to take the lead of Christian armies in the Levant and North Africa and Egypt was a possible objective

The French invasion of the Duchy of Lorraine in November of the same year confirmed Leibniz's assessment of the futility of overtly opposing Louis XIV at this stage.

In the second part of *Securitas Publica*, he drew the conclusion that joining

7 Gottfried W. LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Bedenken welchergestalt Securitas publica interna et externa und status praesens im Reich iezigen Umständen nach festen Fuß zu stellen, 1670, 131-214, N.5-9, IV, I* (Vierte Reihe: Politische Schriften; Erster Band: 1667-1676) Akademie der Wissenschaften, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1923.

8 Stefanie BUCHENAU, *Leibniz, philosophe-diplomate, le traité sur la sécurité publique de 1670*, Université Paris VIII, Saint Denis, Paris, 2010.

the Triple Alliance, of which he correctly predicted the dissolution, would have been a fatal mistake for Mainz and for the Empire as well. While Lorraine could be sacrificed, Leibniz suggested building a coalition of Princes of the Empire- a «*Reichsbund*»- with a professional army of 20,000 troops, financed through a common budget.

In evaluating the strategy of France, which could have been contained through a combination of diplomatic engagement and coalition building, Leibniz forecast Louis XIV's next target: the United Provinces of the Netherlands.

In the aftermath of the secret Treaty of Dover, in June 1670, between Charles II and Louis XIV, the Triple Alliance was broken and France started its preparation for war against the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Seeing the storm approaching, Boineburg and Leibniz continued their efforts to appease Louis XIV and divert French expansionism towards an alternative target.

Therefore, Leibniz, in full agreement with his diplomatic mentor, further highlighted in his paper the advantage of conquering Egypt compared to the troubles of war with the United Provinces.

Whereas the European war, in the end, would backfire on France and lead to the creation of a European Alliance against it, by taking over Egypt from the Ottoman Empire, France would become the leading power of Christendom.

Leibniz drafted The *Consilium Aegyptiacum*⁹ as a «*rolling document*», starting in December 1671 with a first sketch, *Regi Christianissimo (N. 10)*, conceived as a letter to the French sovereign. It was the first draft of the plan and it included the main arguments of the proposal. Being France the «*China of the West and Egypt the Holland of the East*», taking over Egypt would have been a logical step for the «*Most Christian King*». Leibniz highlighted the relevance of Egypt and recapped the previous attempts by western rulers to occupy Egypt in order to reinforce the strategic rationale of the proposed endeavour.

Compared to the time and the military effort required to invade the United Provinces and defeat its fleet, the conquest of Egypt presented fewer risks. The country was open to invasion from the sea, its militia was ramshackle and the

9 Editors of Leibniz's works, including the Prussian Academy of Sciences, used the name *Consilium Aegyptiacum* to refer to the documents in which he developed his plan although it is not the title of any of those documents. See: Paul RITTER, *Leibniz Ägyptischer Plan*, Darmstadt Reichl, Darmstadt, 1930

Ottoman Empire was unable to defend the country. Leibniz also stressed the key role, as a stepping stone, of the island of Malta or, as an alternative, of Lampedusa.

From a diplomatic perspective, the expedition to Egypt would have found support in the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, as well as in other Christian Powers. Furthermore, by taking control of the choke point between the sea-lanes of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, the occupation of Egypt would have dealt a fatal blow to the United Provinces by ruining their trade with East Asia.

For the sake of ecumenism, the plan would lead, according to Leibniz, «to the downfall of the Turkish Empire» and, therefore, «it was in the interest of the whole human race and the Christian Religion». Moreover, «A campaign against the infidels would be welcomed not only by those who love the Christian Commonwealth, but also by those who hate France». Furthermore, the war against the Turks would create the conditions for a Pan European Alliance.¹⁰

Between January and March 1672, Leibniz wrote the *Synopsis Meditationis, de optimo consilio quod potentissimo regi dari potest impresentiarum (n.1)*.¹¹

The *Synopsis* begins with the description of the French decision-making process regarding the incoming war with the United Provinces.

Some of Louis XIV's Ministers, including Jean Baptiste Colbert – Comptroller-General of Finances and Secretary of State of the Navy - and Simon Arnauld de Pomponne, the newly appointed Foreign Secretary of State, appear not to be fully convinced of the viability of the enterprise, since the Dutch are more powerful at sea than the French.

In order to prevail at sea, France needs the alliance with England. Since France cannot rely on England's support, Pomponne is ready to compromise with the Dutch. On the other hand, the Secretary of State for War, François Michel le Tellier, Marquess of Louvois, urges his King to take this opportunity to crush the Dutch.

The paper included a short political novel, *Fabula Ludovisia*, in which Saint

10 Lloyd STRICKLAND, «Leibniz's Egypt Plan (1671-1672): from Holy War to Ecumenism», *Intellectual History Review*, Vol 26, No. 4, 461-476, Routledge, Taylor and Francis, Oxford, 2016

11 According to Blumstengel, the memo had been addressed to the Prince Elector and not to the French King.

Louis appears in a dream to Louis XIV and urges him to carry out an expedition to Egypt¹².

Three other introductory short essays: *Specimen demonstrationis politicae* (n.12), *De eo quod Franciae interest* (n.13) and *Regis Christianissimi quid interest* (n.14), where the author assessed France's interests, should have supported the main argument. In the first paper (*Specimen demonstratonis politicae*), Leibniz clearly outlined the manifold political and commercial benefits of the Egyptian enterprise, including the excavation of a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The two other papers (*De eo quod Franciae interest* n.13 and *Regis Christianissimi quid interest* n.14) were more focused on France's political and economic interests than on the Egyptian enterprise.

The final comprehensive draft including the details of the plan was the *Justa Dissertatio* (n.15), followed by a summary: the *Breviarium* (n.16). Presumably, the summary, written in July 1672, was not meant for the French King but for the Prince Elector.

Leibniz took a long time to complete the *Justa Dissertatio*. He started the draft soon after his arrival in Paris in March 1672 but he could not finish it before November, due to the rapidly changing situation. Hence, he had to update his draft, under the constant urging of Boineburg to take into account the latest developments.

