Double profile of Bonaparte with French bicorne army hat and turban
(Bibliothèque Nationale—Cabinet des Estampes)
Napoleon in Egypt

AL-JABARTĪ’S CHRONICLE OF THE FRENCH OCCUPATION, 1798

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would be prevented from passing into the Nile, this being on the advice of ‘Ali Pasha. In addition he commanded that a bridge of boats with barricades and cannons should be erected, on the assumption that the French would not dare to advance rapidly or at least that they could hold them off and endure until they would be able to carry out their plans.

During the course of these events gloom spread among the populace and was felt in the market-places and people withdrew to their homes from sunset onward. As a result the Aghā and the Wāli publicly called for the reopening of the markets and the coffee-houses and ordered that lamps outside the houses and shops be lit once again. This was done for two reasons: firstly, to dispel the gloom and create an atmosphere of ease and comfort and secondly, out of fear that an alien might have free rein in the town.

On Monday news arrived that the French had reached Damanhūr and Rosetta, bringing about the flight of their inhabitants to Fuwwa and its surroundings. Contained in this news was mention of the French sending notices throughout the country demanding impost for the upkeep of the military. Furthermore they printed a large proclamation in Arabic, calling on the people to obey them and to raise their ‘Bandiera’. In this proclamation were inducements, warnings, all manner of wiliness and stipulations. Some copies were sent from the provinces to Cairo and its text is:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He has no son, nor has He an associate in His Dominion.

On behalf of the French Republic which is based upon the foundation of liberty and equality, General Bonaparte, Commander-in-Chief of the French armies makes known to all the Egyptian people that for a long time the Ṣanjaqs who lorded it over Egypt have treated the French community basely and contemptuously and have persecuted its merchants with all manner of extortion and violence. Therefore the hour of punishment has now come.

Unfortunately this group of Mamlūks, imported from the mountains of Circassia and Georgia have acted corruptly for ages in the fairest land that is to be found upon the face of the globe. However, the Lord of the Universe, the Almighty, has decreed the end of their power

O ye Egyptians, they may say to you that I have not made an expedition hither for any other object than that of abolishing your religion; but this is a pure falsehood and you must not give credit to it, but tell the slanderers that I have not come to you except for the purpose of
Bey Mameluk (Lithography by Carle Vernet)
restoring your rights from the hands of the oppressors and that I more than the Mamlûks, serve God — may He be praised and exalted — and revere His Prophet Muhammad and the glorious Qur'ân.

And tell them also that all people are equal in the eyes of God and the only circumstances which distinguish one from the other are reason, virtue, and knowledge. But amongst the Mamlûks, what is there of reason, virtue, and knowledge, which would distinguish them from others and qualify them alone to possess everything which sweetens life in this world? Wherever fertile land is found it is appropriated to the Mamlûks; and the handsomest female slaves, and the best horses, and the most desirable dwelling-places, all these belong to them exclusively. If the land of Egypt is a fief of the Mamlûks, let them then produce the title-deed, which God conferred upon them. But the Lord of the Universe is compassionate and equitable toward mankind, and with the help of the Exalted, from this day forward no Egyptian shall be excluded from admission to eminent positions nor from acquiring high ranks, therefore the intelligent and virtuous and learned ('ulamâ') amongst them, will regulate their affairs, and thus the state of the whole population will be rightly adjusted.

Formerly, in the lands of Egypt there were great cities, and wide canals and extensive commerce and nothing ruined all this but the avarice and the tyranny of the Mamlûks.

O ye Qâdis, Shaykhs and Imâms; O ye Shurbâjiyya and men of circumstance tell your nation that the French are also faithful Muslims, and in confirmation of this they invaded Rome and destroyed there the Papal See, which was always exhorting the Christians to make war with Islam. And then they went to the island of Malta, from where they expelled the Knights, who claimed that God the Exalted required them to fight the Muslims. Furthermore, the French at all times have declared themselves to be the most sincere friends of the Ottoman Sultan and the enemy of his enemies, may God ever perpetuate his empire! And on the contrary the Mamlûks have withhold their obeisance from the Sultan, and have not followed his orders. Indeed they never obeyed anything but their own greed!

