Imperial Voyages with the Armchair Traveler:
Looking at Landscapes in French Scenic Wallpaper

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From its inception, French scenic wallpaper was meant to defy the viewer's previous conceptions of wallpaper. Even today it is nearly impossible to see a set of scenic wallpaper and not comment on the fact that it is a long, continuous decoration. In the many books dedicated to scenic wallpaper installation and preservation, one is often advised to place the scenic wallpaper in a room with simple mural moldings and as little furniture as possible.[1] In short, these wallpapers are meant to be seen, but what exactly does one see when looking at scenic wallpaper? How is the decoration designed so that the wallpaper is seen in this way?

By scrutinizing a few examples of scenic wallpaper from Zuber and Dufour, the most prominent wallpaper printers of the 19th century, one will find that these wallpapers actively anchor the viewer's attention to the overall aesthetic of the scene while preventing the viewer from recognizing the devices employed by the wallpaper printers to present a product that is both beautiful and affirms France's power and authority in the world. While it seems strange that such messages would be presented in something as trivial as wallpaper, a closer inspection of some scenic wallpapers such as *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique, Les Français en Egypte* and *Bataille d'Austerlitz* shows not only the French desire for power in the Pacific, but their military prowess in North Africa and Europe. Surprisingly, while much has been written on the history and production of French scenic wallpaper, not enough attention has been paid to the actual subject matter of scenic wallpapers. This essay argues that a greater consideration of the devices used in depicting different cultures in these wallpapers would show the viewer that these

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[1] Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: An International History and Illustrated Survey from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), 55.

seemingly benign wall coverings actually offer a very politically charged and often imperialist view of the subjects that they represent.

Scenic Wallpaper as Landscape

With few exceptions, scenic wallpaper nearly always depicts several scenes or arrangements of people unified by a continuous landscape. Because of this, scenic wallpapers can generally be considered landscapes, and it is therefore imperative to understand the medium of landscape and its social constructions as the foundation for scenic wallpaper. As previously stated, these wallpapers draw attention to themselves based on their novelty as a complete panoramic landscape on wallpaper as opposed to a repeated pattern.   W.J.T. Mitchell refers to this as "an appreciation of a total *gestalt...*"[2] As a result, the viewer remembers the wallpaper as an entire scene or how it looks in the room in which it has been hung, and, though the viewer may look at individual figures in the wallpaper, one will more likely marvel at their level of detail as part of the whole work instead of pondering *how* they are depicted. In *Landscape and Power,* Mitchell puts forth nine theses regarding landscapes, of which, the first six are particularly useful for critical viewers of landscapes:

1. Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium
2. Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other. As such it is like money: good for nothing in itself but expressive of a potentially limitless reserve of value.
3. Like money, landscape is a social hieroglyph that conceals the actual basis of its value. It does so by naturalizing its conventions and conventionalizing its nature.
4. Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture; it is both represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.
5. Landscape is a medium found in all cultures.

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[2] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii.

6. Landscape is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism.[3]

While all of the above are relevant to this essay it is imperative that the reader understand the sixth thesis as it most directly relates to the viewing of scenic wallpaper. In *Landscape and Power*, Mitchell explains that landscape might best be seen as the "dream work of imperialism" in that it is a product of the desire for unhindered expansion.[4]

In a 1984 essay on perspective and the evolution of landscape Denis Cosgrove traces the geographical interest in landscape back to the development of linear perspective during the Italian Renaissance, a period that no doubt influenced the nineteenth century French society that produced scenic wallpapers. While Cosgrove's ideas differ from Mitchell's in that the former defines landscape as "a way of seeing the external world" his discussion regarding the use of perspective as being historically linked with the exercise of power over space bears a similar significance to this essay as Mitchell's imperial landscape. The Italian Renaissance and the Enlightenment were both periods in which there was a particular interest in humanism, scientific empiricism and the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. It therefore is not surprising that the use of perspective in landscape, which Cosgrove explains is closely bound to the appropriation of rural space by the urban bourgeoisie, found its way to scenic wallpaper, a type of decoration that was at first intended for the bourgeoisie of the French Enlightenment.[5] Cosgrove uses Pietro Perugino's representation of *Christ Giving to Saint Peter the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven* as an example of how the use of linear perspective provides a view of a city that appeals to the rational mind in its orderly

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[3] Ibid., 5.
[4] Ibid., 10.
[5] Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 10, no. 1 (1985): 46.

presentation and organization (fig. 1).[6] While French scenic wallpaper does not follow linear perspective as rigidly as Pietro Perugino and other artists of the Italian Renaissance, there is usually a sense of scale and recession into the horizon that clearly derives from this method. Most importantly though, the figures in scenic wallpaper are always arranged in some type of orderly manner; crowds of Pacific Islanders sit in neat semi-circles around dancers and Americans form a polite crowd at West Point. Scenic wallpaper generally conveys to the viewer that if one were able to enter the world of the wallpaper, it would be a rational space where the viewer would not feel threatened. While the exact execution of perspective in scenic wallpaper may differ from Perugino's urban landscape —both incidentally are landscapes that are applied directly to a mural surface— they each suppress evidence of tension, presenting an image of order and proportioned control, thereby appealing to their respective intended humanist urban audiences.[7] One significant difference between the landscapes of the Italian Renaissance and scenic wallpaper is that in most cases, Italian Renaissance landscapes were painted by artists specifically for wealthy and important patrons. Scenic wallpaper on the other hand, was, relatively speaking, a mass-produced form of decoration that could be purchased by slightly more modest patrons. With scenic wallpaper the bourgeoisie do not have to go to the Vatican or the Louvre to simply see the controlled landscape but could actually participate in that control in his or her own homes and on his or her own terms.

By combining Cosgrove's idea of landscape as a way of seeing and Mitchell's fourth thesis that classifies landscape as a scene mediated by culture, one can partially define landscape as a way of presenting and viewing space through the eyes of a

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[6] Ibid., 49.
[7] Ibid., 58.

particular culture. Landscape not only reflects the views of the society that created it, but it represents space so that this view will continue to be upheld. In this sense, landscape is like a myth.[8] As the reader may find in the following section, scenic wallpaper landscapes appear to be realistic depictions because they show many different aspects of nature and human life in impressive detail. However, the inclusion of more detail does not equate to a more truthful representation, this is part of the myth of scenic wallpaper. Many details could be inventions of the artist, or may belong to a culture that is different than the one depicted in that particular set of scenic wallpaper. These wallpapers are meant to appeal to consumers, and are constructed with the idea of seducing the viewer. The fact that the artist took the time to add these details naturalizes them and makes them seem researched or true. As critical viewers of landscapes and scenic wallpaper, details in depiction should not be taken for granted and should be considered carefully and questioned, not simply admired.

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique: An Introduction to Scenic Wallpaper

Printed in 1804 by Joseph Dufour et Cie[9], *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was one of the first known scenic wallpapers (fig. 2).[10] It portrays the inhabitants of fifteen different Pacific regions set in an exotic tropical environment.[11] Like many scenic wallpapers, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* presents its viewers with a lush landscape

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[8] This term is borrowed from Roland Barthe's usage of myth as meaning a social construction whose primary goal is to be believed and perpetuated and does so by naturalizing the construction that may have no basis in fact.

[9] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, trans. Deke Dusinberre and others (Paris: Flammarion; London: Thames & Hudson, 2000),, 16.

[10] This title can be translated as "Savages of the Pacific Sea"

[11] The prospectus created by Joseph Dufour to accompany the wallpaper lists the inhabitants of the following regions in order of their appearance in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*: Nootka [Nootka Sound, Canada], Ulietea [Raiatea, French Polynesia],Happaee [Lifuka, Tonga], Tahiti, Tanna [Tanna, Vanuatu], Sandwich Islands [Hawai'i], New Zealand, the Straits of Prince William [Prince William Sound, Alaska], Annamooka [Nomuka, Tonga], New Caledonia, Tongatabo [Tongatapu, Tonga], St. Christine [Tahuata, Marquesas Islands], Marquise Islands, Easter Island and Pelow [Palau]. Susan Hall, ed., *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales; Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2000), 34-40.

that is rendered in vivid colors and inhabited by graceful figures. Many words have been devoted to extolling the beauty of this wallpaper, however, this essay will attempt to abstain from discussing its aesthetic virtues and instead focus on the types of questions that a critical viewer should consider when looking at scenic wallpaper: Who created this wallpaper? Why did they choose this theme? How is this piece influenced by the society for which it was created? How is this wallpaper different from other types of art created with this theme? Did the artist actually travel to the places depicted in the wallpaper? Hopefully, by answering these questions the viewer will come to understand that scenic wallpaper, like Mitchell's Landscape, is a medium of exchange mediated by culture. It is the responsibility of today's viewer to recognize the conventions of the culture that created scenic wallpaper, how they affect the represented place and people, and what these representations signify. Luckily, these conventions are easy to spot in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* and so it will provide us with a good introduction to scenic wallpaper.

