‘Baldwin of Egypt’s Lake’: The Egyptian Overland Route and European Colonial Expansion, 1775-1798

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Abstract:

This thesis is primarily a study of George Baldwin (1743/4-1824), a British merchant and diplomat, and his efforts in developing an overland route through Egypt in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The significance of the Egyptian overland route in this period has often been overlooked when compared to the later overland mail established by Thomas Waghorn in the 1830s and the Suez Canal. This thesis will provide a reassessment of the overland route's commercial and geopolitical significance to the British Empire during the period of George Baldwin's two residencies in Egypt; first as a merchant (1775-1779) and then as the first British Consul-General to Egypt (1786-1798). The growing realisation of the route's strategic significance by British policymakers, like Henry Dundas, predates the Napoleonic Expedition and will be examined in relation to Baldwin's consular appointment in 1786. The commercial value of the route will be assessed by looking at the private trade of Baldwin and his associates during both residencies and is something that casts doubt on the traditional view that the Middle East experienced commercial decline in this period. Most significantly, this thesis will focus on the strategic importance of the route to the British position in India. The significance of Egypt increased as the East India Company transitioned into a territorial power in 1770s and 1780s. This meant that Baldwin's role was a strategic necessity; something shown by a series of case studies on the sieges of Pondicherry in 1778 and 1793 as well as the transfer of Ceylon to the British in 1796.

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Abbreviations:

BiE	Rosemarie J. Saïd, 'George Baldwin and British Interests in Egypt, 1775-1798' (Ph.D. thesis, London School of Oriental Studies, 1968)
BPC	Bengal Public Consultations
CD	East India Company Court of Directors
CO	Colonial Office
CP	William Neil ed, *The Cleghorn Papers* (London, 1927)
Egypt 5.	East India Company Factory Records, Red Sea and Egypt Section vol. 5, British Library IOR/G/17/5
Egypt 5a.	East India Company Factory Records, Red Sea and Egypt Section vol. 5a. British Library IOR/G/17/6
FGO	Francis Osborne, Marquess of Carmarthen/5th Duke of Leeds
FO	Foreign Office
GB	George Baldwin
HC	Sir Hugh Cleghorn
HD	Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
PC	Baldwin, *Political Recollections* (London, 1801)
RA	Sir Robert Ainslie
SP	State Papers
TT	Thomas Thynne, Viscount Weymouth/1st Marquess of Bath
WG	William Grenville, 1st Baron Grenville
WH	Warren Hastings

At that time there was in France a man of genius - Napoleon. He conquered everybody everywhere - that is, he killed many people because he was a great genius. And for some reason he went to kill Africans, and killed them so well and was so cunning and wise that when he returned to France he ordered everybody to obey him, and they all obeyed him.[1]

\- Leo Tolstoy

In this mocking passage from *War and Peace*, Tolstoy points out the absurdity of Napoleon's campaigns. His 1798 Egyptian Expedition is presented as particularly absurd and without 'reason'; something that it must have seemed to many of Tolstoy and even Napoleon's contemporaries. The lack of historical consensus on what that 'reason' was exists to this day, with theories ranging from Napoleon's desires to emulate Alexander to the expedition's status as a scientific and philological project of the Enlightenment. There is good evidence for all these theories and no single one is mutually exclusive, yet so many are Bonaparte-centric, focusing on the motivations and achievements of the 'great man'. This ignores the fact that, for many, Napoleon's attack on Egypt was hardly a surprise. No one more so than George Baldwin (1743/4-1824); a figure who had promoted British interests in Egypt, the Red Sea, and the wider Middle East for over two decades. During two extended residencies as a merchant (1775-1779) and then as Britain's first Consul-General to Egypt (1786-1798),[2] Baldwin established an overland route that was used for both trade and communication with India. His activities stressed strategic importance of Egypt a generation before the better-known Thomas Waghorn's 'overland mail' and almost a century before the Suez Canal. Reflecting on his career in 1801, Baldwin believed that the Napoleonic Expedition was inspired by his development of the overland route, boasting that: 'as a consequence of my exertions, I may have been principal in producing the late events in Egypt.'[3] This thesis will test the validity of such

[1] Leo Tolstoy, Rosemary Edmonds tr. *War and Peace,* 2 vols. (London, 2003) II. 1653
[2] An overview of Baldwin's life and career is provided in Appendix I.
[3] *PC,* p. 23

claims and provide a reassessment of the Egyptian overland route's importance to British colonial expansion of the eighteenth century.

The work of the few historians who have written about the overland route in this period has resulted in some shared historiographical assumptions. The first historian to acknowledge the presence of the route in the eighteenth century was H.L. Hoskins in the 1920s. Hoskins doubted its practicability but saw Baldwin as conceiving an important idea that would be taken up by others, concluding that '[w]hile the full development of these shorter passages awaited the nineteenth century, promising beginnings were made during the last quarter of the eighteenth.'[4] In his 1931 biography of Henry Dundas, Holden Furber continued to raise awareness of George Baldwin's overlooked role in history, describing him as 'the man who really stood between France and India for many years.'[5] Furber later dedicated an article to the East India Company's reliance on overland routes through the Middle East, which described the competition Baldwin faced from the older route through Persia and how the Persian route would prevail by the 1790s.[6] The next contributions to the subject were by Edward Ingram. Beginning in his 1984 *In Defence of India*, Ingram gave the history of Baldwin's overland route greater scope, importantly providing the links between the initial development of the route and the French Expedition of 1798.[7] Ingram also widened the scope of this topic by uniquely linking it to the 'Great Game' between Britain and Russia over India in the nineteenth century. For Ingram, the 1800 decision to invade French-occupied Egypt was the decisive moment when the 'defence of the Indian Empire took precedence over a Continental commitment in the ranking of war aims.'[8] However, the most recent and comprehensive account of Baldwin's overland route was Rosemarie Saïd Zahlan's doctoral thesis on 'George Baldwin and British Interests in Egypt.'[9]

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[4] H.L. Hoskins, 'The Overland Route to India in the Eighteenth Century', *History*, *9:36* (1924), p. 303
[5] Holden Furber, *Henry Dundas, first viscount Melville, 1742-1811* (London, 1931), pp. 117-8
[6] Furber, 'The Overland Route to India in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of Indian History, 29:2* (1951), p. 133
[7] Edward Ingram, *In Defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, 1775-1842* (London, 1984) p. 30
[8] Ingram, 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt I: The Cabinet Crisis of September 1800', *Middle Eastern Studies, 30:3* (1994) p. 435
[9] *BiE*

Through analysing British interests through the person of Baldwin, it is Saïd's research that this thesis is most indebted to.

Since the last historians have written about the overland route there have been numerous historiographical and methodological developments that have increased our understanding of colonial history; something this thesis will incorporate to take the topic further. The increased application of network analysis has been crucial to commercial histories of the eighteenth century due to the problematic nature of calculating statistics like GDP for premodern eras.[10] This approach has helped break down some historiographical dichotomies, such as Emily Erikson's nuancing of the distinction between the East India Company (EIC) and the 'private trade';[11] something applicable to Baldwin's case as, simultaneously, a private merchant and communications agent for the EIC. Taking inspiration from global microhistories of eighteenth-century merchants,[12] this thesis seeks to explore the relationship between colonial state-building in India and European interests in the Middle East through the example of George Baldwin. The establishment of an overland route through Egypt illustrates how the development of colonial empires by western European powers provided renewed impetus to the importance of Middle East. This does not fit with the 'decline thesis' which, despite recent correctives, has been pervasive in historiography, whereby the rise of long-distance oceanic trade around the Cape relegated the Eurasian inland seas to marginal significance. It contradicts the theories that this supposed development can be explained as the ascendency of the European chartered company, as Niels Steensgaard and, more recently, Ron Harris have argued.[13] Whilst acknowledging the influence of such network studies, this is a study of a single

[10] Manuel Herrero Sánchez, Klemens Kaps, *Merchants and Trade Networks in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, 1550-1800: Connectors of Commercial Maritime Systems* (NY, 2017), p. 2

[11] Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600-1757* (Princeton, 2014) p. 18

[12] See: Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: an eighteenth-century history* (Princeton, 2011); Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and merchant capitalism in early modern Europe* (Ithaca, 2005).

[13] Niels Steensgard, *The Asian Trade Revolution: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago, 1974); Ron Harris, *Going the Distance: The Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation* (Princeton, 2020).

node within a wider network, based on *qualitative* analysis of the EIC 'Red Sea and Egypt' records and the pamphlets produced by Baldwin and his supporters.

During the cabinet debate on whether a counter-expedition should be sent to eject the French from Egypt in 1800, Pitt the Younger summarised why the country was useful for imperial defence, stating that: '[w]e must insist on retaining such. . . acquisitions as are essential, not for their own intrinsic value, but for the security of our ancient possessions in the East and west, and (for the same reason) on the French evacuating Egypt'.[14] After taking Baldwin's Consular appointment in 1786 as a starting point, the assessment of the overland route in this thesis follows the same structure as this statement. First, the route's 'intrinsic value' in terms of trade and commerce will be reassessed, followed by an examination of the link between Egypt and India. This link was strengthened as the stability of the British presence in India became more reliant on the Middle East as both a source of investment and a strategic communications route.

[14] Ingram, 'geopolitics', p. 450

A New Consular Appointment

> France in possession of Egypt would possess the Master Key to all the trading Nations of the Earth. Enlightened as the Times are in the general Arts of Navigation and Commerce, she might make it the Emporium of the World. She might make it the *awe* of the Eastern World by the facility she would command of Transporting her Forces thither by Surprize, in any Number and at any time; and England would hold her Possessions in India at the Mercy of France.[15]

The work of George Baldwin should be central to any assessment of the Suez overland route and the British and French interests in it, for, as Rosemarie Said argued, 'George Baldwin was alone in his efforts during the last quarter of the [eighteenth] century to bring about British recognition of the importance of Egypt'.[16] Furthermore, it is this statement from Baldwin's *Speculations and Resources of Egypt* (1785) that summarises the *how* and *why* of his proposals. Not only does it foresee the Napoleonic expedition of 1798, but highlights Baldwin's recognition of the overland route being advantageous to *both* political strategy and commerce. Assessing the extent to which Baldwin's claims were backed up by his experiences in Egypt, would, thus, provide a corrective to Edward Ingram's conception of British Egyptian policies of the time being limited to 'opposition to the French',[17] as well as his wider conclusions that the Egyptian expeditions indicate the decline of commercial interests in favour of 'political interests'. As he put it:

> For most of the eighteenth century, Great Britain's political interests in the Middle East had taken second place to her trade; even the danger from foreigners had been commercial, symbolized by the spectre of the overland trade. After 1798 Great Britain's priorities were reversed: political interests formally took precedence.[18]

The example of George Baldwin's ideas shows us that the overland route had been viewed, simultaneously, as being politically and strategically significant in the security of British India as well as

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[15] GB, 'Speculations and Resources of Egypt' (1785) Egypt 5.; also printed (with alterations) in *PR* p. 217
[16] *BiE* p. 9
[17] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 27
[18] *Ibid*. p. 43

a commercially viable trade route. Furthermore, the actual experiences of Baldwin and his contemporaries in Egypt in trade show the overland route to have been something more than a 'spectre'.