Blessing on blessing to the Egyptians who will act in concert with us, without any delay, for their condition shall be rightly adjusted, and their rank raised. Blessing also, upon those who will abide in their habitations, not siding with either of the two hostile parties, yet when they know us better, they will hasten to us with all their hearts. But woe
upon woe to those who will unite with the Mamlûks and assist them in the war against us, for they will not find the way of escape, and no trace of them shall remain.

First Article
All the villages, situated within three hours' distance from the places through which the French army passes, are required to send to the Commander-in-Chief some persons, deputed by them, to announce to the aforesaid, that they submit and that they have hoisted the French flag, which is white, blue, and red.

Second Article
Every village that shall rise against the French army, shall be burnt down.

Third Article
Every village that submits to the French army must hoist the French flag and also the flag of our friend the Ottoman Sultan, may he continue for ever.

Fourth Article
The Shaykh of each village must immediately seal all property, houses, and possessions, belonging to the Mamlûks, making the most strenuous effort that not the least thing be lost.

Fifth Article
The Shaykhs, Qâdis, and Imâms must remain at their posts, and every countryman shall remain peaceably in his dwelling, and also prayers shall be performed in the mosques as customary and the Egyptians, all of them shall render thanks for God's graciousness, praise be to Him and may He be exalted, in extirpating the power of the Mamlûks, saying with a loud voice, May God perpetuate the glory of the Ottoman Sultan! May God preserve the glory of the French army! May God curse the Mamlûks and rightly adjust the condition of the Egyptian people.

Written in the Camp at Alexandria on the 13th of the month Messidor [the 6th year] of the founding of the French Republic, that is to say toward the end of the month Muḥarram in the year [1213] of the Hijra [2 July 1798].

It ends here word for word. Here is an explanation of the incoherent words and vulgar constructions which he put into this miserable letter.

His statement 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He has no son, nor has He an associate in
His Dominion’. In mentioning these three sentences there is an indication that the French agree with the three religions, but at the same time they do not agree with them, nor with any religion. They are consistent with the Muslims in stating the formula ‘In the name of God’, in denying that He has a son or an associate. They disagree with the Muslims in not mentioning the two Articles of Faith, in rejecting the mission of Muḥammad, and the legal words and deeds which are necessarily recognized by religion. They agree with the Christians in most of their words and deeds, but disagree with them by not mentioning the Trinity, and denying the mission and furthermore in rejecting their beliefs, killing the priests, and destroying the churches. Then, their statement ‘On behalf of the French Republic, etc.’, that is, this proclamation is sent from their Republic, that means their body politic, because they have no chief or sultan with whom they all agree, like others, whose function is to speak on their behalf. For when they rebelled against their sultan six years ago and killed him, the people agreed unanimously that there was not to be a single ruler but that their state, territories, laws, and administration of their affairs, should be in the hands of the intelligent and wise men among them. They appointed persons chosen by them and made them heads of the army, and below them generals and commanders of thousands, two hundreds, and tens, administrators and advisers, on condition that they were all to be equal and none superior to any other in view of the equality of creation and nature. They made this the foundation and basis of their system. This is the meaning of their statement ‘based upon the foundation of liberty and equality’. Their term ‘liberty’ means that they are not slaves like the Mamlûks; ‘equality’ has the aforesaid meaning. Their officials are distinguished by the cleanliness of their garments. They wear emblems on their uniforms and upon their heads. For example an Amir of ten has a large rosette of silk upon his head /like a big rose. If he is a commander of twenty-five his rosette is of two colours, and if he is a commander of a hundred his rosette is of three colours. His hat which is known as burnayta (It. borreta) is embroidered with gold brocade, or he may bear upon his shoulders an emblem of the same. If he has a reputation for daring and is well-known for his heroism and has been wounded several times he receives two badges on his shoulder. They follow this rule: great and small, high and low, male and female are all equal. Sometimes they break this rule according to their whims and inclinations or reasoning. Their women do not veil themselves and have no modesty; they do not
care whether they uncover their private parts. Whenever a Frenchman has to perform an act of nature he does so wherever he happens to be, even in full view of people, and he goes away as he is, without washing his private parts after defecation. If he is a man of taste and refinement he wipes himself with whatever he finds, even with a paper with writing on it, otherwise he remains as he is. They have intercourse with any woman who pleases them and vice versa. Sometimes one of their women goes into a barber’s shop, and invites him to shave her pubic hair. If he wishes he can take his fee in kind. It is their custom to shave both their moustaches and beard. Some of them leave the hair of their cheeks only.