The long memorandum is a manuscript text, rich in geographical, economic and military data and includes quotations of experts and travellers.

The original text was subdivided into paragraphs but the editor, Paul Ritter of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, reordered it in five sections (*I Summa et Historia Consilii; II Expeditio Facilis; III Expeditio Secura; IV Expeditio Tempestiva; V Iustitiae Causa*).

Whereas the *Summa et Historia Consilii* recaps the historical background and the many economic benefits of taking over Egypt (*de redivibus Aegypti*), the second section, *Expeditio facilis*, is the real war plan for the campaign. It is a thorough description and analysis of Egypt's military forces and fortresses, of its

12 Adolphus William WARD, *Leibniz as a politician, the Adamson lecture, 1910*, Sherratt & Hughes, Manchester, 1911



MICHEL-ANGE-BERNARD MANGOURIT
(1752-1829)
résident de la République française en Valais (1798).
(Lithographie – Photo BN, Paris)

Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit (1752-1829). (Wiki-Rennes).

regional neighbourhood, of «Turkish military power» and of the European powers' likely reactions to the enterprise.

The third section, *Expeditio Secura*, stresses the absence of relevant political or military risks in case of forced withdrawal from Egypt, due to external circumstances. The fourth section, *Expeditio Tempestiva*, underlines the timeliness of the endeavour, considering the balance of power in Europe.

Finally, the last section, *Iustitiae Causae*, focuses on the legitimacy of the project: «what is more righteous than a holy war?» (*Quid iustius bello sacro?*). Briefly, the memo expands the rationale already present in the *Regi Christianissimo*: the conquest of Egypt is feasible, easy, with no risks and timely. The aim is clearly to make France and his King supreme by crushing the Ottoman Empire and assuming the leadership of Christian Europe.

Leibniz probably drafted the *Iusta Dissertatio* as a background paper for Boineburg's diplomatic efforts. Hence, Boineburg's request for a summary, which could also be translated into French. The *Breviarium*, therefore, might be the text widely known as the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*.

Leibniz's proposal could never reach its likely goal of diverting French expansionism from Germany to Egypt. The proposal itself was closely related to the Prince Elector's own attempt at mediation, first through Boineburg and later through his nephew, Melchior Friedrich.

Having carefully analyzed French policy and Louis XIV's own personality, Leibniz had detected a growing trend to intervene in the Mediterranean against the Ottomans, in addition to the already mentioned French support to Montecucoli's Army.

In 1664, the Duke de Beaufort had led the multinational expedition against the Berber corsairs to Djidjelli, on the Algerian Coast, which after the seizure of the port, ended in a withdrawal due to a plague outbreak. Later, in 1669, the same Duke of Beaufort commanded the French contingent dispatched to support the Venetian defence of Candia

Both Hugues de Lionne – the French Foreign Secretary before Pomponne – and Colbert, had been in favour of the expansion of trade in the Levant and further East to India, through the Red Sea. Since 1665, French Envoys to Constantinople, first de la Haye-Vantelet and later de Nointel, had requested, without

success, the opening to trade of the Red Sea¹³.

Leibniz and Boineburg, counted on the mercantilist party- reduced to Colbert himself after the unexpected death of de Lionne - to stop the French war machine set into motion by the War Secretary Louvois and by Henry de la Tour d'Auvergne Viscount of Turenne and Marshal General of France.

In full agreement with Boineburg, Leibniz had conceived the project of diversion to Egypt since at least September 1671, as proven by a letter of Boineburg to the Abbé Jacques de Gravel, French Envoy to Mainz, asking for a copy of a book: *Histoire de l'Égypte*.¹⁴

Boineburg's subsequent step was a letter addressed to Louis XIV on 20th January 1672, launching the proposal for an important project, without mentioning the main subject, i.e., the conquest of Egypt. Pomponne's polite answer on 12th February, 1672, while expressing interest for his proposal, welcomed Boineburg's suggestion of a meeting with Leibniz. With a letter of introduction by Boineburg, Leibniz rushed to Paris,¹⁵ looking forward to meeting Pomponne, who unfortunately granted the young philosopher no audience.

During the mission to Mainz of the French special Envoy, Marquess Isaac de Pas de Feuquières, Boineburg clearly outlined the Egyptian plan even suggesting a possible alliance with the United Provinces against the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ Pomponne, who was accompanying the King, replied to Feuquières, on 21st June that the Crusades had been out of fashion since the days of Saint Louis.

As mentioned above, Boineburg did not despair and continued to urge Leibniz to finish his draft memorandum and to make a summary of it, to no avail. It is not known whether Boineburg had ever made the Prince Elector aware of the memorandum. What is sure is that Louis XIV never knew about it and there was

13 Louis-Alexandre FOUCHER DE CAREIL, *Œuvres de Leibniz publiées pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits originaux avec notes et introductions par A. Foucher de Careil, tome cinquième, projet d'expédition d'Égypte présenté à Louis XIV*, Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, fils et Cie, Imprimeurs de l'Institut, Rue Jacob, 55, Paris, 1864

14 Louis-Alexandre FOUCHER DE CAREIL, *ibidem*, *Correspondance et pièces diverses relatives au projet de conquête de l'Égypte*.

15 Gottschalk Eduard GUHRAUER, *Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz, eine Biographie*, Ferdinand Hirt's Verlag, Breslau, 1846

16 Richard H. THOMPSON, *Lothar Franz von Schönborn and the Diplomacy of the Electorate of Mainz From the Treaty of Ryswick to the Outbreak of the War of Spanish Succession*, Springer Netherlands, The Hague, 1973

no trace left in the French diplomatic archives.

Soon after the Ottoman defeat in Vienna, Leibniz wrote in Latin and translated into French one of his most original and ironic political writings, *Mars Christianissimus*, a satire where he chastised Louis XIV's hostility to the Holy Roman Emperor, who was defending Christendom against the Turks.¹⁷

2 *The Discovery of Leibniz's Memorandum: British information warfare.*

The Treaty of Amiens (27th March 1802) between France and Britain, joined by Spain and the Batavian Republic, put an end to the French Revolutionary Wars and was defined by the French and British negotiators, Joseph Bonaparte and Lord Charles Cornwallis, as "*the definitive treaty of peace*". In fact, it proved to be only a truce that endured slightly more than one year, until Britain declared war on France. After a short period of détente a "Cold War" erupted between France and Britain.