Although the *Speculations* offers clear expression of George Baldwin's politico-commercial view of the overland route, it is important to note the work's context and acknowledge the wider trends that may have influenced it. The *Speculations* were commissioned by Henry Dundas on behalf of the newly created Indian Board of Control in early 1785, before Baldwin was appointed as Consul-General. The influence of Dundas on British policy towards Egypt, and particularly its combined strategic and commercial importance, has been emphasised by Ingram. He presents the growing official recognition of this as stemming from Dundas's attitudes to the East India Company, which 'he disliked as heartily as he did the French'.[19] Ingram also suggests that it was Dundas who influenced Baldwin's inclusion of political concerns in a proposal that began as a commercial venture due to his personal belief that trade was a 'political weapon',[20] stating that 'Dundas dreamed of the development of Great Britain's traditional markets overseas, of the creation new ones, and of the flow of colonial tribute, above all from India'.[21] It is also important to note that the 'Indian context' may have become more important following Pitt's India Act, bringing the Company under further Government authority and, by a supplementary act of 1786, appointing Earl Cornwallis as the new Governor-General of India. As Ingram argued, '[i]t was not coincidental that Baldwin was sent to Cairo at the time that Earl Cornwallis went out to Bengal'.[22] Baldwin's consular appointment can also be viewed through the prism of the significant institutional changes of British foreign policy in the 1780s, beginning with the creation of the Foreign Office from merging the Northern and Southern Departments in 1782. Such changes also spelt the beginning of the end for the Levant Company's control of diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire on behalf of the Crown as a body politic. This is evident in the instructions sent to Sir Robert Ainslie, the Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, regarding the new consular appointment. Ainslie and Baldwin had had a long-standing feud by this

[19] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 30
[20] *Ibid.* p. 40
[21] Ingram, 'geopolitics', p. 437
[22] Ingram, *Defence,* p. 30

time, with Baldwin blaming the Ambassador for the failure of his earlier attempt at establishing an overland trade as well as for failing to protect fellow merchants from the ambush of a camel caravan in 1779. Aside from insisting that they bury the hatchet, the Foreign Secretary, the Marquess of Carmarthen, told Ainslie to 'consider this instruction by the King's command, with this express reservation, that it is only to be in force when neither the order, nor the interests of the Turkey Company shall be repugnant in any manner whatsoever to the superior interests of the nation at large…'.[23]

There was also a more immediate context to the appointment of a British Consul in Egypt. On behalf of France, Laurent Jean-François Truguet signed treaties with Murad Bey (the joint Mamluk ruler of Egypt alongside Ibrahim Bey) and other officials in January 1785.[24] The first treaty included such clauses as: 'All vessels of French Merchants might land at all Egyptian ports, and would pay the same taxes as Turkish vessels' and 'If another European country asked for conditions similar to those of France for the India trade, France would always retain the best advantages'.[25] The decision to send Baldwin back to the region was in no small part a response to the Truguet Agreements, yet they were not entirely a surprise to everyone in London. Following the British defeat in the American War, Dundas realised that 'India is the first quarter to be attacked' in the event of another conflict. Thus, he asked the British ambassador in Paris to find out about any French plans relating to Egypt in 1784 and was informed that they were seeking an overland route to influence Indian affairs more effectively.[26] It was based on this intelligence and Baldwin's subsequent report that the Foreign Office was convinced of the need to counter French interference, with Carmarthen's instructions to Ainslie in May 1785 stating:

> Whatever part France may be inclined to take in the affairs of Turkey, it becomes an object of great importance to us to prevent, if possible, the attainment of her views in Egypt …You, Sir, have heard of her wish to induce the Porte to allow France the two ports of Suez and Gedda on the Red Sea.[27]

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[23] Carmarthen to Ainslie (cypher), 1 Sept. 1786, quoted in, Said, p. 159
[24] Ignace de Testa ed, *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane avec les puissances étrangères depuis le premier traité conclu en 1536, entre Suléyman I et François I, jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1865) II. Appendix IV;
[25] Testa, Appendix IX, translation in *BiE*, pp. 139-40
[26] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 27
[27] Carmarthen to Ainslie, 19 May 1785, Egypt 5.

By the time news of the treaties reached London, the need to reverse this French advantage was the highest priority in their commissioning Baldwin as the British Consul-General by 1786. Although the Truguet Agreements were just a chapter in the long history, dating back to the days of Louis XIV, whereby 'French opposition figured at all times and at all points in English plans for opening up any kind of contact between Eastern Europe and India', they were also the culmination of intensified French activity following Baldwin's departure.[28] In 1783, *Ministre de la Marine*, the Marquis de Castries, had sent the Comte de Bonneval to enquire into a possible route over the Suez isthmus. When this plan fell through, Choiseul-Gouffier, the ambassador to Constantinople, sent Truguet on the same mission, with successful results.[29] If British officials, like Ainslie, did not see the material benefits of Baldwin's first residency in Egypt; the French certainly did. As Saïd put it, 'the renewed interest in the commercial navigation of the Red Sea had been brought about by the example of the lucrative trade the British had carried on after the March 1775 Treaty.'[30] If, as Ingram has suggested, British policy was 'opposition to the French' without any consideration of the route's commercial benefit, this neglects the fact that the French who needed to be opposed were drawn there in the first place by those benefits.[31] This further illustrates the problematic nature of using political-commercial dichotomies when trying to understand a period when widespread mercantilism dictated the use of trade as a zero-sum weapon.

[28] Hoskins, p. 303
[29] *BiE*, p. 136
[30] *Ibid*. p. 136
[31] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 27

The Emporium of the World: The Private Trade of George Baldwin

> 'We composed our bowl of the Ganges, the Thames, and the Nile, and from the top of the Pyramid drank prosperity to England!'[32]

George Baldwin was first and foremost a merchant and would likely not have defended his plan so staunchly and endured the hardships of his residencies were there no personal profit motive. The commercial motivations and indeed successes of his first residency in Cairo were something that Baldwin did not conceal, with the above quote coming from his *Political Recollections* (1801), even though he had presented himself as a self-sacrificing diplomat since the 1780s. First going out to Cyprus – where his brother was Consul for the Levant Company – in 1760, Baldwin began trading silk along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean based out of Acre soon thereafter.[33] He later described that it was while in Cyprus and Acre that he began to 'attend and consider the wonderful resources of [Egypt] that still famous country', obtaining leave to travel to India via the Red Sea as a 'free mariner' in 1768 and arriving in Egypt in 1773. Having allegedly received encouragement for the Suez trade from both the then Bey (Abu al-Dhahab) and John Murray (at that time the ambassador to the Sublime Porte), Baldwin returned to London instead of continuing to India. There, he 'resolved immediately to return to Cairo; … freighted a ship and loaded her', with the 'intention to settle at Cairo'.[34] Although, at the same time, he made his offer to forward communications for the East India Company, this illustrates how Baldwin was first drawn to Egypt by economic self-interest. His account of the first few years after he arrived in 1775 describes how he was able to gain results from the opportunity and how he and his associates were soon in a position to toast their 'prosperity':

> I arrived at Alexandria in July 1775, and succeeded very prosperously in establishing a direct commerce from England to Egypt; the navigation from India quite up to Suez had been explored, and a fair prospect was opened of seeing my plan of establishing a commercial communication between Egypt and India

[32] *PC,* p. 6
[33] James Mew, 'Baldwin, George', *ODNB* (2004)
[34] *PC* p. 6

> equally successful. In 1776, 1777, and 1778, ships were arriving at Alexandria from England, and at Suez, from India, at the same time.[35]

Despite his retrospective boasts of prosperity, Baldwin made little reference to his personal commercial dealings in published works and the surviving correspondence in the Red Sea and Egypt Factory Records. There exist only slight references to his trading ventures during his first residency; mostly in letters to Sir Robert Ainslie.[36] Therein, he mentions that between 1775 and 1778 he imported goods from London to Egypt, with their sales estimated at £20,000.[37] Additionally, between 1776 and 1778, he claimed to have freighted fifteen ships from Alexandria to London.[38] Because of the scant references of this trade in Levant Company sources, Rosemarie Saïd was forced to make some insightful deductions. In the Levant Company's Impositions Book for the period of the first residency, only three vessels are recorded as arriving in Alexandria.[39] Explaining the absence of all the other ships mentioned by Baldwin, Rosemarie Said deduced that he mainly chartered foreign and, in particular, Venetian vessels. This is plausible as Venetians were often involved in Baldwin's communications operations for the East India Company, such as when, on the eve of war in 1778, he forwarded a dispatch from the Venetian Captain Tarrabochia containing intelligence that a French agent had just arrived in Morea to inform the French consuls and merchants there of intentions of war.[40] Also, according to Saïd, reports of British merchants' disputes recorded in the British chancery register at Constantinople frequently concern some of Baldwin's associates and Venetian vessels.[41] If we consider this interpretation of Baldwin's commercial activities, it is likely that his imports and exports were primarily freighted onboard Venetian vessels and, thus, traded at many ports besides London and Alexandria.

Where he was not directly involved in arranging shipping for his own goods, Baldwin is referenced as an agent for other merchants in the region. Baldwin acted as an agent for merchants

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[35] *PC.* p. 6
[36] SP.97: Turkey, here quoted from *BiE*
[37] GB to RA, 29 April, 1778, SP.97/54, *BiE*, p. 57
[38] GB to RA, 21 Feb. 1778, *Ibid*. p. 57
[39] SP.105: Levant Company, Vol. 170, 'Impositions Book', 1775-1785, *Ibid*. p. 58
[40] 'Humble Petition of George Baldwin', CD, 1779, Egypt 5.
[41] *BiE,* p. 59

engaged in the Red Sea trade, such as the Bombay syndicate of William Hornby, Hunter, Fell and Ives. They shipped muslins and calicoes to Suez, where Baldwin would pay import duties then sell the products in Egypt and across the Ottoman Empire, sending them to the Constantinople-based independent merchants John Abbott and Richard Willis. He also consigned a portion of these goods to the prominent house of Lee & Maltass of Smyrna.[42] Elsewhere, William Maltass of Smyrna is described as Baldwin's 'agent'.[43] The fact that Baldwin married Maltass's daughter, Jane,[44] is perhaps testament to the closeness of their business relationship, suggesting that their dealings far exceeded those recorded in our few surviving sources.

The Suez overland trade was relegated to secondary importance during Baldwin's second Egyptian residency, this time as Consul-General. As previously noted, the new Consulship could be described as a geopolitical response to the Truguet Agreements aimed at obstructing French designs on India. Nevertheless, those agreements were ostensibly *commercial* treaties, so - as decision-makers back in London believed - negotiating trade access was a necessary prerequisite to securing unhindered passage through Egypt for greater political aims. Thus, Baldwin's commission, states that a Consul-General was appointed 'for the greater benefit, and for the good and more orderly Government of Our British Merchants, and others, Our Subjects, trading thither'.[45] Baldwin was informed that he 'should lose no time in setting on foot a Treaty with murat Bey or with whoever is at the head of the Government of Cairo', and that it was to be 'a Commercial Treaty … provided they grant to us the same immenities and privileges which they have lately given to the French.'[46] Yet, despite the Government's insistence that his immediate priority must be to put Britain on the same commercial footing as France, they were equally insistent that Baldwin could not revive his private ventures. No doubt playing to certain elements in the

[42] British Chancery register, Aleppo, *BiE*. p. 60
[43] Mew, *ODNB*
[44] Jane Baldwin, née Maltass (1763-1839) was a famed society beauty, painted by Joshua Reynolds as well as sculpted by Cerroschi, as commissioned by Emperor Joseph II whilst the Baldwins were in Vienna in 1780. Richard Cosway's *A Grecian Lady* (1782) was based on her likeness. Mew, *ODNB*
[45] 'Copy of Commission appointing George Baldwin as Consul General in Egypt', Egypt 5.
[46] 'Heads of Instructions for Mr Baldwin, appointed consul in Egypt', Whitehall, 19 May, 1786. Egypt 5.