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique was designed by Jean Gabriel Charvet, an artist known for his many studies of exotic flora, fauna and landscapes that he completed while working for his uncle in Guadeloupe.[12] It is suggested that his inspiration for the wallpaper came from a combination of these travels in the Caribbean and hearing about the discoveries of Captain Cook.[13] Charvet was often known to collaborate with Joseph Dufour who had established a wallpaper printing business with his brother in central

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[12] Susan Hall, ed., *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, 21.

[13] Ibid. For the sake of our discussion, this suggestion that Charvet's depiction of the islands of the Pacific, several of which France was hoping to annex at the time, was partly inspired by his visit to an island that had been a possession of France since the seventeenth century is by no means trivial.

France.[14] *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was presented at the 1806 French Industrial Exposition.   Along with one other scenic wallpaper depicting Switzerland made by Dufour's rival, Zuber, this was the first public appearance of large panoramic wallpapers composed of several panels.[15] These scenic wallpapers were made through a printing process where a wood block was carved to print each color, one person depicted in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* may have required as many as seven woodblocks to print their skin color alone, and hundreds of woodblocks were used to make the complete panorama.[16]

These new scenic wallpapers were expensive and quite risky to produce.[17] While one might think that the recent invention of the panoramic wallpaper would provide enough novelty to make it profitable, wallpaper manufacturers needed fashionable subjects that could be made visually appealing.[18] *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* is undeniably appealing and at the time of its production would have been considered very fashionable. There was a great interest in the Pacific during the late eighteenth century, reports of new discoveries captivated Europeans and Americans. Captain Cook was so adored that accounts of his Pacific voyages were rapidly translated into French, despite the fact that Cook's native England was constantly at odds with France.[19] Costume books, also known as "galleries of nations", became a popular way for Europeans to learn about the crafts, appearance and societies of Pacific Islanders. These books emphasized

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, 16.

[16] Susan Hall, ed., 23.

[17] Martin Terry, "The Voyages of Captain Cook: a Pacific theme in French decorative arts," in The *French-Australian Cultural Connection: papers from a symposium held at the University of New South Wales, 16-17 September 1983*, ed. Anne-Marie Nisbet and Maurice Blackman (Kensington, New South Wales: School of French, University of New South Wales and the CEEFA, 1984), 175.

[18] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, 104.

[19] Martin Terry, "The Voyages of Captain Cook: a Pacific theme in French decorative arts," 175.

the comparative study of man in a manner similar to a book featuring popular domesticated cat breeds. These books were likely inspired by the Enlightenment idea of scientific empiricism and depicting what is observed, however this approach led to the presentation of subjects as specimens and not as fellow human beings. Costume books about Pacific Islanders were not only widely distributed in the late eighteenth century, but their format, showing people from different regions in what seems to be a "group picture" configuration undoubtedly inspired the compositions of the many Pacific peoples seamlessly depicted in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*.[20]

Like the majority of the wallpaper's intended viewers, Jean Gabriel Charvet had never traveled to the Pacific, and even though he was inspired by the discoveries of Captain Cook, none of the depictions of Pacific Islanders in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* are taken directly from the artists of Captain Cook's voyages, but rather from the costume books described above. Although Dufour acknowledges that artistic license took place in the creation of the wallpaper, he also believes this wallpaper serves to intrigue and educate the viewer.[21] Bernard Smith disagrees, stating that Charvet's "...colorful elaborations however did more to satisfy the delight in the exotic...than it did to convey accurate information, which was now distanced four or sometimes five times from the original field drawings upon which the designs were ultimately based".[22] While Smith is absolutely correct in his assessment of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* as a representation of Pacific Islanders, this wallpaper can still be seen as educational in that it

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[20]Rüdiger Joppien, "The Artistic Bequest of Captain Cook's Voyages—Popular Imagery in European Costume Books of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *Captain James Cook and His Times,* Ed. Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 1979), 190. This format is misleading in that many of these people actually lived as far apart from one another as New Zealand is to Alaska.

[21] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, 173.

[22] Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 113.

conveys information about its *intended audience* very accurately. Through each step from a voyaging artist's field sketch, to engravings, costume books and finally the wallpaper, popular European ideas about Pacific Islanders became more and more exaggerated making them easy for the modern viewer to understand.

A common theme found in many paintings, and some written descriptions, of Pacific Islanders created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the idea of the "noble savage".[23] The noble savage is "natural man" and exemplifies the way mankind lived before it was corrupted by the artifice of complex civilizations. This backhanded complement is frequently employed visually by depicting Pacific Islander bodies draped in fabric like the Ancient Greeks and gracefully posed in positions that are reminiscent of classical sculpture. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* is no exception, all of the figures seem to wear flowing robes and the classical poses are too numerous to count. Three Tahitian women dancing recall classical images of the Three Graces, companions to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. While the idea of the "noble savage" led to flattering representations of the Pacific Islanders in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, these depictions are not at all as educational as Dufour suggests, rather, the inhabitants of Nootka Sound in the wallpaper's first panel seem more like Pacific Islander dolls positioned by an art savvy child in the same poses as Michelangelo's *Creation* (fig. 3).

Another common device employed by eighteenth and nineteenth century European artists when depicting "savages" was the display of extremely desirable bodies to distract the viewer from unpleasant politics. A famous example of this is a portrait of a woman named Poetua who was kidnapped and held prisoner by Captain Cook (fig. 4). However in her portrait painted by Cook's artist John Webber, her calm demeanor and

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[23] Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 5.

exposed breasts distract the viewer from the violence surrounding her, instead drawing attention to how sexually desirable she is.[24] In *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* the image of three Tahitian women dancing draws the viewer's focus, note that the woman in the center is bare breasted, while just adjacent to them a battle is taking place (fig. 5). Without reading the accompanying information provided by Dufour, the viewer would never be able to figure out that the ships in the middle ground of strips VIII and IX are actually depicting the battle in Hawai'i during which Captain Cook lost his life.[25] Dufour also states that his printers took great care to show huts belonging to Hawaiian priests that were burned by Cook's crew as punishment for killing their Captain.[26] The battle is difficult to see and the burnt huts are impossible to find, the whole scene just looks like a group of ships pulling into a bay. One could easily mistake the presence of these ships for an homage to the discoveries of Captain Cook.

Gender roles in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* also follow conventions of bodily portrayals seen in eighteenth century paintings and engravings. As discussed above, women were often eroticized; this is most commonly done by revealing a part of the body that drapery seems to have slipped off or showing women with clothing that is not covering their breasts. Several examples of the latter can be found throughout *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. If women were meant to embody desirability, men were the epitome of virility. Groups of men are often shown working or engaging in activities that display their strength; there is a very noticeable scene of Tongan men wrestling (fig.

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[24] Margaret Jolly, "From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i: Eroticism and Exoticism in Representations of the Pacific," in *Sites of Desire: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly (Chicago and London: University Press of Chicago, 1997), 103.
[25] Dufour's prospectus states, "On these two strips we have endeavoured to represent the spectacle of the death of Captain Cook on the Island of Hawai'i, February 14, 1779." Susan Hall, ed., *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, 36.
[26] Ibid., 31.

6), whose poses seem to reference classical gladiator images. Such images of men and women of the Pacific islands serve to illustrate the binary opposition between the world in which these "savages" inhabit and the orderly home in which the wallpaper is hung.

However, compared to other cultures depicted in later scenic wallpapers, the figures in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* are not made out to be as "other" as they could be. Most of the Pacific Islanders shown have incredibly pale skin and although they are adorned in clothing that would be considered strange to Europeans, none of the people depicted in this wallpaper are shown with tattoos. As one can see in the portrait of Poetua (fig. 4), it is not entirely uncommon for certain groups of Pacific Islanders to be shown with fair skin, particularly the groups that were described favorably by Captain Cook. However, this wallpaper differs from almost every other depiction of Pacific Islanders in that they are not shown with tattoos, this may be due to the fact that bourgeois Europeans at the time found tattoos to be distasteful, and though Dufour wanted to educate his viewers, his chief concern was pleasing them, so while many of the figures in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* are shown wearing armbands and other odd accoutrements, none appear to have been indelibly marked with what would have been considered repulsive tattoos.