On one hand, the British government, led by Henry Addington, deemed as provocations:

- 1) the French expedition to recover the West Indies,
- 2) the acceptance by the First Consul of the Presidency of the Italian Republic,
- 3) the annexation of Piedmont and the deployment of French troops to Switzerland.

On the other hand, the British had not complied with the provision of Article 10 of the Treaty concerning the withdrawal from Malta and had delayed the evacuation from Egypt. On top of it, Bonaparte deeply resented the recurring attacks of the British press against him.

A further provocation for the British government was the mission of Colonel Horace Sébastiani¹⁸ to supervise the British withdrawal from Egypt. His report to

17 Gottfried W. LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Mars Christianissimus, Autore Germano Gallo-Graeco ou Apologie des Armes du Roy tres Chrestien contre les Chrestiens. (22), 1684*, (Vierte Reihe: Politische Schriften; Zweiter Band: 1677-1687) Akademie der Wissenschaften, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1923

18 Romain H. RAINERO, «Napoléon et la grande stratégie diplomatique en Orient : la première mission d'Horace Sébastiani dans l'Empire Ottoman (1801-1802)», *Cahiers de la Médi-*

the First Consul, where he proposed to reoccupy Egypt, appeared on the *Moniteur Universel* of 30th January 1803, sparking the protests of the British Government.¹⁹

On 27th January, Foreign Minister Talleyrand asked the British Envoy in Paris, Lord Whitworth, to evacuate Malta and Bonaparte himself reiterated that request in strong, undiplomatic terms on two other occasions, on 18th February and on 13th March, in front of the diplomatic corps.

The British Government replied to a new French request on 4th May with a sudden ultimatum, with a deadline of 36 hours, demanding:

- 1) the retention of Malta for 10 years,
- 2) the evacuation of French troops from Switzerland,
- 3) a compensation to the King of Sardinia for France's annexation of Piedmont.

In the absence of a French reply, Britain declared war on France on 18th May 1803.²⁰ In parallel to the diplomatic skirmishes information warfare escalated. In 1803, a pamphlet appeared in London under the title: *A summary account of Leibniz's memoir addressed to Lewis the Fourteenth, recommending to that monarch the conquest of Egypt as conducive to establishing a supreme authority of Europe*,²¹ based on the documents stored at the Royal Library of Hanover.²²

Since Leibniz himself had mentioned the project only once, in a letter to his friend Hiob Ludolf and one of his first biographers Johann August Eberhard²³ had only made a scant reference to it, no one else except the keepers of the phi-

terranée, n.57, 1, Lyon, 1998, online

19 Edouard DRIAULT, *La Question d'Orient depuis ses origines jusqu'à la Paix de Sèvres (1920)*, Librairie Félix Alcan, Paris, 1921.

20 THE ANNUAL REGISTER, *Or, A View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1803*, J. Seeley of Buckingham and J. Wright of St James Square, London, 1805.

21 ANONYMOUS, *A summary account of Leibniz's memoir addressed to Lewis the Fourteenth, recommending to that monarch the conquest of Egypt as conducive to the establishing a supreme authority of Europe*, Hatchard, London, 1803.

22 Karl Gustav. BLUMSTENGEL, *Leibniz' Aegyptischer Plan. Eine historisch-kritische Monographie behufs Erlangung del Doctorwürde in der Philosphischen Facultät der Universität Leipzig*. Commissionsverlag von A. Lorentz, Leipzig, 1869.

23 Johann August EBERHARD, *Gottfried Wilhelm Freyherr von Leibnitz*, Chemnitz, 1795, reprod. in fac-simile in: *Leibniz Biographien: Johann August Eberhard, Gottfried Willhelm Freyherr von Leibnitz, Johann Georg von Eckhart, Lebenbeschreibung des Freyherrn von Leibnitz*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 2003.

losopher's papers at the Royal Library knew about the project. Swiss historian Johannes von Müller likely conducted, in 1799, a research on Leibniz's plan.

After the French landing in Egypt, Count von Kielmannsegge, President of the Regency of the Electorate, gave instructions to the librarians to retrieve the papers, which made up Leibniz's Egyptian project, in order to amend any mistaken annotations and make copies to be forwarded to London.

Here, the British Government published a pamphlet summarizing the papers as part of an information warfare operation²⁴. The introduction to the summary made a connection between the papers stored in Hanover and the ones delivered to the French Foreign Ministry in 1672.²⁵

According to the pamphlet, Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in the summer of 1798 was nothing less than the implementation of Leibniz's plan,

«Only the eventual accomplishment and exact execution of this very plan, which had been laid up at Versailles, for above a century, among the secrets of state».

The plan continued to represent a roadmap for France's expansion in the Mediterranean even after the conclusion of the peace of Amiens. The ultimate aim of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt would have been, as envisaged by Leibniz for Louis XIV, the achievement of «a supreme authority over Europe».²⁶

Commenting passages of Leibniz's memorandum, the author stressed analogies with Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign. For instance, describing Leibniz's aim to deprive the Dutch of their commerce with India and quoting Bonaparte's proclamation of 1798, the author highlighted that the French had substituted the Dutch Republic with their current archenemy, England. The Syrian campaign of the spring of 1799 was the fulfillment of Leibniz's plan to take control of Alexandria and of the mountain passes of the Amanus mountain range between Anatolia and Syria.

The key analogy between Leibniz's memorandum and Bonaparte's expedition was the one regarding the strategic value of the island of Malta. In his memorandum, Leibniz had highlighted the importance of Malta as «a safe haven» for the

24 Adolphus William WARD, *cit. ibidem*.

25 Karl Gustav, BLUMSTENGEL, *cit. ibidem*,

26 K. G. BLUMSTENGEL, *cit. ibidem*.



Jean-Gabriel Peltier (1760-1825), in Léonard Gallois, *Histoire des journaux et des journalistes de la révolution française*, Paris, Bureau de la Société de l'industrie fraternelle, 1845. (Wikimedia Commons)

French fleet. He had also recalled the influence of the French Knights within the Order of St. John, which had facilitated access to the island already in the XVII Century. In his letter to the Directory, soon after the conquest of La Valletta, Bonaparte had stressed the strategic importance of keeping the strongest position in the middle of the Mediterranean²⁷.