EIC's fear that a renewed Suez trade could threaten the Company's monopoly, article 24 of Baldwin's instructions were explicit:

> He should also be instructed that he is not to trade, or be concerned in trade for the present, nor until the East India Company, if they shall thereafter carry on any Commerce upon their own account by that channel, shall give him express permission so to do, but until they do give him that he should not demand permission.[47]

This goes a long way to explain why Baldwin's second residency may not have been as lucrative as well as why, by the time of the Napoleonic invasion, the importance of Egypt to British commerce was not at the forefront of policy-makers' minds. For, despite engaging Baldwin to forward dispatches again, the Company never permitted him to trade. Furthermore, the political turmoil of constant Egyptian regime change meant that he failed in coming to a commercial agreement with the Beys until 1794, by which time he was acting unofficially; the British Government having dismissed him. However, both these restrictions did not stop the old 'Turkey merchant' in Baldwin. Even after an imperial order, or *Hatti Sherif*, of the Sublime Porte prohibited the trade from India in 1779 – mostly consisting of merchandise carried onboard the packet ships – commerce continued, but as Baldwin openly told Ainslie, with 'extraordinary secrecy indeed'.[48] Indeed, Baldwin's audacity in openly informing others of his questionable dealings is one of the most striking things about his correspondence. No clearer is this than in his poor relationship with Ainslie, with their feud being reignited when Baldwin was setting out for his post as Consul. He wrote Ainslie asking whether the ambassador could intercede to prevent Baldwin from having to pay a double duty, at Smyrna and Alexandria, for he was carrying 34 bales of cloth which he intended to sell in Egypt. This was a blatant violation of the Consul's specific instructions. Ainslie's suspicions that Baldwin's intentions were illegitimate were confirmed when Baldwin did not consult with the British Consul at Smyrna.[49] This was not an isolated instance of his continued private ventures in this period. He set up a frequent trade in natron – a mineral similar to saltpetre and used in the production of

[47] 'Heads of Instructions', Egypt 5.
[48] SP.91/55, GB to RA, 30 April, 1779, *BiE*, p. 74
[49] FO.78/7, RA to GB, 19 Dec. 1786, *Ibid.* p. 181

soap, glass and gunpowder; a trade that may have been as lucrative as his previous ones if the exact details of it were not obscured. He wrote to Carmarthen in 1788 asking permission to import the mineral into London. When he received no answer, Baldwin acted on his own initiative and engaged the owner of the British ship *Pollard*, to go to London to personally obtain permission.[50] It just so happened that when the *Pollard* left Alexandria in 1789 she also carried a consignment of natron. [51] From entries in the Levant Company's impositions book and Baldwin's correspondence, Rosemarie Saïd was able to create a table recording 'British Ships in Egypt: 1788-94'.[52] Baldwin mentions loading the *Ceres* with a shipment of natron in 1790 and the *Rossetti* and *Levant* in 1791.[53] However, we can deduce an even more substantial trade from Said's table since all of eleven vessels leaving Alexandria between 1790 and 1793 carried natron consigned to Richard & William Lee: Baldwin's agents in London. There are figures for the size of consignments for all but one of these vessels, meaning Baldwin may have been involved in the import of 1,526 tonnes of natron into London during his time as Consul.[54] Of what other more secret trades he was involved in we cannot say for, but the natron trade alone could have accounted for his ability to live lavishly on a yearly Foreign Office salary of just £500 - of which most of it was to be used for 'constant and necessary presents' to the Beys - and no salary at all after the Government cut him off in 1793.[55]

George Baldwin was also the promoter and consular protector of a significant community of 'British' (in some cases in terms of allegiance rather than nationality) merchants in Cairo and Alexandria. In many ways, this is an unknown group only acknowledged through their dealings with Baldwin, with those partners involved in his personal ventures already being discussed. Yet, we can also see glimpses of a thriving commercial environment in first-hand sources other than Baldwin's. In 1777, Eyles Irwin, a

[50] FO.24/1 GB to FGO, *BiE.* p. 224
[51] Appendix I.
[52] Appendix II
[53] FO.24/1, GB to FGO, 17 May, 1790; GB to FGO, 21 Mar. 1791; GB to WG, 7 Oct. 1791, *BiE*, pp. 224-5
[54] *BiE*, Appendix vii
[55] 'Heads of instructions', Egypt 5.

former superintendent of EIC grounds at Madras used the overland route through Egypt to return to England, later publishing a diary of his journey as *A Series of Adventures in the course of a journey up the Red Sea* (1780). Therein, he praises George Baldwin's assistance in providing his party with safe passage as well as introducing them to a thriving European merchant community in Cairo. At Alexandria, reflecting upon his observations so far, Irwin commented on the state of British trade in the region:

> It is many years since the English trade has declined in the Levant. Their ships of war no more ride triumphant in these seas, and their thunders have long ceased to strike terror through the coasts of Egypt. But the spell is revived. The English have found their way into the Red-sea, and have it their option to deal with Egypt on their own.[56]

Earlier that year, trade had been increasing to an extent that would paradoxically become detrimental to British trading interests. The *Swallow* sloop had arrived at Suez carrying Company dispatches, in the hands of John Capper, Alexander Dalrymple and Deighton. Having then journeyed through a heavy rainstorm, they broke the seals on their luggage to dry their papers when they arrived at Baldwin's house in Cairo. This gave Egyptian customs officials the impression that they were smuggling merchandise from Indian diamond country, having dodged levies at Suez, and resulted in the confiscation of their property.[57] This led to the Porte addressing a Representation to Ainslie, showing the Ottoman concern for growing trade in their sacred sea and disapproval of 'three British Ships come Lately to the Scale of Suez … to a certain Merchant Baldwin.'[58] This was only a 'friendly representation' that failed to stymie the progress of the trade, necessitating the later *Hatti Sherif*. However, it does show how soon after Baldwin's arrival British merchants were exploiting the opportunities he had recognised. The ships mentioned in the representation were noted for the richness of their merchandise: the first and second carried 650 bales of muslin each – valued at 150,000 piastres. The third vessel's cargo proves that this was not merely a continuation of the old Red Sea trade but involved the transportation of goods overland through Egypt since it carried a consignment for Philopoppoli (modern day Plovdiv).[59] Although the 1779 *Hatti Sherif*,

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[56] Eyles Irwin, *A Series of Adventures up the Red Sea* (1780). II. 383-4
[57] RA to CD, 3 Oct. 1777, Egypt 5.
[58] 'Translation of the Representation of the Ottoman Porte to the English Ambassador', May 5, 1777, Egypt 5.
[59] SP.97/53, RA to TT, 3 May, 1777, *BiE*, p. 39

led to a decrease in British-flagged *merchant* vessels engaged in the overland trade, the 'secret' trade mentioned by Baldwin was carried on by the continued packet boats, which discreetly carried merchandise alongside their dispatches. We know this because one such service in 1779 had its official passengers, Captain Scott and Lieutenant Mills, detained in Alexandria on the discovery of goods.[60]

One of the most infamous suppressions of British commerce and the cause of Baldwin's escape from Egypt in 1779, also proves the extent of the overland trade and the concerns this brought Egyptian authorities. This was the so-called 'caravan disaster'. In May of that year, two British merchantmen – the *St. Helena* and *Nathalie* - flying Danish colours and carrying 'considerable cargoes', arrived at Suez.[61] The customs-master arranged caravans to transport the merchandise and passengers to Cairo. However, the second caravan, transporting the *Nathalie*'s passengers and their goods was ambushed in the middle of the night by three hundred Arabs, with all the passengers stripped naked and left in the cold desert night without any provisions. Only John O'Donnell survived, reaching Cairo on foot. This was merely the beginning of a political controversy pointing to the involvement of Egyptian authorities and, according to Baldwin, Carlo Rosetti, a Venetian merchant prominent at the Beys' court. It would eventually lead to George Moore of the *St. Helena* being imprisoned in the Cairo Citadel and Baldwin having to agree to be taken hostage in exchange for his release. In Baldwin's account of the disaster, Rosetti 'found the India Trade to Suez in a flourishing state' and it was from jealousy of British profits that he devised the plan.[62] This event is not only indicative of a wider trend of increasing commercial activity, but also of the value of the Suez trade by 1779. Baldwin recounts that the combined value of the four ships that arrived at Suez at the time of the disaster (including two Company packet ships which carried small amounts of merchandise) was 'a booty of more than half a million dollars'.[63] In a later petition to Ibrahim Bey, asking for restitution, O'Donnell claimed that his plundered goods were worth 150,000 dollars.[64] This shows

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[60] *BiE*, p. 75
[61] GB, *Narrative of facts; relating to the plunder of the English merchants by the Arabs* (London, 1780), p. 4
[62] *Ibid.* p. 2
[63] *Ibid. p. 3*
[64] John O'Donnell to Ibrahim Bey, Egypt 5.

how India merchants were most likely using the Suez route to transfer their fortunes – in merchandise - back to England and how the prosperity of this new trade route attracted the attention of those who wanted to disrupt it or profit from it, with deadly consequences.

'The sinew of our importance in India': the East India Company and the Overland Trade:

> We may date the commencement of the decline from the day on which Bengal fell under the dominion of foreigners; who were more anxious to improve the present moment of their own emolument than to secure a permanent advantage to the nation. With particular want of foresight they began to drain the reservoir without turning into it any stream to prevent it from being exhausted…[65]
>
> – Alexander Dow, *History of Hindostan* (1768)

Although George Baldwin believed one cause of the overland trade's failure during his hiatus was the 'fears and apprehensions of the East India Company', the route was first initiated by Company merchants and officials.[66] It was on the initiative of Warren Hastings that the *Cuddalore* schooner was sent to Suez in 1773 with the aim of 'of improving the General Commerce of these provinces'.[67] According to H. L. Hoskins, James Bruce - a Scottish explorer who had made commercial overtures to 'Ali Bey in 1768 -[68] described Hastings as the 'founder and father of our cause'; meaning the overland trade.[69] This was certainly the view that Hastings retrospectively took, informing the King that his 'official situation in India led me, many years ago, to contemplate Egypt as affording by the position… of Suez… greater commercial advantages than any other land upon the globe.'[70] While most Company merchants who supported the improvement of Red Sea commerce as an opportunity for private profit, Warren Hastings, as Governor-General no doubt took the financial situation of the EIC's recent territorial acquisitions into account. An aspect of both Hastings and Baldwin's proposals attempted to address the economic distresses caused by the EIC's acquisition of the *Diwani* in 1765. Since then, with the right to raise tax revenues in Bengal, the Company saw little need to make investments of bullion to India, even stopping its shipments in 1767-8. However, the revenue surplus was not enough to outweigh the increasing

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[65] Alexander Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, *3 vols.* (Dublin, 1792) III. 3

[66] Baldwin, *The Communication with India by the Isthmus of Suez, vindicated from the Prejudices which have prevailed against it, whether proceeding from the supposed invincible Aversion of the Turks, or arising from Apprehensions of its Tendencies in respect to the Trade of the East-India Company in Leaden-hall Street* (London, 1784) p. 2 [This pamphlet's title shows who Baldwin blamed for the failure of his scheme]

[67] WH to CD, 18 Nov. 1773, Hoskins, p. 303

[68] James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, Vol. I* (London, 1790).

[69] Hoskins, *British Routes to India* (New York, 1928), p. 7

[70] WH to George III, 1798, *BiE*, p. 18

military spending necessary for a *territorial* power as well as merchants' continued remittances of fortunes back to England. This forced the Company to resume its bullion exports in 1770, but it was too late.[71] The trend exacerbated the devastating effects of the Bengal famine, with remittances of £1,086,255 being transferred to London at the famine's height in 1770-71. By 1772, when remittances were about to reach the £1.5million mark and amid an international financial crisis, the Company defaulted on its annual custom payments, resulting in the Bank of England having to bail out a corporate entity that was now deemed 'too big to fail'. It was in this context that Lord North's India Regulating Act of 1773 was passed, with Parliament appointing Warren Hastings as the first Governor-General of India.[72] With the 'drain of wealth' theory being the leading explanation of the 'true sources' of India's distress at the time of Hastings's appointment,[73] it is no surprise that he viewed commercial opportunities in the Middle East through this prism.