As one of the first scenic wallpapers, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* set many precedents for the genre; its employment of classical imagery is echoed in several other sets of scenic wallpapers and its use of landscape to unify several scenes was still being used thirty years after it was first printed. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* also began a tradition of celebratory French themes in scenic wallpaper. The Tahitians, prominently featured in this wallpaper, were of particular importance to the French after the explorer

Louis de Bougainville visited Tahiti in 1768 and dubbed it New Cythera, after the mythical island of Aphrodite.[27] However, as Martin Terry suggests, the idea of French glory is fairly subtle in this particular wallpaper, whereas it is more overtly stated in the later wallpapers, namely *Les Français en Egypte* and *Bataille d'Austerlitz*.[28]

Napoleon and Scenic Wallpapers: Expanding the Horizons of the French Empire

Historians of scenic wallpaper have had trouble dating and attributing *Les Français en Egypt* (fig. 7); Nancy McClelland's 1924 book on wallpaper as well as Oman and Hamilton's wallpaper survey from 1982, suggest that it was printed in 1814 by Dufour.[29] However, while discussing the difficulties of trying to date the scenic wallpapers featuring Napoleonic battles in *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, Odile Nouvel-Kammerer states that this wallpaper was printed in 1818, it was designed by Jean-Julien Deltil and that it was printed by Velay, a company about which very little is known.[30] Though the information provided by Nouvel-Kammerer reflects the findings of more recent scholarship, the earlier date proposed by other historians seems to indicate a desire to link this wallpaper to the period of Napoleon's reign, the fact that it was produced after his defeat at Waterloo and before his death and posthumous popularity makes one curious as to why this wallpaper was produced at that particular moment in time.

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[27] Bernard Smith, 42.

[28] Martin Terry, 181.

[29] Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: An International History and Illustrated Survey from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 55.
Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception to the Introduction of Machinery* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), 306.

[30] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, 149. The title of this wallpaper can be translated as "The French in Egypt," this wallpaper is often frequently referred to as "*Battle of Heliopolis*." *Bataille de Héliopolis* is the title Odile Nouvel-Kammerer uses, and though I generally use Nouvel-Kammerer's dates and titles, in this case I would prefer to use *Les Français en Egypte* as there has historically been more than one Battle of Heliopolis and this wallpaper does in fact show the French in Egypt and not just the French in battle.

Though this wallpaper was not created during the reign of Napoleon and his regime, it appears to be very much part of the system of visual culture that celebrates his military victories. Unlike Gros' paintings of battles and Napoleon's entry into Syria, which were works displayed for the government and the public, *Les Français en Egypte* functioned like an icon of imperialism, a replica of an important victory that could be infinitely reproduced so that while the purchaser of the wallpaper was not taking part in the original imperialist act, he or she would have a simplified representation that provided the most essential images necessary to ground the viewer's private experience in French glory without the unpleasant complications that may have occurred in the actual events. Another difference between this wallpaper and Gros' paintings is that *Les Français en Egypte,* the first wallpaper created with a Napoleonic theme, does not actually depict Napoleon in the wallpaper. Napoleon's absence from the wallpaper may account for why this wallpaper was produced; *Les Français en Egypte* imparted its viewers with the feeling of French glory and of the stable, expansive empire that Napoleon's reign had provided, without actually showing the leader who had been recently defeated. This message of an enduring victorious empire may have been appealing to the French middle-class at a time when the country seemed to be politically unstable. The setting of Egypt itself contributes to this message; while discussing the obelisk at Place de La Concorde in Paris, Todd Porterfield states that part of what made the obelisk an appealing choice for the location is that "it had what no French monument could boast and what all post-Revolutionary governments sought—tremendous longevity and association with an enduring political and societal order."[31]

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[31] Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism 1798-1836* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 25.

Another reason why this wallpaper would have been profitable is that like the Pacific, Egypt was an extremely popular subject in the early nineteenth century and it delighted European minds with its exotic strangeness. Napoleon's successful campaigns in Egypt had generated a large interest in Egyptian artifacts, of which the Rosetta stone is probably the best example, though it was surrendered to the British in 1801.[32] Furthermore, paintings of Turkish and other women from the Near East by painters like Ingres and Girodet helped to perpetuate the fascination with the Near East. In the sixth panel of *Les Français en Egypte* the viewer can see three Egyptian figures (fig. 8). Their luxurious dress and relaxed demeanor is very much reminiscent of Ingre's lounging *Odalisque* (fig. 9). Unlike the other figures in the wallpaper, the Egyptians in *Les Français en Egypte* are quite obviously posed for the viewer: the standing man, possibly a body guard, looks down at the seated woman who props up the arm of the elegantly dressed man who is leaning against a rock. If one were to follow the arm of this reclining man, the viewer would find that it points to a scene of French soldiers. As they stand casually, as if relaxing after battle, one soldier is using the tip of his bayonet to inscribe a message at the base of a column with "On the twentieth of March, 1800, 10,000 French under the command of the brave Kleber vanquished 80,000 Turks on the plains of Heliopolis."[33] Unlike the frontally facing Egyptians, the French soldiers seem to be caught up in their own discussion, unaware that they are being seen.

In this arrangement the Egyptians, despite their more expensive wardrobe, appear to be subjects of both the viewer and the French soldiers. The viewer is the master of the Egyptians in that he or she is the owner of the space in which these particular Egyptians

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[32] Ibid., 8.
[33] Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception to the Introduction of Machinery*, 306.

live and the helpful gesture of the reclining Egyptian man reflects this relationship. Meanwhile, French soldiers dominate the landscape of this wallpaper as they march across the background. The soldier inscribing the pedestal most emphatically exerts this dominance by inscribing the message of a French victory in French on what is essentially a piece of Egypt. In *Les Français en Egypte* the submission of the Egyptians and their land to the French army and wallpaper viewer serve to satisfy the orientalist fantasies that had been made popular by sensuous paintings of Turkish women like Ingre's *Odalisque*.

Because of the confusion regarding its origins, sales records for *Les Français en Egypte* are not available, though it is generally referred to as having been a commercial success.[34] Oman and Hamilton assert that after Napoleon was overthrown, many sets of *Les Français en Egypte* and other similarly themed papers were shipped abroad, particularly to America.[35] Though this statement was made with the assumption that this wallpaper was printed during Napoleon's reign, which has since been refuted, McClelland lists three full sets and one partial set of *Les Français en Egypte* extant in the United States as of 1924, which indicates that it enjoyed some sort of popularity abroad.[36]

Despite the absence of Napoleon, *Les Français en Egypte* nonetheless conveys the ideas of French victory and imperial expansion that were associated with his reign. However, a successful scenic wallpaper does not just provide an image of imperialism but must depict an imperial landscape. Printed between 1827 and 1829, *Bataille d'Austerlitz* shows Napoleon's greatest victory in the Battle at Austerlitz (fig. 10). Unlike *Les Français en Egypte*, Bataille *d'Austerlitz* was created during a period in which the

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[34] Sabine Thümmler, "The battle of Austerlitz scenic wallpaper: new dating and old politics" *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 4, no. 2 (1997) 54.
[35] Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: An International History and Illustrated Survey from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 55.
[36] Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception to the Introduction of Machinery*, 306.

Bourbon monarchs were losing popularity and the so called "Cult of Napoleon" began to flourish, it is one of many items of visual culture produced at that time that reflects the revival of Napoleonic themes in French consciousness.[37] Drawing heavily from popular works of fine art, this *Bataille d'Austerlitz* seemed to possess everything it needed to be a successful scenic wallpaper, however, as we know from correspondence between the artist Deltil and the wallpaper printer Zuber, it was a financial failure.[38]

Per Cosgrove's discussion of landscape, Napoleon's campaigns, characterized by his organization of troops, should have been perfect for scenic wallpaper as a representation of an ordered world depicted in landscape. Yet, Bataille *d'Austerlitz* is the only wallpaper with a Napoleonic theme not formatted as a picturesque landscape.[39] There is very little land in this wallpaper and what is present is either completely ravaged by war or packed with soldiers. *Les Français en Egypte* presents a beautiful landscape; the soldiers seem to be enjoying a post-victory repose and the combat that does take place is punctuated by artful bursts of smoke. *Bataille d'Austerlitz* on the other hand is full of fighting figures, dead figures, as well as figures in pain, and while it shows the organization of Napoleon's army through differentiated uniforms, in general it is too chaotic to be a successful landscape. As the reader may recall, Cosgrove discusses perspective as a method for imparting order on landscape, however, in *Bataille d'Austerlitz* the scale of figures is strangely conceived with many soldiers being simply too big for the setting while others do not seem to decrease in size the further one looks

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[37] Sabine Thümmler, "The battle of Austerlitz scenic wallpaper: new dating and old politics," 23.