Malta being the main bone of contention between France and Britain in that fateful spring of 1803, the main purpose of the pamphlet should have been to reaffirm the legitimacy of the British possession of Malta, in order to block the enduring French strive for Egypt. The conclusion of the author was:

«...Great Britain must oppose a strong and persistent resistance to the expansion of France in the Levant ».

Two years later, in 1805, the same printing house, Hatchard, published a new, anonymous pamphlet that made the position of the British government regarding Malta abundantly clear: *The policy and interest of Great Britain with respect to Malta, summarily considered*.²⁸ The author of the paper explicitly suggested:

«1. that is indispensably necessary that Great Britain should employ the most efficacious means that she can devise, to guard against the possibility of France ever acquiring again the possession of Malta. 2. That, consistently with that object, and in necessary course to its attainment, is indispensable that Great Britain should establish the permanent presence of her power at some secure, and insular, position within the Mediterranean. 3. That the most simple and convenient, and at the same time the only certain and effectual, mode of attaining both these ends is that Great Britain should remain in possession of Malta».

Soon after the British declaration of war, on 26th May 1803, the French Army in Germany under the command of Lieutenant General Edouard Mortier invaded the Electorate of Hanover and occupied, its capital, on 4th June.

The French philosopher Charles de Villiers, who lived in Göttingen, had earlier published an *Appel aux officiers Français de l'Armée d'Hanovre*,²⁹ which

27 Napoléon BONAPARTE, *Pièces diverses et correspondance relatives aux opérations de l'Armée d'Orient en Egypte*, Baudoin, imprimeur di Corps législatif et du Tribunat, rue de Grenelle, faubourg Saint Germain, n° 1131, Paris, 1801.

28 ANONYMOUS, *The policy and interest of Great Britain, with respect to Malta, summarily considered*, Hatchard, London, 1805.

29 Charles DE VILLIERS, *Appel aux officiers français de l'Armée d'Hanovre qui peuvent et veulent mettre à profit le loisir de leur position, signé, Villiers, ci - devant capitaine d'artil-*

included a reference to Leibniz's memorandum. Hence, many French officers came to the Royal Library to read it.

Therefore, General Mortier asked the Director of the Royal Library, the philosopher Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, to make a copy of the Memorandum. Feder provided Mortier with a copy of the summary (most likely the *Breviarium*) of the Memorandum, which Leibniz wrote for the Prince Elector of Mainz. General Mortier conveyed the *Breviarium* to the First Consul with an enclosed letter where he remarked:

«J'ai cru qu'il ne vous serait point indifférent de le lire».

The First Consul, of course, was wholly unaware of Leibniz's project as was his Foreign Minister, Talleyrand. Bonaparte must have read the copy of the *Breviarium* as he wrote some side remarks before remitting it to Gaspard Monge, the Director of the Institut d'Égypte who, in 1815 during the «Hundred Days», finally deposited the document at the Institut de France.

The diplomat Michel-Ange Bernard Mangourit confirmed that Leibniz's proposal had been unknown to the French until 1803. He happened to be in Hanover on an official mission and wrote a comprehensive report, published in 1805: *Voyage en Hanovre fait dans les années 1803 et 1804*.

The report included two chapters (XIV and XV) dedicated to Leibniz's project where he excluded that Bonaparte had ever read it before the expedition to Egypt:

«..Il est d'autant plus certain que ce mémoire est resté ignoré jusqu'à la conquête du Hanovre que, s'il eût été connu lors de l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte, on en aurait parlé depuis et en diverses circonstances ; ce que l'on n'a pas fait...»³⁰.

In his book, Mangourit annexed a French translation of a pretended letter to Louis XIV, *De expeditione Aegyptiaca, epistola ad regem Franciae scripta*, which was composed of excerpts from the Memorandum.

lerie au service de la France, Lübeck, 1803.

30 Michel-Ange Bernard MANGOURIT, *Voyage en Hanovre fait dans les années 1803 et 1804, contenant la description de ce pays sous ses rapports, politique, religieux, agricole, commercial, minéralogique, etc. Le tableau des mœurs et usages de ses habitants ; des détails sur la chaîne du Harz et les anciennes divinités saxonnes ; les extraits du projet de la conquête de l'Égypte, rédigé par Leibnitz et présenté à Louis XIV, et des événements de la guerre de sept ans*, Dentu, Paris, 1805.

A mention of Leibniz's proposal to Louis XIV appeared in the Introduction - written by Charles Fourier - of the *Description de l'Égypte*³¹, published in 1809, under the supervision of Napoleon himself.

3 Leibniz is back: the Oriental crisis of 1840

In 1840, in the midst of the Oriental crisis, a volume was published by Marie-Gabriel-Joseph-Hyacinthe de Hoffmanns, reproducing Mangourit's translation of the *De expeditione Aegyptiaca* together with a *Projet d'expédition dans l'Inde par terre, concerté entre le Premier Consul et l'Empereur Paul I en mil huit cent*.³² The author, a former diplomat, had been a member of the Académie de Stanislas of Nancy in Lorraine since 1839. As a scholar in international law and diplomatic history, Hoffmanns had published some essays such as *le Traité du commerce et de la navigation de la France et des puissances étrangères depuis la paix de Westphalie* and had edited a *Guide Diplomatique* by Karl Martens.³³

Two years before, the official biographer of Leibniz, the German scholar Gottschalk Eduard Guhrauer, had presented Leibniz's *Mémoire* at the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* in Paris,³⁴ kicking off a Leibniz's revival within the scientific community. In itself, the publication by Hoffmanns of a reduced version of Leibniz's project, after Mangourit and more recently, Guhrauer, was not a literary discovery. The *Mémoire*, in Hoffmanns' pamphlet was preceded by a most appropriate quotation from a letter of General Kléber to the Directory, which clearly stressed the main flaw of the Egyptian expedition, *i.e.* the lack of a powerful navy:

«Je connais toute l'importance de la possession de l'Égypte: je di-

31 COMMISSION DES ARTS E DES SCIENCES, *Description de l'Égypte. Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'Armée française, publié par les ordres de Sa Majesté l'Empereur Napoléon le Grand*, Imprimerie impériale, Paris, 1809.