The historic trade between India and the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf was viewed by many as being a source of investment into the EIC's territories which could balance out the remittances. In the *Ninth Report* to the Commons Select Committee on the Affairs of India in 1783, Edmund Burke stated that the trade to the Persian Gulf and onwards to 'Turkey, Jedda and Bussora, which was the greatest and perhaps best branch of the Indian trade is very *much* diminished'. Furthermore, he described how the 'Communication with the Persian Gulph and the Red Sea, and through them with the whole Turkish… Empire' had 'repaid [the state] with interest through the medium of a lucrative Commerce', even during a period when 'Remittances… from Bengal were very large'.[74] George Baldwin would reference Burke's report in his pamphlet *Communication with India by the Isthmus of Suez* (1784), concluding that the 'opening of a mart for [the Company's] Indian manufactures' presented by his Suez route would be

[71] H.V. Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: the Indian problem in British politics* (Cambridge, 1991) pp. 113, 117
[72] William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: the relentless rise of the East India Company* (London, 2019) p. 221
[73] Bowen, p. 113
[74] 'Extracts from Mr. Burke's 9th Report', Egypt 5. [This likely appears in Egypt 5. as part of the notes compiled by Baldwin for Dundas in support of his plans]

beneficial to the 'revenue of Bengal'.[75] Ironically (considering Burke's prominent role in his impeachment), Warren Hastings had also realised the importance of the trade with Egypt to counteract the remittances; something more pressing considering the evacuation of British factors from Baghdad and Basra (Bussora) in 1773 and 1774, respectively. Hastings hoped that having little to export, the Egyptians and Arabs would pay for Company imports with hard currency, which could be reinvested in India. If it was successful, there was even the possibility to further increase Bengal's much-needed funds by creating a new source of customs revenue.[76] Thus, to use Alexander Dow's wording, the Suez trade was viewed as a new 'stream' to prevent the 'reservoir' of funds from being exhausted. Recollecting his 'arguments of 1773', Baldwin summarised this aspect of the scheme in his *Speculations* (1785). The British establishment in India, Baldwin described, had a 'revenue badly administered, capable… of defraying the civil government, and still of remitting millions sterling annually to England.'[77] Therefore:

> A communication with India by the Red Sea may be established, which, in its consequences, will have this operation: it will create a call for the manufactures of Bengal principally, which will contribute to the prosperity of that country. It will, in exchange, supply them with a large return of specie, the sinew of our importance in India.[78]

The extent to which this aspect of the Suez overland trade was viewed to be beneficial to the EIC is demonstrated by the fact that Hastings's proposal found its greatest support in the Bengal Supreme Council from none other than Philip Francis. This is particularly surprising considering that Francis was bent on sabotaging most of the Governor-General's plans, with the two men's relationship being so acrimonious that they fought an infamous duel. Also, seeing the Suez trade as a crucial replacement for that with Jeddah – where the operations of the Commercial Society of Merchants of Calcutta had recently been curtailed by the 'oppression and villainy' of the Sheriff of Mecca - [79] Francis concluded:

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[75] GB, *Communication*, p. 23
[76] Ingram, *Defence*, p. 22
[77] *PC* p. 213
[78] *Ibid.* p. 203
[79] 'Letters and Enclosures from Capt. Scott', BPC, 28 Aug. 1776, Egypt 5.

> If the projected Trade to Suez should appear to be attended with advantage, I see no reason why the Company members should not partake in it. The Ships now sent once in five years from Bombay to Mocha for Coffee, which are pay for it in Specie, might be freighted with coarse Goods from this port to be sold at Suez on the Company's account, a part of the Products would pay for the coffee at Mocha and the remainder to be left at Bombay in aid of the annual supply from this Presidency.[80]

The potential of Middle Eastern commerce to improve cash-starved colonial economies was not a realisation limited to the British. Merchants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were also drawn to the trade with the Persian Gulf as a source of silver as specie became crucial in funding Dutch establishments. As with the British experience in Bengal, the extractive nature of colonial economies also resulted in a severe reduction of the circulation of currency in the Dutch East Indies. By 1750, the *Hooge Regering* (High Government of the VOC) in Batavia promoted the establishment of a post on Khark Island in the Persian Gulf as an entrepôt for surplus Javan sugar as well as a source of much-needed specie. A factory was established on the island in 1753, but it was soon evident that operations were not profitable enough to cover the significant overheads. Thus, no effort was made to re-establish Dutch presence on Khark after it was conquered by Mir Muhanna of nearby Bandar Rig in 1766.[81] These attempts may have been fresh in the mind of Hastings and other promoters of the Red Sea trade, yet it is interesting that the Dutch failure did not deter them. This was most likely because the EIC – relying on their merchants to take such opportunities as private traders – was safe in knowledge that the funding for similar projects would not need to come from central coffers. As Willem Floor concluded in his analysis of the Khark Island factory, the 'Dutch company had lost the power to initiate new projects, to adapt, to make things happen, unlike its main competitor, the EIC. The British company stimulated the country trade by British traders.'[82] This reflects Erikson's assertion that EIC agents, being part of a more decentralised structure, were better suited to operating in the 'open cities' of the Gulf and Arabia, like Hormuz, Basra or Mokha, than their Dutch contemporaries, for whom private country trade was only

[80] 'Minute delivered by Mr. Francis', BPC, 4 Nov. 1776, Egypt 5.
[81] Willem Floor, 'The Dutch on Khark Island: A Commercial Mishap', *International Journal of Middle East Studies 24:3* (1992) pp. 422, 456
[82] *Ibid.* p. 458

exempted from the VOC monopoly in 1740s.[83] Hastings and his supporters no doubt believed that a similar organisational model could be attempted in Suez.

Although Hastings and Baldwin would portray the trade through Suez as beneficial to colonial finances, the overland route would be used by private traders as another way to remit their fortunes. Ainslie had long suspected that Baldwin was personally involved in such operations, informing Lord Weymouth that he had 'reason to think that Mr. Baldwyn… is commissioned by the People in India to devise a secure Method for Transmitting their Fortunes to Europe by a Trade to Suez'.[84] Although we must take whatever Baldwin's arch-rival stated with a pinch of salt, the valuable merchandise seized in the caravan disaster of 1779 illustrates that private merchants, like O'Donnell, may have used the route for these purposes. Spurred by Hastings's trade agreement with the Bey of Egypt in 1775, the Bengal Commercial Society was incorporated in Calcutta. Although primarily concerned with recapturing the export trade with the Middle East, this society of private merchants (albeit at a time when the boundary between private and Company was blurred[85]) could remit the proceeds of their sales in Egypt by bill of exchange via Venice, Marseilles or Leghorn. On at least one occasion, Baldwin made the arrangements for the society's remittances. In 1777, the *Alexander* carried the society's agent John Robinson to Suez where he sold India merchandise to Baldwin in exchange for bonds payable in London and also bought respondentia bongs for two *lakh** rupees on England-bound ships.[86] In contrast to India-based merchants and Fort William, the EIC directors in London were unenthusiastic about the Red Sea trade as it could undermine the Company's re-export of India goods from London to the Levant. The condemnation of the trade by Ottoman authorities, thus, gave the directors the opportunity to forbid further voyages to Suez. Although this led the Bengal Commercial Society to look elsewhere, the fortune carried through Egypt by O'Donnell suggests that remittances may have continued under other nations' flags or smuggled with

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[83] Erikson, pp. 19, 179
[84] RA to TT, Constantinople, 4 Jan. 1779, *Ibid.*
[85] See: P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 102
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[86] Marshall, 'The Bengal Commercial Society of 1775: Private British Trade in the Warren Hastings Period', *Historical Research, 42:106* (1969) pp. 174, 178, 180

Company dispatches. The example of sections of the EIC's involvement with the Egyptian overland route not only shows that the Company's fears over its monopoly were not black and white, but also how British interests in the Middle East were linked to the need to find markets to sustain the EIC's new *territorial* status in India. The transition from Company to territorial ruler also led to new strategic considerations like the necessity for reliable communications.

The Overland Route for Communications

They united the subjects of the most distant provinces by an easy and familiar intercourse… The advantage of receiving the earliest intelligence, and of conveying their orders, induced the emperors to establish, throughout their extensive dominions, the regular institution of posts.[87]

- Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, Ch. II

Where Baldwin's uses of the Egyptian overland route for commercial purposes divided opinion, its use for faster communications with British possessions in India was universally recognised. The recognition of this strategic advantage increased throughout the century even before Napoleon cemented its importance in the minds of all. This was due to steady increase in colonial state-building in the subcontinent as well as the growing realisation of 'empire' amongst the British public. It was in a pamphlet published at the height of Governor-General Cornwallis's expansion of (now Crown-regulated) Company authority in the aftermath of the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790-92) that Major John Taylor invoked Gibbon on 'the great attention paid by the Romans to the advantage of receiving the earliest intelligence' in his argument for the continuation Suez overland route.[88] At a time when Baldwin was at the tail end of his consulship, the Company had reverted to sending its most important dispatches on the rival overland route through Syria and Mesopotamia. Taylor, drawing on his own experiences on the Syrian route and comparing with Eyles Irwin and Colonel James Capper's journeys through Egypt, attempted to show that passage via Suez was significantly shorter outside of summer months. For Taylor, 'the want of intelligence from Bombay, during the late war with Tippoo Saib, [which] is too deeply impressed on our minds, to require much elucidation' could be explained by the fact that 'not one public dispatch was received by way of Suez, during the whole war.'[89] To support his argument for reviving the

[87] Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, New Edition in Twelve Volumes* (London, 1820) I. 82
[88] John Taylor, *Considerations on the Practicability and Advantages of a More Speedy Communication between Great Britain and her Possessions in India* (London, 1795) p. 17
[89] *Ibid.* pp. 16-7

vital communications link, Taylor could draw on a host of examples in which important intelligence, as well as political agents, passed through Egypt under Baldwin's supervision; often with consequences that led to British territorial acquisitions. It is these examples of the strategic and political advantages of Baldwin's activities that we will now re-evaluate, going beyond the existing historiography by examining the strategic consequences of them to the geopolitical position of the British in India rather than relying solely on his own accounts. This reassessment will draw upon a set of case studies: the use of the Egyptian overland route for intelligence before the sieges of Pondicherry in 1778 and 1793, as well as a route for political agents during the successful operation to transfer Ceylon to British control in 1795.

Reflecting on his first arrival in Egypt with the benefit of hindsight offered after the Napoleonic Expeditions, Baldwin stated that he 'meant no more, indeed, than commerce; but [he] saw that that commerce would subserve to great political designs.' During his first residency, these political designs were primarily his relaying of dispatches between the Court of Directors and the Indian Presidencies and *vice versa*. On arrival in 1775, he wrote to the Directors offering such a service – particularly 'in the event of a sudden war'[90] – with the Company signalling their approval in reply:

> if you shall settle at Grand Cairo… any Packets forwarded under the East India Company's address should be received there, the Gentlemen in the Directors will be obliged to you for forwarding them hither in the most expeditious manner, and will thankfully discharge to your Order such small Expences as may be thereby incurred, and, to prevent any Interruption to your kind Offers on these Occasions, the Directors will furnish their Presidencies in the East Indies with Orders to address the Letters, which they shall find necessary, for Expedition's sake, to send through Cairo, under cover to you…[91]

Although this letter also illustrates the extent to which the Company was unwilling to make a significant investment, with its guarded language only guaranteeing 'small Expences', the numerous covering letters addressed to Baldwin - which were originally affixed to packets of dispatches – in the India Office Records indicate that his communications service saw significant use from as early as 1776. Examples preserved in the India House records lend much credence to H. L. Hoskins's assertion that the service

[90] *PC,* p. 23
[91] Peter Mitchell (EIC Secretary) to GB, London, 25 May, 1775, Egypt 5.