[38] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, 292. This correspondence discusses plans for a future wallpaper to be produced and how they should be careful not to repeat the mistakes of *Bataille d'Austerlitz*. However, this should not be taken to mean that Deltil and Zuber produced this wallpaper; in fact, the printer and artist are currently unknown.

[39] Sabine Thümmler, "The battle of Austerlitz scenic wallpaper: new dating and old politics," 56.

into the distance. Where one might feel as though he or she could enter into the *Les Français en Egypte* and enjoy the landscape, no viewer would want to enter the claustrophobic space presented in *Bataille d'Austerlitz*.

This could also be due to the fact that Egypt's landscape is more exotic than the central Netherlands, but the main problem is that *Bataille d'Austerlitz* is just not artfully executed. Besides the many different scales of the figures, some of these figures are carelessly represented—a detail shows one soldier attacking his enemy with his left arm even though his face is completely blocked on that side by his horse's head (fig.11). The unknown artist of *Bataille d'Austerlitz* has sloppily put together motifs from paintings of the early nineteenth century, whereas the artist for *Les Français en Egypte*, Jean-Julien Deltil, one of the best known scenic wallpaper designers, creatively synthesized artistic conventions, his own ideas and landscapes into enjoyable panoramas. This is very clearly seen in *Vues d'Amerique du Nord*, where Deltil is able to combine scenes from five different locations in the eastern United States, rendering a military review at West Point nearly as picturesque as the exotic American landscape (figs. 12, 13).

Vues d'Amérique du Nord: The Promise of the New World

Printed in 1834, *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* presents a very flattering view of the newly independent nation, a fact that has not been lost on most who write about scenic wallpaper (fig. 14).[40] Though this wallpaper does not exactly fall into the previously discussed themes of French Imperialism and power, there are definitely sound reasons as to why a French wallpaper manufacturer would choose to be so complimentary towards

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[40] Louise Ade Boger and H. Batterson Boger, eds., "Scenic Wallpaper," *The Dictionary of Antiques and the Decorative Arts* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 419.

Americans. Also, many of the devices used previously to show French authority are still present in this set of wallpaper.

Vues d'Amérique du Nord was produced by one of the most successful wallpaper printers of the nineteenth century, Zuber, the main rival of Joseph Dufour's company. Like Dufour, Zuber used the same woodblock process to print scenic wallpapers, and as the reader may recall, produced one of the first scenic wallpapers in the same year as Dufour's *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. One easily noticeable difference between Dufour and Zuber's scenic wallpapers is the prevalent use of the *irisé*, a technique in which colors are blended together, which one finds often in Zuber's skies and bodies of water (fig. 15).[41] However, in terms of representing cultural difference, Zuber and Dufour use many of the same conventions, due to the fact that these conventions are not stylistic like irisé, but are social constructions.

The artist for this wallpaper, Jean-Julien Deltil, designed several scenic sets for Zuber including the famous 1829 wallpaper *Les Vues du Brésil*, as well as the aforementioned *Les Français en Egypte* for Velay. While Deltil was known for producing portraits and religious paintings, it was his landscape work that attracted the attention of Zuber.[42] Deltil's talent for landscape may explain why the titles of the wallpapers designed by Deltil for Zuber, despite the fact that they generally feature a plethora of human figures, often stress the wallpaper as a total view, marginalizing the inhabitants of the wallpaper's landscape. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, on the other hand, has a title that highlights the wallpapers figures; however, this wallpaper can also

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[41] Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America from the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1980), 174.

[42] Robert Emlen, "Imagining America in 1834: Zuber's Scenic Wallpaper 'Vues d'Amérique du Nord'" in *Winterthur Portfolio* 32, no. 2/3 (1997): 192.

be considered a total *gestalt* in that it presents the figures so that they are seen all at once so that their differences disappear even though they represent fifteen disparate cultures.

Though it is possible that Deltil might have visited America at some point in his life, Robert P. Emlem's article on *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* provides more than sufficient evidence to show that the landscapes in this scenic wallpaper were inspired by textual sources and engravings rather than personal experience.[43] Undoubtedly the reason why Deltil would be able to design a wallpaper of America without having been there is the same reason why Zuber decided to produce *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*: America was a very popular topic in France. By the time Zuber decided to produce this wallpaper around twelve hundred French authors had already published works on America, and, in the 1830s, many French people were interested in American democracy as a new "social experiment."[44] Another factor that increased America's popularity in France was that after the Revolutionary War, America was no longer under obligation to England and could therefore expand its importation of products from France.[45] A possible explanation for why Zuber's paper is so complimentary to America is that these expanded trade opportunities directly affected the wallpaper industry; before the revolution, English wallpapers were widely imported into America, however, the nineteenth century saw French wallpaper, particularly scenic wallpaper, replace English papers in popularity.[46]

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[43] Robert Emlen, "Imagining America in 1834: Zuber's Scenic Wallpaper 'Vues d'Amérique du Nord,'" 189.

[44] Ibid., 191.

[45] Richard C. Nylander, *Wallpapers for Historic Buildings* (Washington D.C: The Preservation Press, 1992), 43.

[46] Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: An International History and Illustrated Survey from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 72.

The French interest in the "American social experiment," as Emlen calls it, is evident in the portrayal of African Americans throughout *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*. Like many images produced in America at the time, the African Americans in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* are often the best-dressed and most well mannered figures in whichever scene they appear (fig. 16). However, for American artists, the depiction of African Americans in this manner was often meant to mock recently emancipated individuals who were trying to replicate European behavior (fig. 17). [47] These images often show African Americans as over-dressed and pretentious and lacking in both education and sophistication. Though the poses and dress for the African American figures in Deltil's design are often taken directly from the derisive American sources, they do not seem so malicious. Emlen suggests that the frequent depiction of well-to-do African Americans in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* stems from the artist's genuine interest in the status of African Americans, and that Deltil depicts astonished white-skinned men and women to highlight the "remarkable spectacle of prosperity among former slaves and the novelty of racial integration in America."[48] Deltil is not alone in this fascination, many Europeans, including a female French writer who visited New York in 1831 was amused by "the inversion of traditional racial roles symbolized by the black man's courtly behavior in comparison to the white man's lack of social graces."[49] Though it is apparent that real Americans were not adjusting to their new society as gracefully as the Americans in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*, many French people still thought of America as a democratic nation that had done away with class and race distinctions.[50] This vision is

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[47] Robert Emlen, 196.
[48] Ibid., 195
[49] Ibid., 196.
[50] Ibid., 199.

also clear in the dock scene in Boston harbor where two men with dark complexions can be found working side by side with lighter skinned workers, an indication that American society is racially integrated both in the upper class as well as the working class (fig 15).

While French interest in American democracy allowed Deltil to create a world where African Americans had attained nearly equal status to their white counterparts, this treatment did not extend to the Native Americans depicted in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord.* In a letter to Zuber detailing his plans for *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*, Deltil listed the scenes for the wallpaper: an exact view of New York, view of West Point, Seaport of Boston with the arrival of a French three-master ship, and finally "Niagara Falls in the background and in the front, scenes of savages and virgin forests, the Mississippi with steamboats, travelers on horseback, natives hunting bears and bison, vultures and lush vegetation. NB: If there is room we will put in a dance of American warriors or a frontier settlement."[51] For the most part, Deltil's rendering of the listed scenes are taken directly from some engravings in a book by Jacques-Gérard Milbert entitled *Itinéraire pittoresque du fleuve Hudson et des parties latérales: L'Amérique du nord* which documents the author's travels throughout the northeastern United states from 1815 to 1823.[52] Milbert was quite fascinated by Native Americans and was greatly disappointed by how they seemed to be diminishing. Deltil, on the other hand, does not seem to be so captivated by Native Americans, rather they are somewhat of an afterthought in his plans for *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*, and his note suggests that he is actually indifferent as to whether he depicts Native Americans or frontier settlers. Zuber, and perhaps most of the wallpaper's intended audience, however wanted a warrior dance, and, from an extant letter written by

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[51] Ibid., 192.
[52] Ibid., 191. This book was later translated into English with the title: *Picturesque Itinerary of the Hudson River and the Peripheral Parts of North America.*

Deltil where the artist says that he has placed Native Americans "everywhere it was reasonable to place them" one can deduce that Zuber wanted even more Native Americans in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*, perhaps to add some exotic flare to the wallpaper and show that wild America is not just limited to virgin forests.[53]

While the Native Americans in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* may not be as central to the wallpaper as the Pacific Islanders are in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, one thing that they have in common is that they both seem to be performing for the wallpaper's viewer. In *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, while there is an audience in the wallpaper for the Tahitian dancers and the wrestlers, the dancing and wrestling is arranged so that the wallpaper's viewer is the audience member with the best view. The same can be said for the dance of the American Warriors in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* (fig. 13). While it is certainly understandable that dances should take place for the wallpaper's viewer, it is not clear why Zuber insisted that the Native Americans perform a dance. As Deltil suggested, the Native Americans could hunt a bear instead, is it really necessary that they dance in the foreground? In the scene at West Point in *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*, the military review, which is something that should be performed for a viewer, is not as clearly presented (fig. 12). While Deltil could have filled that particular section with soldiers so that the viewer could evaluate them, they are instead shown at a distance and are separated from the viewer by a crowd of onlookers.