32 M. DE HOFFMANNS, *Mémoire de Leibniz à Louis XIV sur la Conquête de l'Égypte*, publié avec une préface et des notes par M.de Hoffmanns, suivi d'un *Projet d'expédition dans l'Inde, par terre, concerté entre le Premier Consul et l'Empereur Paul 1^{er} en mil huit cent*, Edouard Garnot, libraire-éditeur, Paris, 1840.

33 ACADEMIE DE SAINT STANISLAS. *Les académiciens. Notices biographiques des anciens membres de l'Académie*, Nancy, 2023, online.

34 Gottschalk Eduard GUHRAUER, *Mémoire sur le projet d'expédition en Égypte, présenté en 1672 à Louis XIV par Leibnitz*, Typographie de Firmin, Didot Frères, Paris, 1838.

sais en Europe, qu'elle était pour la France le point d'appui sur lequel elle pourrait remuer le système de commerce des quatre parties du monde; mais pour cela il faut un puissant levier; ce levier, c'est la marine.»

Hoffmanns refused to declare where the Leibniz's document came from. In order to protect his confidential sources, he hinted at the possibility that Leibniz's paper was in the archives of Versailles. Furthermore, the author referred to a *Mémoire* on Egypt, which was circulating at the Navy Secretariat under Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix Marquess de Castries (1780-1787).

Peculiar was the combination in the same volume of Leibniz's plan with the joint Franco-Russian project for an expedition to India, allegedly drafted in 1800. The objective of the expedition would have been to deliver Hindustan from the British yoke, as well as to open new trade routes for the "civilized nations" of Europe. To achieve this goal, an Army of 70,000 troops of the French Republic and of the Russian Empire should have been deployed overland to India.

A reminder preceded the Indian project:

«l'attentat contre la vie du Premier Consul, le 24 décembre 1800, et la mort tragique de l'Empereur Paul Ier, le 24 mars 1801, furent les funestes effets du Projet d'expédition dans l'Inde. On sait d'où partaient les coups».

The reminder hinted at a connection between the failed attempt on the life of Bonaparte, on Christmas'eve of 1800, and the assassination of Tsar Paul I, on 23 March 1801, which the author ascribed to the same instigator: Britain. The motivation behind both attempts would have been the British Government's determination to prevent the Franco-Russian expedition to India.

While Leibniz's *Mémoire* was the translation of an authentic document, albeit in a reduced version, the Indian project was a forgery.³⁵ The origin of the forgery was a pamphlet published in London- as verified by Professor Virgilio Ilari - in the review *Paris dans l'année 1801* by a French émigré, Jean Gabriel Peltier,³⁶ who was in close contact with the Foreign Office.³⁷

35 Muriel ATKIN, «The Pragmatic Diplomacy of Paul I: Russia's Relations with Asia, 1796-1801», *Slavic Review*, Vol 38, Issue 1, Cambridge, 1979.

36 Jean-Gabriel PELTIER, «Projet d'une Expédition dans l'Inde, par Terre», *Paris dans l'année 1801*, de l'imprimerie de T. Baylis, London, 1801.

37 Virgilio ILARI, «Napoleone e la spedizione indiana di Paolo I», *Rivista Europea di Studi*

If the plan of a joint Franco-Russian expedition to India was a fake, a real Russian invasion of India was ongoing at the time of Paul's assassination. The Tsar had issued orders, already in mid-January, to the Ataman of the Don Cossacks, General Vasilii Orlov, to lead a corps of 23,000 troops to India starting from Orenburg. The march of the Cossacks began at the end of February and the expeditionary force had hardly reached the Aral Sea when the order came from the new Emperor Alexander to end the operation and withdraw to Russia.

The purpose of the forgery, in 1801, was clear: to spoil the peace negotiations between Britain and France, which resulted in the conclusion of the Treaty of Amiens. Essentially, both the Indian plan forgery and the 1803 pamphlet, based on Leibniz's summary (see the previous chapter), were part of the information warfare waged against France at the time of the Peace of Amiens. The French Royalists, their British supporters and most likely the British Government itself, may have been behind the authors.

The two papers, the *Egyptian* and the *Indian*, published by Hoffmanns in the same volume, however, should be read within the framework of the Oriental crisis of 1839-40. The "diplomatic Waterloo" suffered by France following the London Convention of 1840 had rekindled French nationalism.

In order to prevent the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British Government of Lord Palmerston had gathered Austrian, Russian and Prussian support to stop the Egyptian Army of Muhammad Ali, who enjoyed French diplomatic support. On 15th July 1840, in London, the four powers signed the Convention for the Pacification of the Levant with the Sublime Porte and conveyed an ultimatum to Muhammad Ali demanding him to withdraw his troops or face armed intervention. Relying on French support, which did not ultimately materialize, Muhammad Ali rejected the ultimatum.

The joint Austrian-Turkish-British amphibious force, under the command of Admiral Stopford and Commodore Charles Napier, decisively defeated Ibrahim Pasha's Army in Syria. After taking Beirut, Sidon and St John of Acre, Napier was able to dictate the armistice terms to the Egyptians in the harbour of Alexandria.³⁸

Napoleonici, I, 2, dicembre 2020, pp. 275-292, Naples, 2020.

38 Henry LAURENS, *Les Crises d'Orient, 1768-1914*, Fayard, Paris, 2017.



Ernst Gebauer (1799–1865). Ritratto (1823) del generale Heinrich Menu von Minutoli (1772-1846), da *Zerstört-Entführt-Verschollen; Die Verluste der preußischen Schlösser* (Wikimedia Commons)

The political climate in France, in 1839 and especially in 1840, was already particularly tense for internal reasons. The Oriental Crisis just added fuel to the political debate, radicalizing the confrontation between, on one side, the conservative right, keen to preserve the Congress of Vienna order and on the other side, the nationalist left. Liberals, republicans, utopian socialists and bonapartists, building on the Napoleonic legacy, were totally in support of Egypt in the name of the principle of nationality recently applied to Greece.