'proved so effective that by the year 1777 the India authorities both in England and in India were relying on this route for their most important communications; and a packet marked "received overland" was a signal for instant attention.'[92] The significance of Baldwin's activities at this early stage was also corroborated by Eyles Irwin's account of the same year. Passing through Cairo, he wrote: 'Mr. Baldwin … is still the only merchant of our nation here, and is agent to the Company for forwarding their packets to and from India. And, considered in itself, this is a point of no little importance to that political body. The advantage of quick intelligence is no secret to a wise government.'[93] The frequent use of the route for communications – even in peacetime – illustrates its importance. Yet it was in wartime that the route proved its contribution to the British strategic advantage in India.

[92] Hoskins, p. 306
[93] Irwin, II. 84

The Sieges of Pondicherry:

1778:

The frustration of Taylor in his description of this communication channel's neglect in the 1790s was heightened by the fact that, as he put it, 'communication by the Red Sea, has twice, in fifteen years, accelerated the reduction of the French capital on the Coast of Coromandel.'[94] In the first instance, when Baldwin transmitted intelligence of the French entry into the American War of Independence in 1778 to the Indian Presidencies, Baldwin viewed it as a 'crisis… that would bring the merits of his situation into a proper light.'[95] Dispatches compiled by Baldwin in early May 1778 had reached Bombay by June 12th; Madras by June 22nd, and the Governor and Council in Calcutta by July 7th. The dispatches' arrival in Bengal predated that of the Secret Committee's official orders by almost a month.[96] After rapidly ejecting the French from their Bengal enclave at Chandernagore, the most significant result of this early intelligence was the 'reduction' of Pondicherry: France's largest Indian possession. In a letter of August 1778, Warren Hastings confirmed how Baldwin's information led the authorities at Fort William to act immediately:

> On the 7th of July we received intelligence from Mr. Baldwin at Cairo, that war had been declared on the 18th of March in London, and on the 30th in Paris. The proofs of this came so well attested that we ventured to proceed upon them as a certainty. We on the same day wrote to the Governor of Fort St. George to prepare for the immediate attack of Pondicherry, and we set them an example on the 10th by the capture of Chandernagore.[97]

A key element in this success was the fact that Baldwin acted on his own initiative rather than waiting to forward orders from London. Rather, Baldwin gathered his intelligence almost exclusively from his commercial network in the Mediterranean. Enclosed in his first dispatch to India were letters

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[94] Taylor, p. 14
[95] 'Humble Petition', Egypt 5. p. 3
[96] *Ibid*. p. 16
[97] WH to Laurence Sulivan, 18 Aug. 1788, in G.R. Gleig ed, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rt. Hon. Warren Hastings, First Governor-General of Bengal,* (London, 1841) II. 203

from Signor Brandi (Baldwin's agent in Alexandria), the Otto Franck & Co. merchant house in Leghorn, Captain Tarrabochia,[98] as well as '[a]uricular evidence collected from the French merchants of Cairo themselves'.[99] This points to the importance of Baldwin's commercial activities alongside his political role. In the eighteenth century, it was merchants, with their complex international networks, who often had the most accurate intelligence of geopolitical events. As David Hancock described in his study of transatlantic merchants, the expansion of imperial commerce in the eighteenth century forced merchants 'to improve and raise the level of commercial communication'.[100] This was certainly the case for Baldwin, who had to coordinate his Mediterranean trading with his activities as an agent for Red Sea traders. Whilst improving communications through Egypt would be highly beneficial to Baldwin's business interests, at such times of crisis as the outbreak of war his maintenance of the communication could serve a political use. No doubt this was why Baldwin consistently pushed for the development of both commercial and political interests in Egypt alongside each other. In terms of intelligence gathering, Baldwin could be said to have acted as a 'weak tie' (to use Mark Granovetter's terminology) between the well-integrated, hierarchical network of the East India Company and the loose commercial networks of the Mediterranean. Granovetter argued that individuals with many weak ties are better placed to diffuse information more effectively as they are more often able to tap into many short-distance 'local bridges'. This allows for a clearer transmission of information since longer distance 'bridges' – no matter how strong or institutionalised – will subject the information to distortions.[101] As a merchant engaged in two regional markets with their 'local bridges', Baldwin was better placed to gather and pass on reliable intelligence to the Presidencies in India than the long-distance, bilateral information flow between the Court of Directors and Fort William.

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[98] See above: p. 11

[99] 'Humble Petition', Egypt 5. p. 4

[100] David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge, 1995) p. 37

[101] Mark Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology, 78:6* (1973) pp. 1364-5, 1367

Although the Company '[r]esolved to present [Baldwin] with Five Hundred Pounds for [his] Zeal and attention to the Companys Interest in the Course of the last year by conveying early an Essential Intelligence to India at a very important Crisis',[102] he still felt that they were underestimating his contribution to the fall of Pondicherry. In his petition to the Court of Directors in 1779 for a fixed salary, he compared his compensation unfavourably with the rewards of diamonds, swords and plate conferred on other personages involved in the operation. Baldwin argued that his claim was 'distinct from every other claim, for services that tended indispensably in their consequences to gain Pondicherry, and which eventually was the cause of their possessing what at this time is possessed by the honourable Company in India.'[103] Since he was so diligent in including extracts from the Company records as well as a timeline of the events in his petition,[104] it is clear that the significance of his actions was contested at the time. It is understandable why this might have been the case when we consider the field dispatches sent to Viscount Weymouth, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, by Hector Munro, who commanded the Company forces at the fall of Pondicherry. Although a vanguard from Madras had encamped four miles from the city by August 8th (which had set out as soon as Baldwin's intelligence reached Fort St. George two weeks earlier), as Munro put it, 'it was the 21st before a sufficient number of troops were here so that we could attempt to advance.' Furthermore, it was not until September that the besieging force 'broke ground'.[105] Thus, the hostilities only began by the time the Secret Committee's orders had reached India and, since Baldwin's dispatch was an unofficial compilation of news reports, the Company forces may not have felt it proper to open fire before ordered to do so from London. However, as Captain Matthews, the courier sent to Madras with the Secret Committee's orders, recollected: 'when [Munro's army] received the Company's orders, they had already assembled an army for the siege of Pondicherry, and the

[102] Peter Mitchell to GB, London, 18 May, 1779, Egypt 5.
[103] 'Humble Petition', Egypt 5. pp. 14-5, 12
[104] For example, see: Appendix III.
[105] Hector Munro to TT, Pondicherry, 27 Oct. 1778, printed in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure, Vols. 64-65,* (London, March 1779) pp. 146-7

greatest part of that army had reached Conjeveram [Kanchipuram; a city *en route* to Pondicherry] on its way thither. That the moment the Company's orders were received they began the attack'.[106]

At the operational level, Baldwin's dispatches were an advanced warning that allowed the Presidencies to mobilise their forces before the French could. Indeed, Munro's letter after Pondicherry's capitulation stated that the total size of his force was 10,500 men. Although this figure was computed after the besieging army had been static outside the walls of Pondicherry for almost two months, allowing for reinforcements from the marines of Admiral Vernon's naval squadron, Baldwin's intelligence bought Munro's forward force time to cover a significant portion of the journey to Pondicherry as well as the Madras Presidency time to assemble the main force. [107] This head start was even more important when we consider the poor condition of roads in the Carnatic; the principal difficulty of Munro's army since it resulted in their being plagued by shortages in provisions and munitions until British naval superiority could allow supply by sea. Nevertheless, there were other decisive factors in the city's fall, regardless of Baldwin's actions. It was indeed the question of naval superiority that led to the delay from August to September, as a French squadron under Admiral Tronjoli was covering Pondicherry's seafront, preventing British encirclement. However, a series of engagements between the French fleet and Vernon's East Indies squadron in late August led to Tronjoli retiring to Mauritius. The Governor, Guillaume de Bellecombe, attributed the fall of Pondicherry entirely to the conduct of Tronjoli. Not only had he retreated when he had outgunned the British fleet but, when landing his wounded at Pondicherry, Tronjoli took 800 men and munitions from the garrison back to Mauritius with the fleet.[108]

On the strategic level, the Presidency Armies were able to take advantage of Baldwin's warnings to conduct a campaign based on rapidity, ejecting the French from the Indian mainland by the beginning of 1779. Not only was France's stronghold on the Coromandel taken, but – even before the Secret Committee's orders – the French enclave at Chandernagore, Bengal was occupied within days of

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[106] 'Humble Petition', Egypt 5. p. 18
[107] *Universal Magazine*, p. 152
[108] S. P. Sen, *The French in India, 1763-1816* (Calcutta, 1958) pp. 78, 76-7

Baldwin's intelligence arriving at Fort William, Calcutta.[109] Taking Pondicherry as early as October was also of great strategic import, as the defenders had hoped to hold out until the rains would begin that month, hopefully inundating the besieging force on the city's marshy surroundings. It was extremely fortunate for the British that that year the rains came later than usual.[110] The fall of Pondicherry also aided the campaign going forward, as the Madras Army now had winter quarters from which a detachment could march across the tip of the subcontinent to the French factory at Anjengo at the bottom of the Malabar Coast after the monsoon had abated in February 1779. From there they embarked for Mahé with Vernon's fleet, leading to the settlement's surrender without a shot fired.[111]

By 1778, the French presence in India had been eviscerated to the point of no return. In contrast to the highpoint of Anglo-French rivalry at the time of Dupleix, the Seven Years' War had reduced the French in India 'to absolute political impotence.'[112] This was particularly significant in the case of Pondicherry, which had previously fallen to the British in 1760 after a bloody siege and had had its fortifications and large swathes of the city razed. Although commendable efforts were made to rebuild areas of the city, the reconstruction of its fortifications was plagued by disputes. By 1778, the fortifications were still incomplete, with the defensive ditch only reaching a foot deep in some sections.[113] Under these circumstances, it seems inevitable that Pondicherry would fall and that its fate – as well as that of the wider French presence – had been sealed fifteen years earlier. The extent to which this detracts from the decisiveness of George Baldwin's actions is further suggested by the fact that British forces had been continually monitoring the military position at Pondicherry since 1765.[114]

Yet, such an interpretation ignores the French objective to recover its prior standing in India. Between 1765 and 1778 the French 'drew up innumerable plans of diplomatic alliances and military

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[109] Sen, p. 16
[110] *Ibid.* p. 79
[111] G. J. Bryant, *Emergence of British Power in India, 1600-1784: A Grand Strategic Interpretation* (Woodbridge, 2013) p. 187
[112] Sen, p. 218
[113] *Ibid.* p. 74
[114] Bryant, p. 219

operations',[115] including a 1777 arms sale and diplomatic mission to the Marathas, opening the possibility of an attack on Bombay.[116] Indeed, the greatest British fear was that the French would ally with the Company's 'country' enemies in a future war; something confirmed by hindsight. If the French could again aid the Kingdom of Mysore, ruled by Haidar Ali, in a war against the British, the Company presence on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts would be threatened. In 1777, de Sartine, the Minister of Colonies, commissioned a veteran of Dupleix's wars, the Marquis de Bussy, to submit a *Mémoire* on Indian affairs. Therein he argued that Haidar Ali would be the principal French ally in the 're-establishment of our position in India'.[117] This alliance was already apparent even before Haidar opened hostilities with the Company in 1780. He had sent a detachment to aid the French at Mahé; a strategic port that was an entrepot for Mysore's French munitions and military advisors. Thus, when Vernon's squadron arrived to take Mahé in 1779 Haidar Ali's standard flew alongside the French flag above the fort.[118] Most crucially, the rapid campaigns of 1778-9 denied the French a foothold on the Coromandel or Malabar coasts from where they could land forces in support of Haidar Ali or the Marathas (had diplomatic overtures succeeded). From 1770 at the latest, the garrison and naval squadron at Mauritius had been built up, leading Fort William to suspect a landing of a large force in India. With advanced warning of hostilities, they were able to 'neuter the French forces already present in India' and repel Tronjoli's squadron.[119] The capture of Arcot by Haidar, and his son Tipu's victory over Colonel Baillie at the Battle of Pollilur in 1780 – the last great defeat of Company forces – proved that 'country' enemies were dangerous enough without coordinated support from European allies. Such a potential operation was made a reality by the arrival in Indian waters of Commodore de Suffren in 1781 and the partial success of his series of naval engagements against Admiral Sir Edward Hughes in 1782. Suffren's fleet supported Haidar Ali's army throughout the closing stages of the Second Anglo-Mysore War, notably at the Battle