Just as the Pacific Islanders in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* represent possible imperial subjects for the French, perhaps these Native Americans are the potential subjects of America's imperialistic expansion. Just as France can claim Tahiti, the owner of the wallpaper can claim the inhabitants of the depicted landscapes as his or

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[53] Ibid., 205-206.

her own; these perform for the viewer because they are the American viewer's imperial subjects. If landscapes are, as Mitchell says, the dream work of imperialism, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders in landscapes must appear submissive or else they would become obstacles to the limitless expansion that the culture portraying the particular landscape desires. For Americans to continue their industrial progress, which is already evident in Boston Harbor, they must tame the wilds of their continent. The intended audience of *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* wants Americans to continue to flourish and therefore wants them to conquer their land and the land's natives. If these natives appeared to be impossible to conquer, this could create displeasure for the viewer, something the printer must avoid at all costs. In short, by showing the native inhabitants of the Pacific and the Americas as submissive to the viewer, the wallpaper's artist and printers satisfy their intended audience's imperial desire. It is not by chance that *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* became incredibly popular in the twentieth century amongst proponents of the American colonial revival; it can very easily be seen as a promise that America will succeed and expand into a great and industrious nation.[54]

Scenic wallpaper was produced for the same society that created it: a well-to-do, intellectually cultivated crowd. Sales records from scenic wallpaper manufacturers show that the majority of scenic wallpapers were destined for French metropolises, the majority of sales taking place in Paris, this is supported by surviving information regarding these wallpapers which reflects the lifestyle of the Parisian bourgeoisie.[55] Though extant examples of scenic wallpaper are generally found today in countryside estates, Bernard

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[54] Ibid., 210.
[55] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, 98-100.

Jacqué argues that the country home was a privileged extension of city life and that scenic wallpaper was hung in urban homes as well, but was probably taken down due to changing fashions.[56]

In regards to this aforementioned intellectually cultivated crowd, the reader might find it helpful to keep in mind that the first wallpaper discussed in this essay was produced at the beginning of the nineteenth century and still very much reflects popular ideas of the Enlightenment. The Age of Enlightenment is generally associated with an increased interest in scientific empiricism, a revival of classical art, reason, and order.[57] The first two ideas clearly influenced the production of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* but as years passed, ideas went out of fashion and by the time *Les Français en Egypte* was produced, neoclassicism was not so much in fashion. The idea of scientific discovery, however, can be seen in the depiction of Ancient Egyptian ruins. Thirty years after *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, *Vues d'Amérique du Nord* shows that the interest in scientific empiricism and neoclassicism have faded but the notion of universal equality between men, an idea that emerged, or perhaps re-emerged as a result of the interest in reason, during the Enlightenment was still being explored. One theme that remained constant throughout these wallpapers was the expansive imperialist landscape. In the prospectus for *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* Dufour explains that his hope in producing this wallpaper was:

> "To please the eye and excite the imagination without taxing it...that viewers would be pleased to see assembled in a convenient and vivid manner this multitude of peoples who are separated from us by vast oceans, arranged in such a way that, without leaving his apartment, a studious man reading the history of the

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[56] Ibid., 100.
[57] Valerie Mainz, "Enlightenment," Grove Art Online,
http://www.groveart.com.oca.ucsc.edu/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=486455 64&hitnum=1&section=art.026341 (accessed December 4, 2006).

voyages...might think himself, by casting his eyes around him, in the presence of the depicted people."[58]

Though Dufour may not have made this statement thinking that it fell in line with France's imperialist exploits at the time, it seems very fitting that the scenic wallpaper viewer would be able to bring the imperial landscape to him or herself without leaving the comforts of home. The scenic wallpapers printed by Dufour, his rival Zuber, and others accomplish much more than simply placing the viewer "in the presence of the depicted people," they provide the viewer with the opportunity to take part in the process of prescribing meaning to these people and their lives. The danger of landscape is that it prevents the viewer from noticing that he or she is taking part of a meaning making process motivated by imperialist desire. To once again quote Mitchell, "If a landscape, as we say, 'draws us in' with its seductive beauty, this movement is inseparable from a retreat to a broader safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance, a kind of resistance to whatever practical or moral claim the scene might make on us."[59] With the recent resurgence of interest in scenic wallpaper, reflected by an increase in its reproduction and its discussion in books about the decorative arts, the contemporary viewer is invited once again to take the position of the *armchair traveler* and bring the imperial landscape into his or her own home.

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[58] Susan Hall, ed., *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, 32.
[59] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, viii.