The “oriental fever” reached its climax in the summer of 1840. Britain and Prussia, in particular, were the targets of nationalist demonstrations with some advocating the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine. Ironically, Prime Minister Adolphe Thiers, who was a supporter of Muhammad Ali, had evoked Leibniz’s proposal to Louis XIV in his *History of the French Revolution*.³⁹ In such an overheated atmosphere, twenty-nine pamphlets related to the *Question d’Orient* appeared in the course of 1840, the majority of them supporting the Egyptian cause.⁴⁰

In this framework, it is no surprise that Hoffmanns, who clearly belonged to the nationalist camp, published two documents, originally conceived as tools of British-Royalist propaganda⁴¹, aimed at highlighting British perfidy. The Indian document could also be interpreted as a hint at a future anti-British Franco-Russian alliance, which actually materialized 50 years later, in 1894.⁴²

In 1842, another French historian, Auguste Vallet de Viriville, published a new translation of the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* with an introduction detailing the history of Leibniz’s proposal and of the discovery of the manuscript.⁴³

39 Adolphe THIERS, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, Tome X, Ch I, page 65, Paris, 1839.

40 Jean-François FIGEAC, «La crise de 1839-1840 : question d’Orient ou question Française?», *Parlements, Revue d’Histoire Politique*, 2018/2, no 28, pp. 169-189, Editions Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2018.

41 Onno KLOPP, *Leibnitii de expeditione aegyptiaca Ludovico XIV Francia Regi proponenda scripta quae supersunt omnia adjuncta praefatione historica critica*, Impensis Klindworthianis, Hannover, 1864.

42 George F. KENNAN, *The Fateful Alliance, France, Russia, and the coming of the First World War*, Manchester University Press, Pantheon Books, New York, 1954.

43 Auguste VALLET DE VIRIVILLE, «1671 Projet de conquête de l’Égypte proposé par Leibnitz», *La revue indépendante*, Vol II, pages 780-809, Paris, 1842.

4 Minutoli and Mahan

In 1841, one year after Hoffmann's pamphlet, an article dedicated to Leibniz's Egyptian project appeared in Berlin on a professional military review containing a free translation in German of *De expeditione Aegyptiaca*.⁴⁴

The author, Heinrich Menu von Minutoli was a Lieutenant General of the Prussian Army and a founding member of the Militärische Gesellschaft, established in 1801 by Gerhard von Scharnhorst, which included the main representatives of the Prussian school of strategy.

Moreover, Minutoli had led a scientific mission to Egypt in 1820-1822, providing the first archaeological collection for the new Egyptian Museum in Berlin. Therefore, he added his first-hand experience of the Egyptian reality to his professional knowledge of strategy

His sources were the *Voyage en Hanovre* of Mangourit and Guhrauer's works on Leibniz, including a historical essay under the title: *Kurmainz in der Epoche von 1672*.

He made also reference to an anonymous pamphlet of 1806, whose real author was Gustav von Schlabrendorff, a well-known Prussian anti-Napoleonic writer who lived in Paris⁴⁵. The paper included, in attachment IV, Mangourit's translation of the *de expeditione aegyptiaca*.

Although being published in German, it falsely claimed to be a translation from an English original. The place of printing, St Petersburg, was also a fabrication to avoid Napoleonic censorship. Two years later, the English writer and war correspondent, Henry Crabb Robinson, translated the essay into English, adding one more work to the anti-Napoleonic literature produced in London.

Schlabrendorff's essay wrongly pretended that Lazare Carnot had been the first to receive a copy of Leibniz's proposal in 1797 at Rastatt, during the peace negotiations. Therefore, in his introduction, Minutoli affirmed that Carnot had shared Leibniz's project with the other members of the Directory, who would have been glad to dispatch the young and ambitious General to Egypt.

44 Johann Heinrich Carl Menu von MINUTOLI, «Leibniz als Kriegspolitiker», *Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und Geschichte des Krieges*, Ernst Siegfried Mittler, Berlin, Posen und Bromberg, 1841.

45 ANONYMOUS, *Napoleon Buonaparte, wie er leibt und lebt, und das französische Volk unter ihm*, Peter Hammer, Saint Petersburg, 1806.

Despite his utmost admiration for his great fellow countryman, Minutoli sharply criticized Leibniz' Egyptian project under several aspects.

First, he noticed the role assumed by Leibniz as *Kriegspolitker*, a term whose literal translation may be *a war policymaker* or, with reference to the concept of grand strategy, *a strategist*. As a first remark, he focused on Leibniz's endeavour to justify an «offensive war against a country on which France could not claim any indisputable right».

«Nun sei es mir vergönnt, einige Bemerkungen zu dieser Denkschrift unseres berühmten Landesmannes hinzuzufügen, der hier als Kriegspolitiker auftretend, die Gründe darzulegen versucht, die Frankreich damals bewegen konnten, einen Angriffskrieg gegen ein Land zu unternehmen, auf welches es keineswegs ein unbestrittenes Recht hatte.»

He then defined such a hypothetical war as a «war of opportunity» (*Gelegenheitskrieg*), a concept similar to that of «war of choice»⁴⁶, admonishing that, in planning such a war, every aspect matters: costs and benefits, neutrality or support by neighbouring countries.

Moreover, according to Minutoli, no political combination would have been sufficient to launch a military operation without a previous assessment of the means required to achieve the war goal (*Kriegszweck*). Minutoli stressed the need to achieve from the very beginning numerical superiority and to appraise the internal situation of the country, its finances, the strength of the army and its fortresses. In developing an operational plan, he deemed crucial a thorough knowledge of the target country since, quoting Jean Charles de Folard, the «knowledge that can be inferred from the maps is not enough».

Not only such a knowledge should have included an appraisal of the physical geography of the country but also of its coastal waters and climate as well, in order to avoid starting military operations in the wrong season of the year.