[115] Sen, p. 218
[116] Bryant, p. 272; Gleig, p. 214
[117] Sen, pp. 296-7
[118] Bryant, p. 187
[119] *Ibid.* p. 189

of Cuddalore.[120] The ramifications of this campaign never played out due to news of the Peace of Paris but, had a French force been able to disembark earlier in the war, the threat to the British presence in India would have been much greater. Indeed, commenting on the Battle and Siege of Cuddalore of 1783, which happened after peace preliminaries were signed in Europe, Taylor highlighted how Baldwin might have made a difference had he not been forced to leave Egypt in 1779. 'Had the Preliminaries arrived so soon as they might have done', he lamented, '…it would have prevented the fatal consequences of two actions at land, and an engagement at sea, in which 80 officers fell and upwards of 2000 men.'[121]

1793:

With the return of the *status quo ante* after the Peace of Paris, Pondicherry again became the 'centre of French rivalry to the expansion of English power in India.'[122] In a repeat of the events of fifteen years earlier, news of the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1793 would reach India through Egypt, leading to a final siege of Pondicherry and the close of Anglo-French rivalry on the subcontinent. Baldwin would thus be able to boast that he 'conveyed the account of [war] so early to India as to enable the Governor-General (as he professes candidly to have done upon the credit of my report) to expel the French from India, and to decide the fate of the war in that country a second time, to the great honour and incalculable advantage to England.' In the same recollection, he stated that he acted because he 'saw the disorders and the convulsions of France, tending to the consequences we have seen' and that he 'was attentive to the impending moment of unavoidable war.'[123] This suggests that, as in 1778, Baldwin preempted any orders from the Company or the Foreign Office and demonstrated his ability to acquire geopolitical intelligence from his commercial network. This is something he confirmed in a letter to the Court of Directors in April 1793, stating: 'I have collected all the European Intelligence which has come to my hands & as far down as the 12th of February from London' and he further informed them that he

[120] G.B. Mallenson, *The French Struggles in India and on the Indian Seas* (London, 1884)
[121] Taylor, p. 16
[122] Sen, p. 451
[123] *PC,* pp. 28-9

gave his consent for the *Drake* sloop at Suez 'to proceed with it instantly to India.'[124] Although this intelligence took a comparatively long time to reach British forces in India, it outpaced French communications and led to decisive actions. On land, the Company was in a strong position by 1793, with Governor-General Cornwallis having defeated Tipu Sultan in 1792 leading to the British and their Maratha allies acquiring significant territorial concessions from the Kingdom of Mysore. Yet, at sea, the picture was quite different. After two years of blockading the Mysore-occupied Malabar coast, Rear Admiral William Cornwallis (the Governor-General's brother and commander of the East Indies Squadron) ordered all his fleet bar his flagship, the *Minerva*, back to England since he had dismissed the rumours of impending war with France. This left the British outnumbered at sea by a French squadron of at least four frigates. The timely arrival of Baldwin's letters to Cornwallis at Trincomalee on June 19th allowed the *Minerva* to immediately proceeded to Pondicherry before any French forces had heard the news, capturing a French merchantman *en route* and denying the garrison a supply of munitions.[125] With '[t]he *Minerva* therefore being the only Ship belonging to His Majesty in these Seas, and the French having, by all accounts, four, or five frigates and a Corvette', Cornwallis believed that 'being able to prevent succors from being thrown into Pondicherry appeared…very doubtful'.[126] He, therefore, headed to Madras to put together a fleet from assorted East Indiamen. The ramshackle fleet returned to Pondicherry and 'continued to block up the place until the twenty-third of August when it surrendered to the Army under the Command of Colonel Braithwaite, having made no resistance after our Batteries were opened.'[127] Even though the garrison at Pondicherry was yet again in a poor state, with nothing having been done to repair its ruined fortifications since 1785, the time bought by Baldwin's intelligence was decisive, not least in that it arrived before French dispatches.[128] This meant that a significant French squadron did not know to take advantage of its naval superiority. As the naval historian Cyril Northcote Parkinson argued, it would have been disastrous for the British had the French squadron taken

[124] GB to CD, Alexandria, 10 April, 1793, Egypt 5a.
[125] C. Northcote Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1815* (London, 1954) pp. 59-60
[126] Cornwallis to Admiralty, Sept. 10, 1793, Parkinson, p. 61
[127] *Ibid*.
[128] Sen, p. 446

Cornwallis's lone flagship, bombarded Madras and blockaded the Hooghly River. 'That nothing of the sort took place', he wrote, 'was due less to the efforts of armed Indiamen [which had been hastily prepared to blockade Pondicherry] than to French ignorance of the situation.'[129] This information asymmetry was solely based on Baldwin's intelligence collection - in large part from private commercial networks - and his initiative in making rapid use of the Egyptian overland route.

Even as Baldwin was forwarding intelligence crucial to the geopolitical situation in India for a second time, the East India Company directors were promoting the use of the alternative overland route through Syria and Persia. Despite the Company agents at Basra being unable to outpace Baldwin's communications in both 1778 and 1793, the directors – encouraged by Sir Robert Ainslie – were intent on establishing the Persian route as the official channel due to the perpetual fear of the Suez trade's competition and, particularly, after the disturbances caused by the *Hatti Sherif* and caravan disaster of 1779, out of fear for the safety of their agents and dispatches.[130] In a letter dated two months prior to Baldwin's 1793 warning of war, the then Foreign Secretary Grenville announced: 'I am commanded by His Majesty to acquaint you that His Majesty has no further occasion for your services as Consul-General in Egypt.'[131] However, Baldwin *alleged* that a duplicate of this letter only reached him in 1796, meaning that he would carry out what he still perceived to be his duty, not only in communicating the outbreak of the French Revolutionary War but also in transporting political agents on the overland route. In 1794, Dundas, one of his few remaining champions in Whitehall, pleaded to Grenville to reverse the decision to no avail, highlighting Baldwin's service in 1793, stating that he 'did feel a little awkwardness in the recollection that, about the same time of his doing that public service, he would receive his letter of dismission.'[132] Concerning the strategic position of the British in India, Baldwin played a crucial part in finally eradicating the French threat on the subcontinent. When Pondicherry and Chandernagore were returned to France in 1816, they ceased to have any political significance, with no stationing of garrisons

[129] Parkinson, p. 62
[130] Furber, p. 130
[131] FO.24/l, WG to HD, Feb. 8, 1793, *BiE*, p. 235
[132] HD to WG, Aug. 17, 1794, *Ibid.* pp. 245-6

above that required for policing.[133] Information asymmetries in favour of Company forces in India enabled two rapid campaigns which contributed much to the outcome of 1816. Such asymmetries would not have been possible without the use of the overland route through Egypt to transmit Baldwin's intelligence.

[133] Sen, p. 451

Cleghorn's Expedition to Ceylon, 1795:

Hugh Cleghorn was professor of Civil History at St. Andrews for sixteen years, but found academic life unsuited to what his friend William Adam called his 'bigness of mind.'[134] Taking the opportunity to travel, he agreed to accompany the 10th Earl of Home on a grand tour as his 'bear leader' from 1788 to 1790. Alongside his travelling, Cleghorn was 'for some time been employed in Switzerland on H.M. Service',[135] developing plans for the Swiss Cantons to attack France's exposed eastern border in the event of a French invasion of the Netherlands. In Neuchâtel, Cleghorn developed a close friendship with Count Charles-Daniel de Meuron, the founder and colonel of a Swiss mercenary regiment. The Regiment de Meuron had been hired by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and, by 1795, formed a large part of Ceylon's garrison.[136] With the French invasion of the 'old' Dutch Republic and the creation of the 'new' Batavian Republic in 1795, Stadholder William V of Orange went into exile in England. From there he wrote the 'Kew Letters' which implored commanders throughout the Dutch colonies to continue resisting the French. In Ceylon, the commanders of the VOC forts refused to follow the orders of the Kew Letter, necessitating an expulsion of the Dutch by the British.[137] When a delegation of Swiss soldiers approached the Comte de Meuron complaining of how the political situation had led to arrears in the Regiment's pay, Cleghorn saw an opportunity to secure a shift of allegiance that could help transfer Ceylon to the British without 'great effusion of blood'.[138] Dundas approved Cleghorn's plan and issued orders that stressed the urgency of the mission, stating that it 'is important that the departure of the Count should be hastened as much as possible, and in order that no delay may take place, it is wished that you would accompany him thither.'[139] Cleghorn left England on March 1st 1795, joining Meuron and his retinue (his aide-de-camp, secretary, and two servants) in Switzerland and sailed from Venice for Alexandria, where George

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[134] Aylwin Clark, *An Enlightened Scot: Hugh Cleghorn, 1752-1837* (Duns, 1992) p. 283
[135] HC to Admiral William Hotham, Neuchâtel, 13 April, 1795, in *CP* p. 32
[136] Aylwin Clark, 'Cleghorn, Hugh', *ODNB* (2016)
[137] Erik Odegard, *The Company Fortress: Military Engineering and the Dutch East India Company in South Asia, 1638-1795* (Leiden, 2020) pp. 247-8
[138] Clark, *ODNB*
[139] HD to HC, Feb. 1795, *CP,* p. 1

Baldwin arranged their passage through Egypt.[140] This mission was another example of the Egyptian overland route being selected due to it being seen as the quickest passage to India rather than the most reliable or commercially tenable. Where most historians of the Suez route – like Ingram, Hoskins and Taylor – have never mentioned the Cleghorn Expedition, Saïd insisted that Baldwin's role 'must not be overlooked'.[141] Yet, as with accounts of the route's use for providing warning of war, Saïd's assessment does little to address the wider geopolitical significance of the Expedition or the precise extent to which Baldwin's actions contributed to the strategic outcomes.