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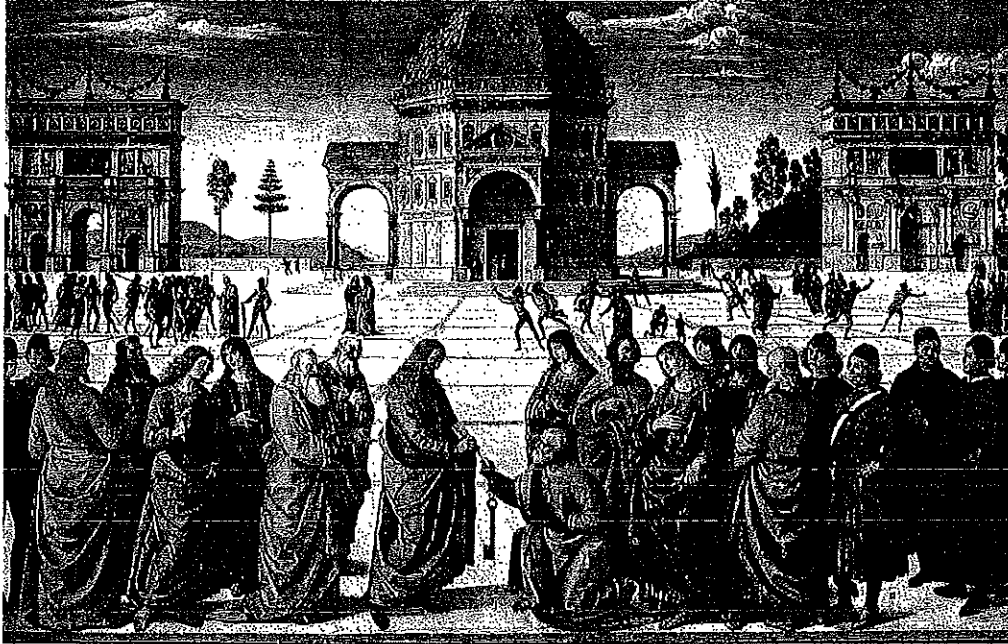
Figure One
Pietro Perugino
Christ Handing the Keys to St. Peter, 1481-82
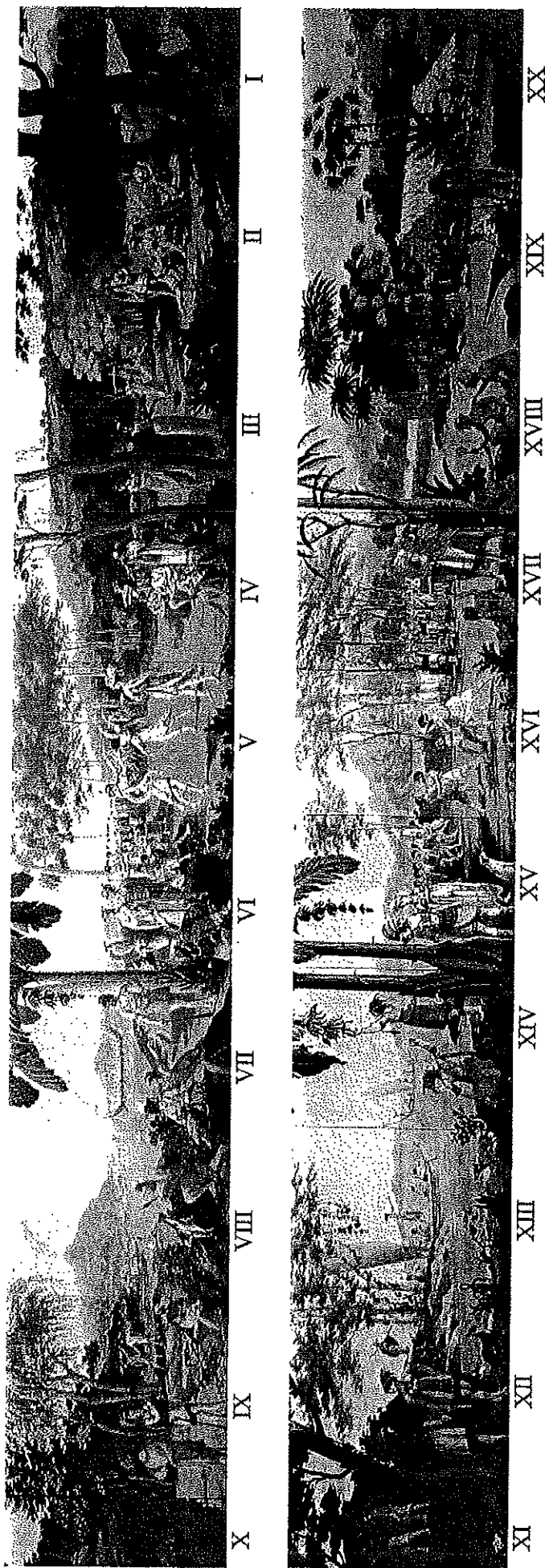Fresco, 335 x 550 cm
Cappella Sistina, Vatican
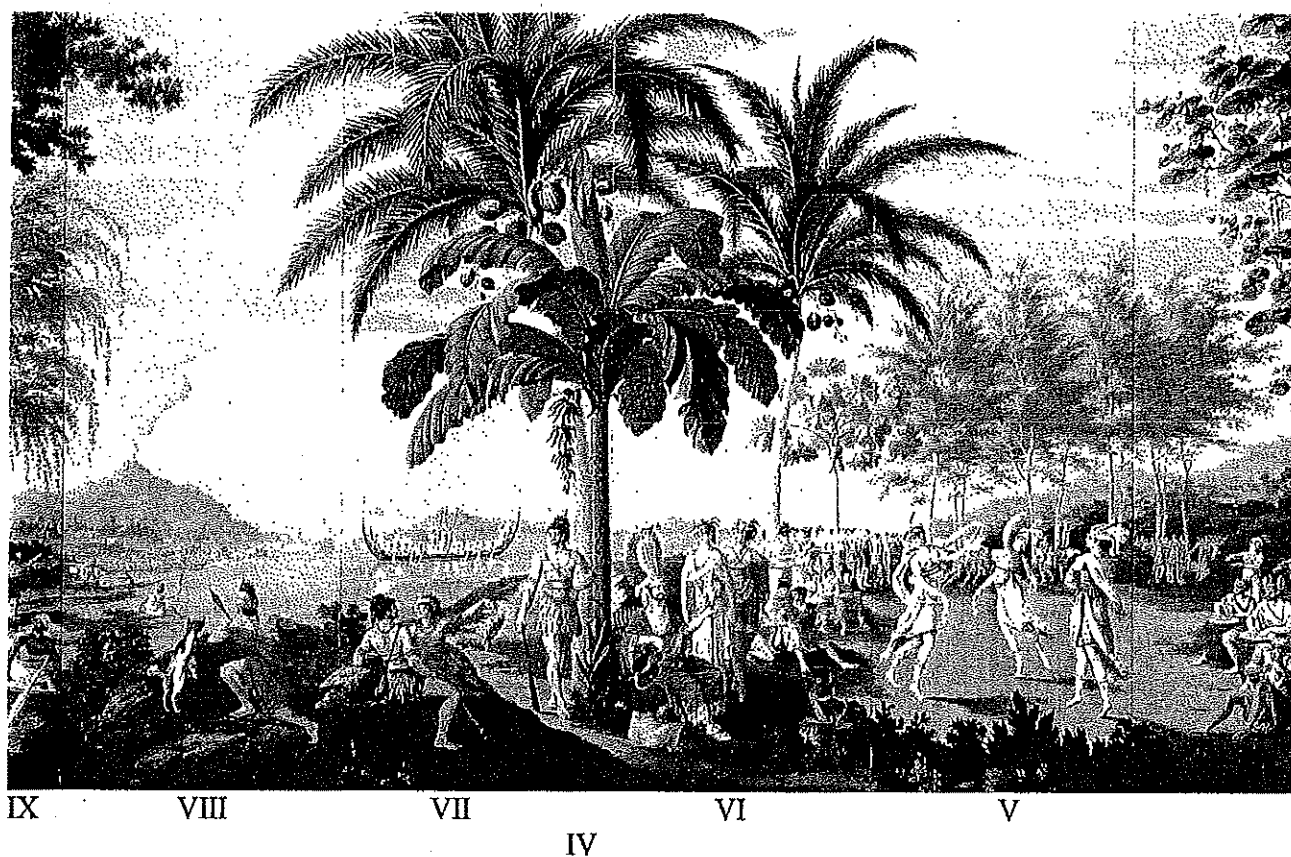
Figure Two
Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique
Designed by Jean Gabriel Charvet
Produced by Joseph Dufour, 1804-1806
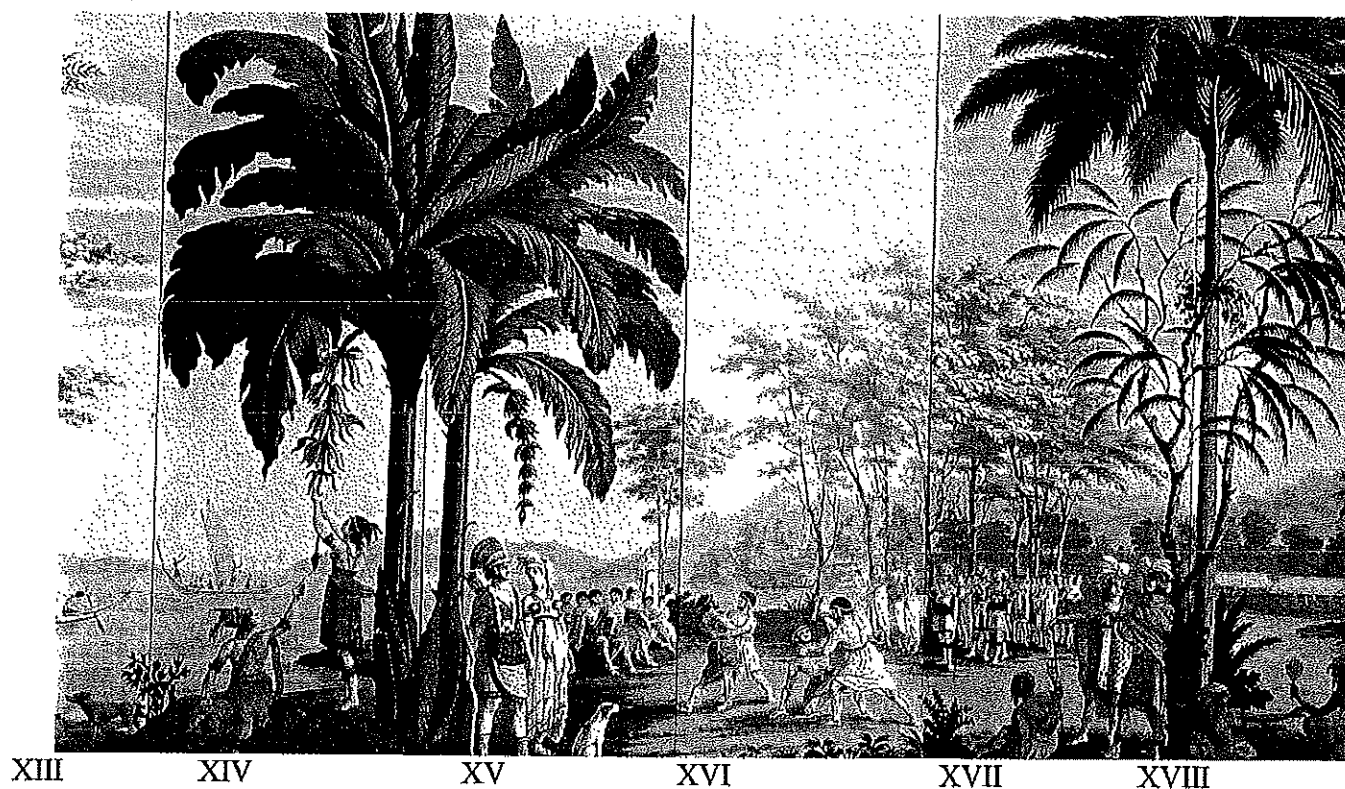Block printed watercolor on paper, 251.5 x 54 cm
deYoung Museum, San Francisco