Recalling several examples drawn from military history, from the antiquity to the recent French invasion of Algeria, Minutoli, underlined the danger of epidemics linked to seasonal factors, such as the one that had decimated the Tunisian expedition of Louis IX.

The Prussian General also highlighted the risks inherent in overseas expeditions and with explicit reference to Nelson's victory in Abukir, he pointed out the

46 Richard HAASS, Wars of Choice, *The Washington Post*, 23rd November 2003, Washington, 2003.

risk of losing control of sea lines of communication.

In the same vein, he recalled, as a negative example, the utter failure of the British expedition of 1807, despite British naval dominance and previous understandings with some Mameluke chieftains.

Looking at the political situation at the time when Leibniz drafted his plan, Minutoli also stressed the poor results of Louis XIV's war of revenge (*Rachekrieg*) against the Dutch.

Counterfactually, he perceived a window of opportunity for a French *coup de main* in Egypt in the timeframe between the Peace of Nijmegen in 1678 and 1688, when the 100 ships strong navy created by Colbert had achieved sea dominance in the Mediterranean.

As an example of such a mastery of the Mediterranean Sea, Minutoli recalled the bombardment by the French navy, between 1682 and 1688, of Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli and Genoa. Shelling a harbour, however, was not like invading a country, which required the deployment of several transport ships in addition to the naval squadron. France, anyway, could not have undertaken such an endeavour, according to Minutoli, after the death of Colbert.

Minutoli called into question Leibniz's estimate of the strength of the Turkish militia in Egypt (30,000), adding at least 15,000 to 20,000 Mamelukes and 20,000 Bedouins. Furthermore, the fanaticism of the population could have well increased the number of fighters against an invading Christian Army. A recent case in point had been the revolt of the local population against Bonaparte's Army, in particular the uprising in Cairo.

According to the Prussian General, Leibniz, who took for granted the availability of the Maltese harbours as well as of the uninhabited and barren island of Lampedusa, had belittled the challenges of a long sea line of communication. While conceding that the fortifications of Alexandria, Damietta and Cairo were an easy prey, if taken by storm, Minutoli stressed that disembarking an invasion force in Alexandria would have slowed down the pace of the French advance.

He was not convinced by Leibniz's assertion that the French Army would have had enough troops both to launch an expedition to Egypt and to defend France from a continental aggression at the same time. Moreover, Minutoli dismissed Leibniz's analogy between the physical geography of the Netherlands and that of Egypt.

He did not agree either on the likelihood of a coalition of Christian powers in

support of the French conquest of Egypt, as wished for by Leibnitz. A coalition among the United Provinces, Britain, and some other European powers to counter France's expansionism in the Mediterranean would have been a more likely outcome.

He agreed instead with Leibnitz's reference to the lesson learned from the history of the Crusades: the control of Egypt was necessary to hold Palestine and Syria. As demonstrated by Bonaparte and Muhammad Ali's campaigns, the reverse was also true: Egypt's defence hinged on control over Syria.

Finally, by defining Leibnitz's project «a beautiful dream», Minutoli called into question the idealistic justification that the enterprise would be for the sake of humankind and of Christendom even at the price of thousands of human lives.

«Ne faut 'il pas toujours sacrifier quelqu'un au bonheur général? On dédaignera de s'attacher à des considérations aussi misérables, lorsqu'il se présente de si grands avantages, provenant d'un motif aussi sacré, puisque cette nouvelle entreprise a pour but le triomphe du christianisme et l'avantage du genre humain».

In Minutoli's judgement Leibnitz's project belonged to the kind of plans envisaged by some European powers to conquer the East Indies or the Barbary states, which looked appealing on paper but could not always be executed and in any case not without overcoming huge hurdles.

On the contrary, Mahan, the American theoretician of Sea Power, highly appreciated Leibnitz's *Consilium Aegyptiacum* in his landmark essay *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*.⁴⁷ He described it as a lost opportunity and the road not taken to the creation of a great maritime and commercial empire.

In his historical work, Mahan briefly described and praised the efforts of Colbert, «*the greatest and the wisest of Louis' ministers*», to establish great trading companies, to encourage export-led manufacturers, to introduce duties on foreign shipping and the monopoly on trade with French colonies. The construction of great harbours and the built-up of a great merchant shipping laid the base for the creation of a first class navy, which could have restrained Britain and diminished Dutch sea power.

«At the end of twelve years, everything was flourishing, everything was rich in the State, which was in utter confusion when he took charge of the finances and marine».

47 Alfred. T. MAHAN, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1890.

Quoting French historian Henry Martin, who highlighted in his *History of France*⁴⁸ that:

«The interest of France seemed to be peace in Europe and America; a mysterious voice of the past and of the future, called her warlike activity on other shores».

Mahan stressed how the voice «found expression through the mouth of Leibniz».

By diverting Louis XIV's expansionism from the land to the sea, the implementation of Leibniz's plan could have transformed France into «a great power, the elements of which, thanks to the genius of Colbert, he had in his hands».

According to Mahan, Bonaparte, more than a century later, tried to realize Leibniz's project but he «did not have, as Louis had, a navy equal to the task proposed». Therefore, Mahan defined the beginning of the War of Holland, in the spring of 1672, as the fateful moment when:

«...Louis, with his kingdom and navy in the highest pitch of efficiency, stood at the point where the roads parted, and then took the one which settled that France should not be the power of the sea. This decision, which killed Colbert and ruined the prosperity of France, was felt in its consequences from generation to generation afterward, as the great navy of England, in war after war, swept the seas, insuring the growing wealth of the island kingdom through exhausting strifes, while drying up the external resources of French trade and inflicting consequent misery.»

The decision not to become a sea power, according to Mahan, also had consequences on the repeated French efforts to prevail over the British in India, including those of Bonaparte.

After the considerations on the long term consequences of Louis XIV's rejection of Leibniz's plan, Mahan detailed the benefits of the conquest of Egypt,

«That country which, facing both the Mediterranean and Eastern Seas, gave control of the great commercial route which in our day has been completed by the Suez Canal».

Consistent with his theory on the importance of «choke points», Mahan remarked that the occupation of Egypt would have ensured the control not only of the trade route to India and the Far East, but also of the Levant.