Cleghorn and the Swiss party arrived at Alexandria on the 10th of June 1795 and were taken 'to the house of Mr. Baldwin, our Consul. [Where] We were received by him with the utmost politeness and cordiality. We were all lodged at his house, and his table was furnished with luxurious abundance.' According to Cleghorn, Baldwin was 'ignorant of the motives of [their] journey'; something that must be acknowledged when assessing his contribution to the expedition. Yet, Cleghorn also believed that 'from some hints, [Baldwin] had reason to be persuaded that I was going to India with some intelligence relative to a general peace.' That Baldwin may have realised the intentions of the mission are confirmed by the fact that he informed Cleghorn that the Dutch Consul in Alexandria was due to receive dispatches to be forwarded to their possessions in India. On his own initiative, Baldwin suggested to Cleghorn that he could arrange for the dispatches to be intercepted either by bribery or by 'contriv[ing] to get him robbed and his papers seized on his journey'.[142] Not without some anxiety over whether he was exceeding his mission, Cleghorn wrote up the following orders for Baldwin:

> I am of opinion that a knowledge of the contents of these dispatches may be of use to His Majesty's service. I am also inclined to believe that the only way of getting possession of them is by employing the means which you were so good as to suggest.[143]

Although it is unknown whether Baldwin ever had to employ his 'abilities and knowledge of the country to cause the person with dispatches to India to be attacked (but not murdered)',[144] the example highlights

[140] *BiE*, p. 259
[141] *Ibid.* p. 262
[142] *CP,* pp. 52-3
[143] HC to GB, Alexandria, 10 June, 1795, *CP,* pp. 53-4

Baldwin's political role. Just as it was useful to have an agent to forward communications, maintaining a consulship in Egypt could also have allowed opportunities to intercept enemy communications or other forms of espionage. A week later, Cleghorn's party reached Cairo where they were placed under the care of Carlo Rosetti. Rosetti, who Baldwin had accused of complicity in the caravan disaster in 1779, was surprisingly acting as Baldwin's Cairo representative by the 1790s – alongside his other services as the Consul for both the Holy Roman Empire and Russia as well as *chargé d'affaires* for Spain.[145] He arranged for the Pasha to write letters of recommendation for Cleghorn to be presented to the authorities in Jeddah. Additionally, Rosetti wrote to the EIC factors in Mocha to ensure that Cleghorn would have a ready vessel waiting for him. They left Suez on July 9th and – breaking the passage at Jeddah – arrived in Mocha by August 18th.[146] Learning of Baldwin and Rosetti's negotiations with the Beys in 1794 for an emulation of the Truguet Agreements as well as his well-organised passage, Cleghorn was convinced of the political utility of a British Consul in Egypt, lamenting the fact that the treaty had not been recognised by the British Government in the form of diplomatic gifts. He informed Henry Dundas that he:

> by no means presume to offer my opinion concerning the importance of securing at all times a safe and speedy passage from Cairo to the different ports of the Red Sea, but if such a passage appears to you to be occasionally necessary, to preserve uninterrupted a communication between Britain and the immense, and I hope increasing possessions of the East, I have reason to believe that it may be expedient to pay a regular attention to the governing powers of this country.[147]

Nevertheless, when assessing the impact that using the Egyptian overland route had on the outcome of Cleghorn's mission, the crucial factor – as Dundas had insisted in his orders – was speed. Despite being one of the few Government supporters of Baldwin, Dundas had never specified which route Cleghorn was to take to Ceylon and certainly did not show any preference for the Red Sea route in his written orders. 'I do not wish to confine you in your journey to any particular route', Dundas informed Cleghorn. The only arrangement he made was to have a vessel ready 'to convey [Cleghorn] across the

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[144] *CP*. pp. 53-4
[145] *Ibid.* p. 66
[146] *BiE*, pp. 261-2
[147] *CP*, p. 63

Mediterranean to such a port as you may think most convenient to facilitate your journey to India.'[148] This reflects the context of increasing competition between the two overland routes. The 1790s, Furber argued, was a time when 'the directors refused to slight the Persian Gulf route in favour of its rival', with the EIC appointing their own agent to Aleppo in 1791 when the Levant Company could no longer staff the consulate. The directors were not even deterred when civil disturbances at Basra forced the operation to be moved to Kuwait in 1793.[149] It is telling that Cleghorn would show a different preference; something that could be explained by the example of Major John MacDonald, a courier between England and India on the Egyptian route,[150] 'who left Europe thirty days before [Cleghorn], [and] met with no interruption.'[151] Although he would sing the praises of the British Consulate while in Egypt, Cleghorn was frustrated in the delays in his onward journey. By the time the expedition had reached the Malabar Coast on September 6th, he learnt that hostilities had already broken out with the Dutch, including on Ceylon itself where Trincomalee had been besieged and taken in August. This contradicts the interpretation of a 'bloodless' transfer of the island and puts the decisive role of the overland route into question.[152] Although the final toll of casualties was undoubtedly kept down by the fact that Trincomalee surrendered only two days after the British saps were opened, 200 of a 600-man Dutch sally against the British batteries were killed.[153] Reporting back to Dundas, Cleghorn would lament that:

> It has been to me matter of the most serious regret, that a variety of unfortunate and unavoidable delays detained me so long on the Red Sea. Had I arrived there before the commencement of hostilities, I have reason to be confident that the object of my mission would have been easily attained, and Ceylon gained without bloodshed or expence.[154]

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[148] *CP* pp. 1-2
[149] Furber, pp. 130-1
[150] MacDonald also had a secret purpose for being in Egypt. His visit was a follow-up to one made in 1791, after which he presented a memorial to Dundas, promoting the idea of a British occupation. MacDonald went on to have a meeting with Ibrahim Bey (brokered by Rosetti) where it was agreed that the British could establish factories at Qina and Qusayr in Upper Egypt (although the Napoleonic Expedition meant nothing was put into action). See: *BiE*, pp. 248-50
[151] *CP*, pp. 196-7
[152] *BiE*, p. 258
[153] Francken to Nederburgh, 20 Feb. 1797, quoted in Odegard, p. 249
[154] CH to HD, Madras, 15 Oct. 1795, *CP*, pp. 196-7

By this time, Columbo was the only and, according to Cleghorn, 'the strongest', Dutch fort still holding out on Ceylon. There was still hope for Cleghorn since it was discovered that the main body of the Regiment de Meuron (five companies) formed a significant and the most experienced portion of Columbo's garrison. As Cleghorn argued, 'our great object, the easy reduction of Columbo, is still to be obtained, and indeed cannot be obtained unless the regiment de Meuron transfers itself to us.'[155] The continued relevance of the mission was further aided by the fact that the monsoon season put a halt to all military operations until January of 1795. This also bought time for Cleghorn to dispatch Major Agnew to Columbo to deliver Meuron's capitulations. Considering that such pauses in hostilities are expected annually, the overland route did manage to get the expedition to India before the Cape route would have. This allowed Cleghorn and Agnew to take advantage of the monsoon season to safely carry out negotiations. What cannot be ascertained is whether the Persian route would have allowed Cleghorn to reach Ceylon before the opening of any hostilities. In the new year, Agnew would return from Columbo having secured Governor Van Angelbeek's agreement that a cartel would be arranged to transport the surrendered Regiment de Meuron out of the fort. The Governor then put up a token resistance to the British as they advanced from Jaffna but surrendered on February 16th, before a formal siege was laid. Although this could in part be attributed to his Organist sympathies,[156] the departure of the Swiss deprived him of a force capable of mounting an effective defence.

The addition of Ceylon to the British Empire in 1796 was a final solidification of the British position in India and marked the end of the VOC and Dutch military presence. Although the Peace of Amiens would return the Cape Colony (invaded by British forces in 1795) to the Batavian Republic in 1803, the same was not the case for Ceylon. The acquisition of the island was also an important blow to the potential for continued French rivalry in India. The primary strategic value of Ceylon was the Bay of Trincomalee, which was one of the few year-round safe anchorages in the Bay of Bengal; a fact acknowledged during the Seven Years' War when both British and French vessels used the natural

[155] *CP*, pp. 172-3
[156] Odegard, p. 249

harbour to refit. With the loss of Pondicherry and their other coastal possessions in India in 1778, Trincomalee became a potential base for the French fleet to operate from, becoming a reality with Dutch entry into the American War in 1780. Thus, a French fleet could be closer to the mainland than at Mauritius and could also be on station earlier in the season, while the British fleets would have to sail from Bombay or the Hooghly.[157] Worryingly for the British, between the American and French Revolutionary Wars, engineers were employed to improve Ceylon's defences, with their plans calling for the unification of Dutch and French forces at the Cape and in Asia under a single *French* command.[158] War with Revolutionary France had brought the Dutch into alliance with the British, with the VOC relying on British convoys. Yet, with the shift of alliances in 1795 again opening the possibility of the French using Ceylon, Cleghorn and Dundas saw that seizing the island was a strategic necessity. Although the direct contribution of George Baldwin in this geopolitical success for the British must not be overestimated, Cleghorn selected and used the Egyptian overland route for his, ultimately successful, mission. Furthermore, Baldwin would again supply important intelligence overland to secure the territorial gains made against the Dutch, including the British capture of the Cape. In 1796 he sent word to Admiral Elphinstone in India that a Dutch squadron and invasion force had departed from Texel. This allowed the British fleet to return to the Cape and intercept the Dutch squadron 'and to save that valuable conquest to our country.'[159]

[157] Odegard, pp. 181, 197
[158] *Ibid*. p. 209
[159] *PC,* p. 29

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In conclusion, this reassessment of the overland route in Egypt and George Baldwin's role in its development has shown how it was underestimated both in its time and in historiography. The considerations that went into Baldwin's appointment as the first British Consul-General to Egypt in 1786 show that there was recognition of Egypt's geopolitical importance by colonial powers prior to the usual assumption of the Napoleonic Expedition. The example of George Baldwin is of a figure who realised this potential even earlier with his successful commercial and communications operations since 1775 being indicative of this. This thesis has also gone further than existing historiography in analysing the consequences of Baldwin's use of the route to both the financial and strategic position of the British in India itself. The subject of this thesis has been a lens through which we can understand the beginnings of European colonialism in the Middle East, a process that took strategic considerations as a starting point, rather than 'functional colonial uses' following cultural Orientalism.[160] It has also been an example of how both the commercial and strategic significance of the region to Europeans was not in terminal decline during the long eighteenth century but that it experienced a revival. A major aspect of this renewed impetus was the colonial state-building project in India, as the East India Company became an increasingly *territorial* power. This necessitated some element of control over adjacent regions. In the case of Egypt this was the need for rapid communications and movement of political actors as well as an extra market to provide investment to colonial territories drained by remittances. Having been examined from the British perspective, using primary sources of the East India Company and the various actors involved, this thesis could be viewed as a starting point for further avenues of research that might adopt comparative approaches to other regions or, crucially, incorporate indigenous or subaltern voices; something lacking in the archival material available to British scholars.

[160] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978) pp. 76-7, 80

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Appendix I: Life and Times of George Baldwin

1743/4	Born to William Baldwin, hop merchant, in Southwark, London.
1760	Joined his brother William, Levant Company Consul, in Cyprus.
1763-1767	Based in Acre as a Levant Company silk merchant.
1768	Returned to England and applied for leave to travel to India as a free mariner.
1768/9-1771	Served as Consul in Cyprus following the death of his brother.
1773	Travelled to Egypt and had an audience with Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab. Baldwin claimed al-Dhahab said: 'if you bring India ships to Suez, I will lay an aqueduct from the Nile to Suez and you shall drink of Nile water.' (Baldwin, *Political Recollections*, p. 4)
1773	Briefly travelled to Constantinople to gain consent of the British Ambassador John Murray.
1774	Returned to Egypt and to Suez where he attempted to gain passage to India. Failing to find a ship bound for Jeddah, he returned to England.
7th March 1775	John Shaw was sent to Egypt as a representative of Warren Hastings and concluded a trade agreement with the Bey.
	Baldwin hears of the agreement and leaves for Egypt. Before leaving he wrote to the EIC offering his services for forwarding dispatches and received a commission from Oxford University to collect any manuscripts in Coptic or Syriac.
July 1775	Arrived in Alexandria.
1775	Sir Robert Ainslie appointed as a British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, succeeding Murray.
1775 – 1779	**First Residency**
1777	The *Swallow* Incident: Company officials onboard the *Swallow* dispatch sloop were accused of smuggling. The Ottoman *Reis Effendi* issues a memorial condemning trade in the trade in the Red Sea.
May-June 1778	Baldwin forwards intelligence of French entry into the American Revolutionary War to India. Leads to the capture of Pondicherry.
January 1779	The Sublime Porte issued a *Hatti Sheriff* (Imperial Command) to the Government of Egypt, forbidding trade in the Red Sea: 'The Sea of Suez is destined for the noble pilgrimage of Mecca. To suffer Franks' ships to navigate therein, or to neglect opposing it, is betraying your Sovereign, your religion and every Mahometan' (*Political Recollections*, pp. 8-10). Clandestine trade continued.
May-July 1779	The Caravan Disaster: a caravan carrying EIC merchants and merchandise was attacked between Suez and Cairo. British merchants in Suez are imprisoned. Baldwin agrees to be taken hostage in return for the release of other British prisoners.
Sept.-Nov. 1779	Baldwin escapes captivity and travels to Smyrna where he marries Jane Maltass (1763-1839), daughter of the merchant William Maltass.
1780	Baldwin and his wife travel to London, via Constantinople and Vienna. They are welcomed into London society as exotic figures and Baldwin develops an interest in Cosway's of theories animal magnetism. William Blake satirised this interest: 'Cosway, Frazer and Baldwin of Egypt's lake / Fear to associate with Blake / This life is a warfare against evils / They heal the sick / he casts out devils.'