IV   III   II   I

Figure Three

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (Detail Strips I-IV)

Designed by Jean Gabriel Charvet

Produced by Joseph Dufour, 1804-1806

Block printed watercolor on paper, 251.5 x 54 cm

deYoung Museum, San Francisco

Figure Four

Portrait of Poedua [Poetua],
Daughter or Oree [Orio], Chief of Ulietea [Raiatea], one of the Society Islands
John Webber, 1777
Oil on canvas painting, 142x94 cm
National Maritime Museum, London

IX   VIII   VII   VI   V

IV

Figure Five

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (Detail Strips IV-IX)

Designed by Jean Gabriel Charvet

Produced by Joseph Dufour, 1804-1806

Block printed watercolor on paper, 251.5 x 54 cm

deYoung Museum, San Francisco

XIII   XIV   XV   XVI   XVII   XVIII

Figure Six

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (Detail Strips XIII-XVIII)

Designed by Jean Gabriel Charvet

Produced by Joseph Dufour, 1804-1806

Block printed watercolor on paper, 251.5 x 54 cm

deYoung Museum, San Francisco
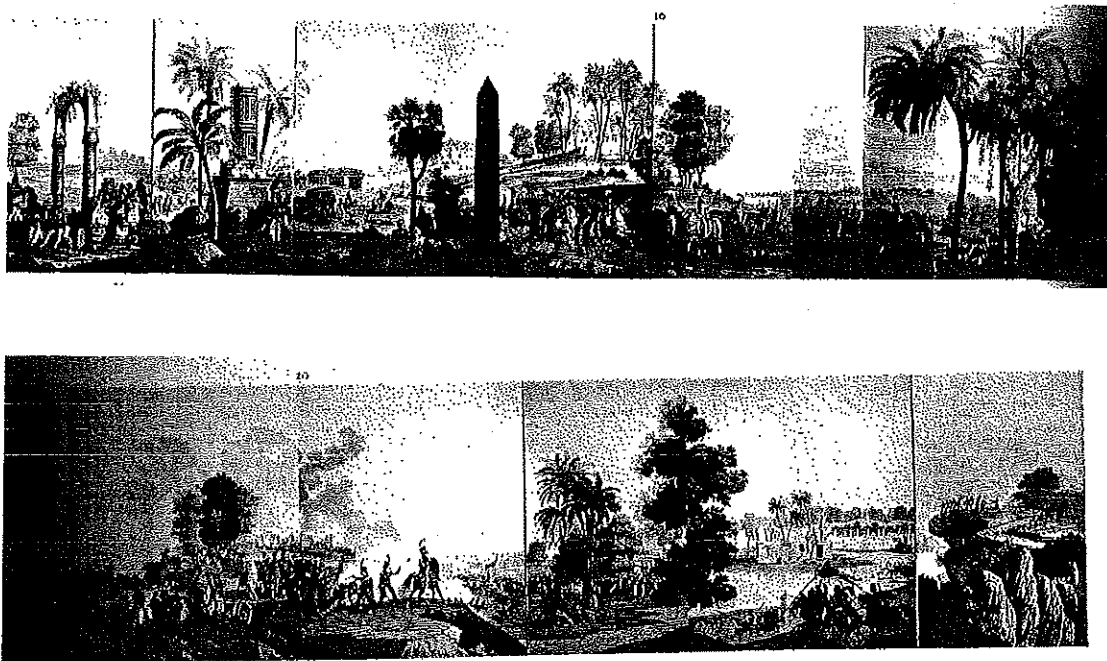
Figure Seven

Les Français en Egypte

Designed by Jean Julien Deltil

Produced by Velay, 1818
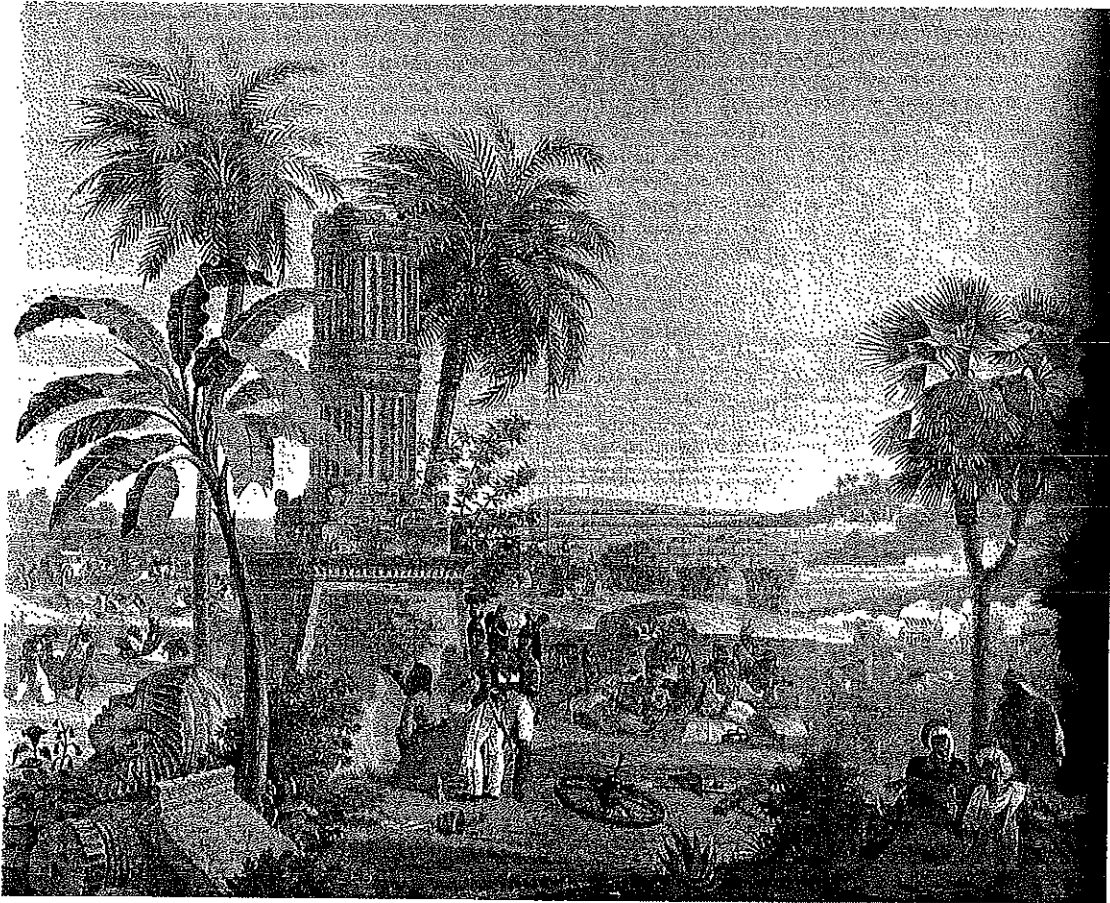
Figure Eight
Les Français en Egypte (Detail)
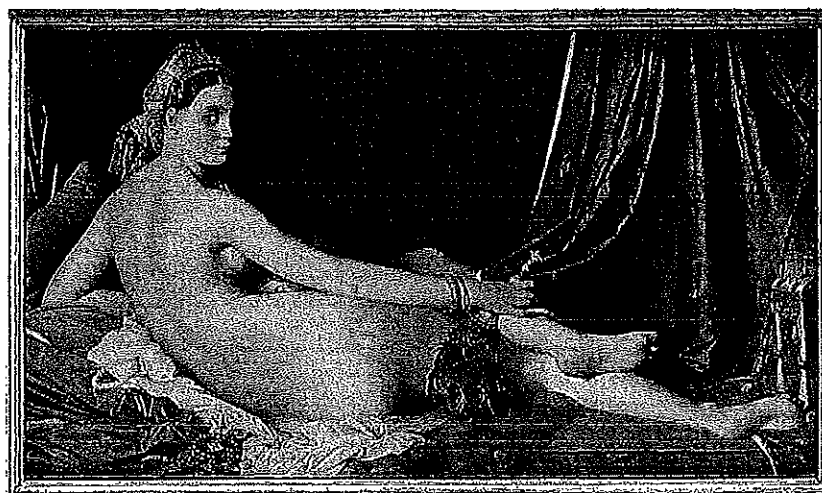Designed by Jean Julien Deltil
Produced by Velay, 1818