Therefore, to achieve mastery in the Mediterranean and open the route of the

48 Henry MARTIN, *Histoire de France depuis le temps plus reculés jusqu'en 1789*, Furne, libraire-éditeur, Paris, 1858.

Red Sea, France should have seized bases «on either side of Egypt», such as Malta, Cyprus and Aden, as Britain did for India. The possession of the naval bases would have transformed France into a great sea power.

The decision of Louis XIV to move against the United Provinces cost France a lengthy war both at sea and on land, which resulted in the consolidation of the *Pré Carré* but paved the way to the decline of the French navy and maritime commerce.

Britain, instead, skillfully exploited the French war with the Dutch to build up its maritime empire. Mahan noticed that, ironically, the major French naval victories of the war had occurred in the Mediterranean, not far from Egypt.

The assessment of Leibniz's plan by the representatives of two schools of strategy, Minutoli and Mahan, are evidence of the interest raised by the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* during the nineteenth century.

The two schools were also the expression of the land power of Prussia and the sea power of the Anglo-Saxon thalassocracies.

When Minutoli wrote his article, in 1841, the Oriental crisis was recent. Egypt had been at the centre of the crisis and memories of Bonaparte's expedition were fresh. Captain Helmut von Moltke had participated in the conflict as a military adviser in the Ottoman Sultan's Army.⁴⁹

The Royal Navy had, once again, won the war over Egypt, this time under the command of Commodore Napier.⁵⁰

In 1890, when Mahan wrote his essay, the Suez Canal had been open for 20 years, Britain had taken control, first of the Suez Canal Company and, in 1882, of Egypt as a whole, by establishing a protectorate.

Minutoli focused on the philosopher's lack of professionalism and military experience. The Prussian general, who had lived through the storm of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, could not condone – being war the domain of uncertainty – Leibniz's overoptimistic plan. Interestingly, Minutoli, by recalling Nelson's victory at Abukir, attributed the utmost importance to naval superiority and to the availability of safe and secure bases. He also noticed, like Mahan fifty years later, that the endeavour would have not been possible without Colbert.

49 Helmut von MOLTKE, *Briefe über Zustände und Begebenheiten in der Türkei aus den Jahren 1835 bis 1839*, Ernst Siegfried Mittler, Berlin, 1841.

50 Charles NAPIER, *The War in Syria*, John W. Parker, London, 1842.



Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), Portrait by J. E. Purdy. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. Public Domain (Wikimedia Commons).

From a broader perspective, Minutoli was deeply skeptical of the wisdom of expeditionary warfare, in particular of invading an Islamic country like Egypt. Finally, he expressed a damning judgement on the assumed idealistic motivations of such «wars of opportunity». His *caveat* against what we call today «liberal peace building» seems quite relevant to this date.

Conversely, Leibniz's plan fitted quite well within Mahan's theory of sea power. Despite the successful mercantilist and maritime policies of Colbert –according to Mahan, Louis, by neglecting Leibniz's advice, had lost the opportunity to create the sea empire that Britain subsequently built. The possession of Egypt would have been the catalyst for achieving mastery of the Mediterranean and of the Red Sea and the springboard for the conquest of India.

As a result, Louis' determination to punish the United Provinces with a land campaign and to pursue continental hegemony only played into the hands of Britain, which achieved sea dominance at the expense of its two most dangerous rivals: France and the Netherlands.

5 Conclusion

Contrary to common belief the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* remained a theoretical exercise with no political or strategic consequences and it had no influence whatsoever on the planning of Bonaparte's *expedition d'Egypte*. Despite his proteiform genius, apparently Leibniz did not grasp all the diplomatic and strategic implications of his project.

Pomponne's seemingly dismissive assessment «that the Crusades had been out of fashion since the times of Saint Louis» was not entirely unjustified. In fact, at the time, the substitution of Louis XIV's continental strategy with one relying on sea power was not a viable option, given the failure of Djidjelli's expedition and of the defence of Candia. Moreover, the French occupation of Egypt would have meant the end of the traditional Franco-Ottoman alliance, jeopardizing French trade with the Levant.

Ironically, while Leibniz's project has never been considered by French policymakers, it ended up being used as a propaganda tool by Britain against France. Furthermore, the real intent of the British information warfare in exploiting the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* and the reputation of its author was mainly to retain the control of Malta. The instrumental use of Leibniz's project continued during

the Oriental Crisis of 1840, this time by the French nationalist camp with an anti-British bias.

The counterfactual analyses of the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* by Minutoli and Mahan came to conclusions in line with their respective schools of strategic thought. Whereas Mahan's positive judgment of Leibniz's plan is clearly aimed at providing further evidence of the importance of sea power and may appear outdated, Minutoli's critical assessment of such a plan for a «war of opportunity», is still relevant in our times.

Recalling the landmark article on the «war of choice» written by the US diplomat and scholar Richard Haass, in the wake of the 2003 war in Iraq, the *Consilium Aegyptiacum* may also represent an early blueprint for contemporary «wars of choice» and «liberal peace building».

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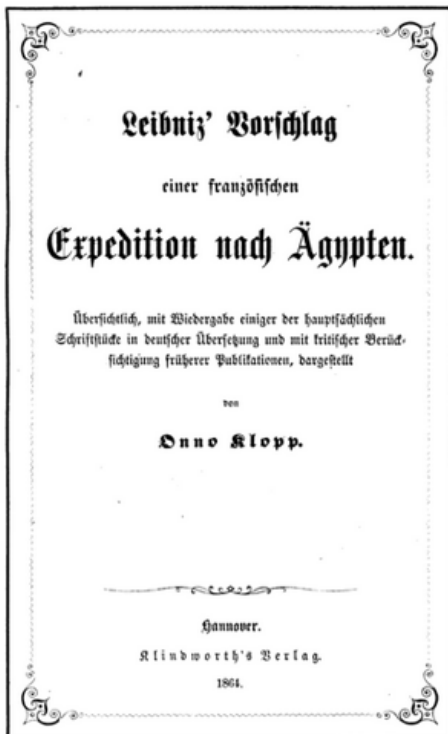
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Lev Nikolaevič Tolstoj in uniforme di capitano d'artiglieria

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