Jan. 1785	French emissary, Laurent Jean-François Truguet signed trade treaties with Murad Bey (joint ruler of Egypt with Ibrahim Bey).
1785	Baldwin wrote a report on Egypt for Henry Dundas of the Indian Board of Control: *Speculations and Resources of Egypt* (1785).
June 1786	Baldwin is appointed as the British Consul-General in Egypt.
Dec. 1786	Arrived in Alexandria.
1786-1798	**Second Residency**
1786	Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid I sent Grand Admiral Gazi Hasan Pasha on an expedition to reassert control over Mamluk Egypt. The Ottomans drove the Duumvirate (Murad and Ibrahim Bey) to Upper Egypt and installed Ismail Bey as *Shayk al-Balad* (civil governor/*de facto* ruler).
1787	Gazi Hasan Pasha is recalled to take part in the Russo-Ottoman War, leaving Ismail Bey without military support.
1790-1	Much of Ismail Bey's faction perished in a plague.
1790	Baldwin wrote *A Memorial Relating to the Slave Trade in Egypt* at the request of the Privy Council.
1791	The Duumvirate returned to Cairo and regained control of Egypt.
	Baldwin wrote *An Essay on the Plague*. It is published later in *Political Recollections*.
April-June 1792	Baldwin forwards warning of the French Revolutionary War to India, leading to Pondicherry being captured again.
1793	Baldwin's letter of dismissal from the Foreign Office is written and sent.
Feb. 1794	Carlo Rosetti (Baldwin's agent in Cairo) finally succeeded in concluding a commercial treaty with Murad and Ibrahim Bey, securing British merchants the same rights as the Truguet Agreements.
1795	Baldwin (in Alexandria) and Rosetti (in Cairo) assist in transporting the party of Hugh Cleghorn and the Comte de Meuron through Egypt on their expedition to transfer Dutch Ceylon into British hands.
May 1796	Baldwin warns Admiral Elphinstone in India that a Dutch naval squadron was *en route* to the East. This led to its interception at the Cape. Baldwin claimed the letter of dismissal reached him at this time.
May 1798	Baldwin leaves Egypt.
1799-1800	Baldwin lived in a rented palace in Tuscany until he left for Livorno on hearing of Napoleon's victory at Marengo. 'I clothed myself, amidst this splendour, in perfect humility: I would have clothed myself in peace, but the din of war was all around me.' (*Political Recollections*, pp. 36-7)
	Escaped the invading French in the frigate *Santa Dorothea*, disembarking in Naples.
Nov. 1800	Admiral Keith writes to Baldwin requesting that he join the British invasion fleet bound for Egypt at Malta to act as an advisor for the expedition.
Dec. 1800	Joins the British fleet at Malta onboard HMS *Greyhound*.
March 1801	Baldwin is present at the landings at Aboukir and the death of Gen. Sir Ralph Abercromby. His responsibility was to negotiate for supplies and caravans for the Army. He claimed that Abercromby stated: 'the army, Gentlemen, is greatly indebted to Mr. Baldwin.' (*Political Recollections*, p. 124)
May 1801	Arrived in London and brought back the standard of the Invincible Legion of Bonaparte.
	Published *Political Recollections*.
19 Feb. 1826	Died at Earls Court, London.

Appendix II: 'British Ships in Egypt, 1788-1794'

		Name	Purpose	Port	Date
	1.	"Britannia"		Alexandria	June 1788
*	2.	"New Euphrates"	loaded senna, myrrh	Alexandria	June 1788
*	3.	"Pollard"	loaded natron, myrrh coffee, gum	Alexandria	April 1789
	4.	Baldwin's commission from Isma'il. "Watkins"	See Chapter IV, p.21	Alexandria	July 1789
L*	5.	"Ceres"	loaded natron	Alexandria	Sept. 1790
	6.	Baldwin mentions arrival p.27. Name unknown	dispatches	Suez	Nov. 1790
*	7.	"Betsey"	loaded natron, flax, coffee	Alexandria	Dec. 1790
*	8.	"Betsey"	loaded natron	Alexandria	Dec. 1791
L*	9.	"Levant"	loaded 80 tons, natron	Alexandria	Jan. 1792
L*	10.	"Delta"	loaded 146 tons, natron	Alexandria	May 1792
L*	11.	"Jackall"	loaded 44 tons natron; cotton, opium, pistachios	Alexandria	May 1792
*	12.	"Frederick"	loaded natron, 165 tons; cotton, ostrich feather, wool	Alexandria	May 1792

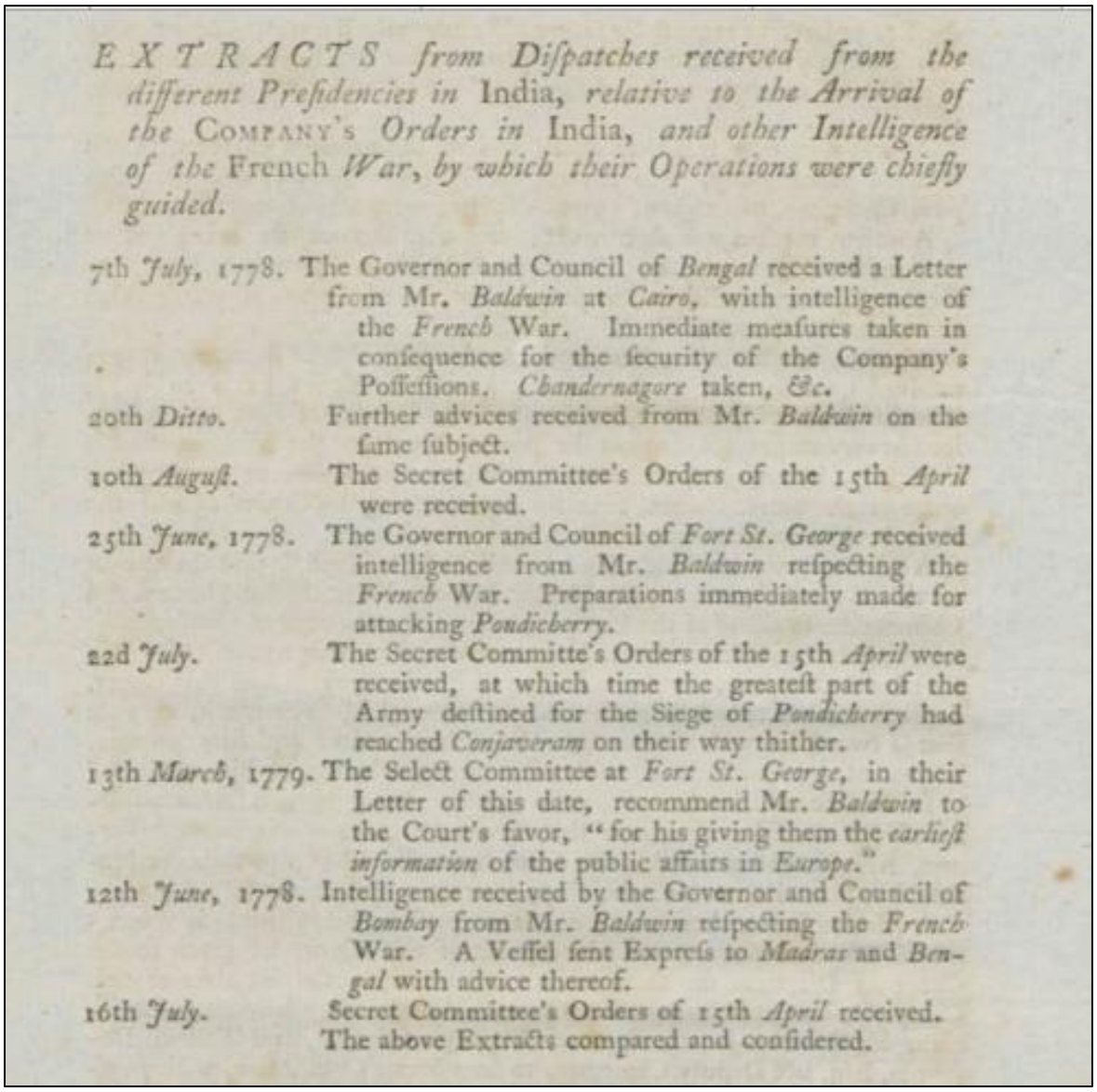
L Indicates consignments to Rich. & W. Lee, Baldwin's agents in London.

* It must be noted that the dates given are not the ones when the vessels landed in Alexandria, since they were dated later in the Impositions Book, The Levant Company. SP 105/171.

	Name	Purpose	Port	Date
L* 13.	"Levant"	loaded natron, 183 tons	Alexandria	Oct. 1792
L* 14.	"Frederick"	loaded natron, 172 tons	Alexandria	Nov. 1792
L* 15.	"Ceres"	loaded natron, 368 tons; cotton, 100 bales	Alexandria	D"c. 1792
* 16.	"Mohawk"	loaded natron, 150 tons; cotton-wool	Alexandria	Dec. 1792
* 17.	"William and Robert"	loaded natron, 440 tons	Alexandria	Dec. 1792
L* 18.	"Pollard"	loaded natron, 90 tons; india bales	Alexandria	Nov. 1792
L* 19.	"Minerva"	loaded natron, 226 tons; asphaltan, coffee, gum	Alexandria	Dec. 1792
L* 20.	"Mercury"	loaded natron, 133 tons	Alexandria	March 1793
L* 21.	"Allison"	loaded natron, 84 tons; gum, cotton, myrrh	Alexandria	June 26, 1793
* 22.	"Acorn"	loaded natron, 344 tons	Alexandria	June 1793
* 23.	"Drake" (Sloop)	brought dispatches	Suez	April 1793
* 24.	"William"	loaded natron, 119 tons	Alexandria	Sept. 1794
* 25.	"Rossetti"	loaded natron, 252 tons	Alexandria	Sept. 1794

Rosemarie J. Said, 'George Baldwin and British Interests in Egypt, 1775-1798 (1968), Appendix vii., pp. 291-2

Appendix III:



EXTRACTS from Dispatches received from the different Presidencies in India, *relative to the Arrival of the* COMPANY'S *Orders in* India, *and other Intelligence of the* French *War, by which their Operations were chiefly guided.*

7th *July*, 1778. The Governor and Council of *Bengal* received a Letter from Mr. *Baldwin* at *Cairo*, with intelligence of the *French* War. Immediate measures taken in consequence for the security of the Company's Possessions. *Chandernagore* taken, *&c.*

20th *Ditto*. Further advices received from Mr. *Baldwin* on the same subject.

10th *August*. The Secret Committee's Orders of the 15th *April* were received.

25th *June*, 1778. The Governor and Council of *Fort St. George* received intelligence from Mr. *Baldwin* respecting the *French* War. Preparations immediately made for attacking *Pondicherry*.

22d *July*. The Secret Committe's Orders of the 15th *April* were received, at which time the greatest part of the Army destined for the Siege of *Pondicherry* had reached *Conjaveram* on their way thither.

13th *March*, 1779. The Select Committee at *Fort St. George*, in their Letter of this date, recommend Mr. *Baldwin* to the Court's favor, "for his giving them the *earliest information* of the public affairs in *Europe*."

12th *June*, 1778. Intelligence received by the Governor and Council of *Bombay* from Mr. *Baldwin* respecting the *French* War. A Vessel sent Express to *Madras* and *Bengal* with advice thereof.

16th *July*. Secret Committee's Orders of 15th *April* received. The above Extracts compared and considered.

'Humble Petition of George Baldwin', London, 1779, Egypt 5. p. 16