Figure Nine

Une odalisque

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

1814

Musée du Louvre

Figure Ten
Bataille d'Austerlitz
Artist and Printer Unknown
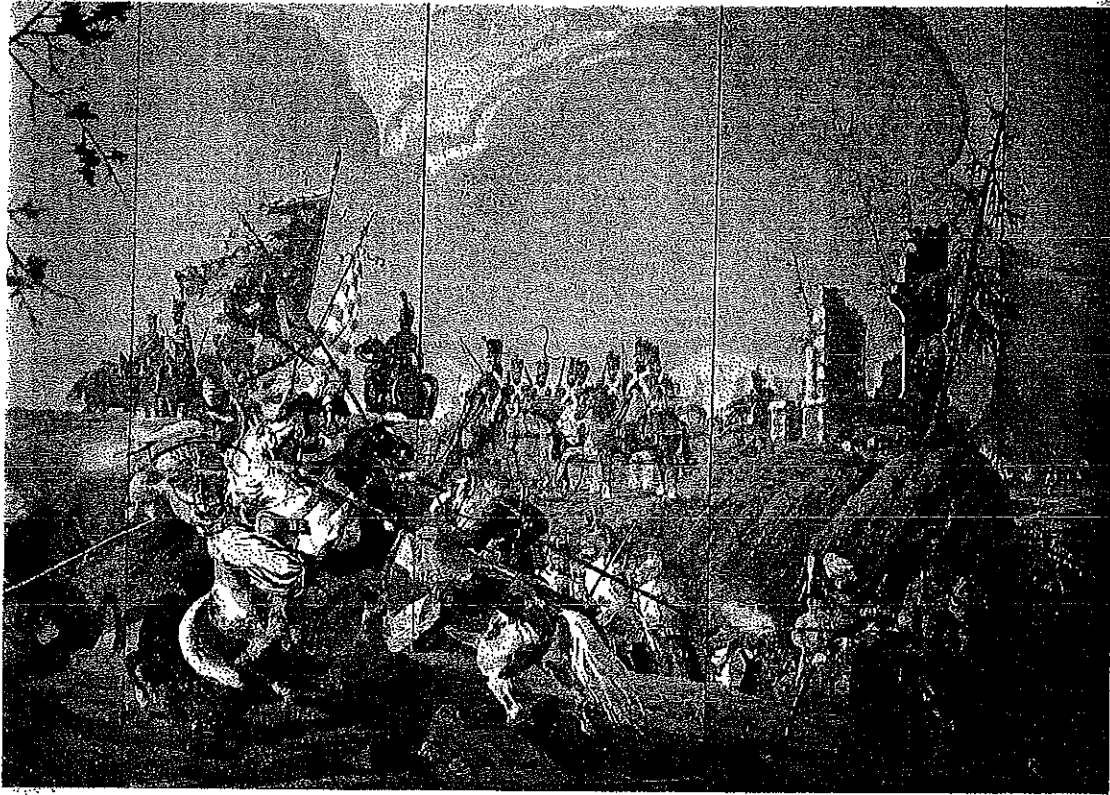1827-29
Deutsches Tapeten Museum

Figure Eleven
Bataille d'Austerlitz (Detail)
Artist and Printer Unknown
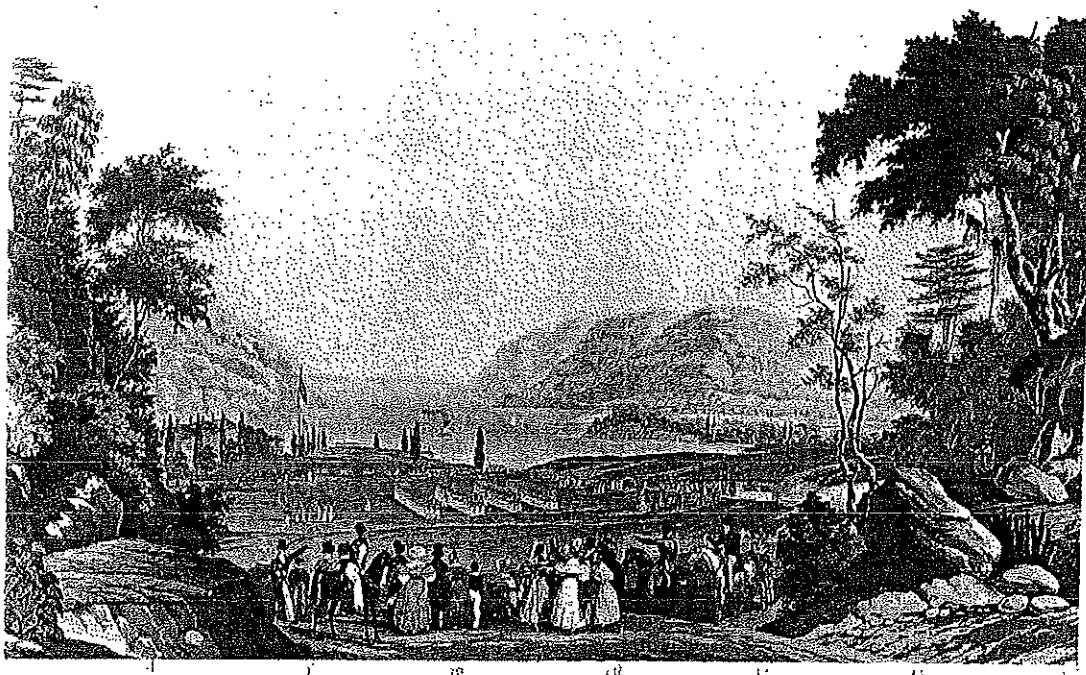1827-29
Deutsches Tapeten Museum

Figure Twelve

"Military Review at West Point" from *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*

Zuber et Cie, 1834

Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University
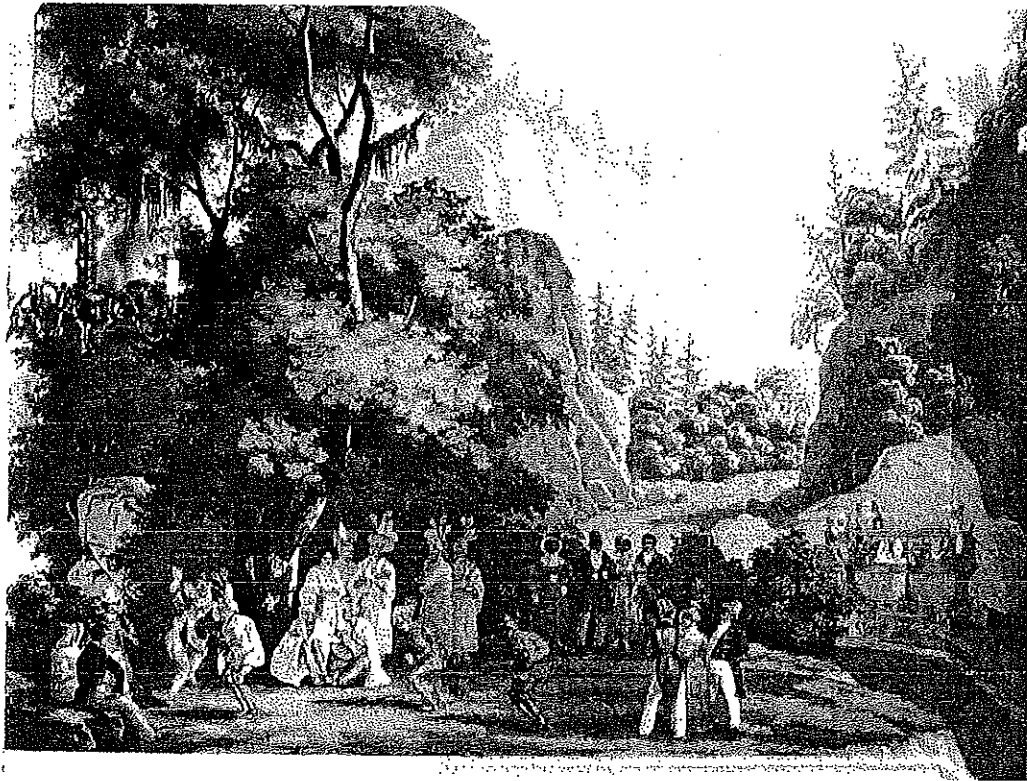
Figure Thirteen

"Dance of the American Warriors" from *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*

Zuber et Cie, 1834

Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University

Figure Fourteen

Vues d'Amérique du Nord

Zuber et Cie, 1834

Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University

Figure Sixteen

Detail of "New York Bay" from *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*

Zuber et Cie, 1834

Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University

Figure Fifteen

"Boston Harbor" from *Vues d'Amérique du Nord*

Zuber et Cie, 1834

Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University

Figure Seventeen
Shall I hab de honour…
Plate 5 From *Life in Philadelphia*
Edward W. Clay (Philadelphia: W. Simpson, 1828)
Library Company of Philadelphia