They do not shave their heads nor their pubic hair. They mix their foods. Some might even put together in one dish coffee, sugar, arrack, raw eggs, limes, and so on. As for the name ‘Bonaparté’ this is the title of their general, it is not a name. Its meaning is ‘the pleasant gathering’, because *Bona* (*Būnā*) means ‘pleasant’ and *parté* means ‘gathering’. His statement ‘for a long time’ is a redundant adverb (*zarf laghw*) connected with his saying ‘have treated’ and the implication underlying the statement is that the Ṣanjaqs who are ruling over Egypt have been treating for a long time, etc. Ṣanājiq is the plural of Ṣanjāq, he is so called with reference to the banner which is displayed over his head. Sometimes the *sad* is changed into *sin*. The correct form of ‘yatasalṭanū’ is *yatasalṭamūn* (to rule), because there is no reason to omit the *nūn*. The same applies to *yata‘āmalū* (to treat). His statement ‘basely and contemptuously’ is connected with an elision which again is connected with his statement *fi ḥaqq*, and the implication is that ‘they give treatment with baseness and contempt’. But if he were to say *yu‘āmilūn al-Faransawīyya bi ‘l-dhull wa ‘l-iḥtiqar* (they treat the French basely and contemptuously), it would be most excellently and succinctly expressed. In fact the French are more deserving of such a treatment. His statement *Fahāḍara* (Therefore has come) there is no reason for this *fā* here. Good style would require *wa-qad ḥaḍara* (it has come). The word *al-ān* (now) is in the accusative, being an adverb modifying the verb ḥaḍara (has come) and *sā‘a* (the hour) is a subject. So the meaning is: ‘the hour of their punishment has now come’. It is much better to delete the word now (*al-ān*), the adverb being redundant, because *al-ān* is a noun denoting present time, and it is the same as the hour of punishment. It requires some constraint to turn it into a simple adverb of time, may God afflict them with every calamity. His statement *Wā ḥasratan* (Un-
fortunately), probably it is *wa-khuṣusan* (especially), because this word has no place here, / for *wā hasratan* is a word expressing affliction and the context does not permit it here. Its occurrence here is like animal droppings on the road or a boulder in a mountain pass, may God afflict the man who composed it with break-bone fever $^{42}$ and may God expose him to all sorts of destruction. His statement 'for ages' is connected with his statement 'have acted corruptly' (*yufsidū*) which is corrupt like all former and later verbs in the imperfect, because the *nūn* has been omitted. The expression should be read as *yufsidūn min muddat ‘uṣūr* (they have been corrupting for ages). He qualifies the ages as long in order to clarify and explain. However, ‘*uṣūr* is the plural of ‘*aṣr* (age), ‘*aṣr* means time, and so if they are numerous ages they are long. The correct form of *al-majlūbīn* is *al-majlūbūn* (imported), because it is an adjective qualifying the *zumra* (group), or it is *na’t maqīū* (an adjective cut off from its qualified noun).

His statement *alladhī yūwjad* (that is to be found) should be *alladhī lā yūwjad* (that is not to be found). The expression is not complete without *lā*.

His statement *fa-ammā Rabb al-‘ālamīn* (However the Lord of the Universe) is recommencement: ‘the Almighty’, (indeed He is), and one aspect and clear sign of His great power is bringing these devils to the fertile land of the kings and sultans, and their discomfiture and their destruction.

His saying *qad hattama* etc. (has decreed) shows that they are appointing themselves controllers of God’s secrets, but there is no disgrace worse than disbelief. *Yā ayyuhā ’l-Miṣriyyīn* should be *al-Miṣriyyīn*, because it is a vocative.

His statement ‘*qad yaqūlu lakum*’ (they may say) refers to those who fabricate lies against us.

His saying *fi hādhā ’l-ṭaraf* (hither), means ‘this part of the earth’. His statement *wa-qūlū li ’l-mustariyyīn* (but tell the slanderers) is the plural of *mustari* (slanderer) which means liar, and how worthy of this description they are. The proof of that is his saying ‘I have not come to you except for the purpose of restoring your rights from the hands of the oppressors’, which is the first lie he uttered and a falsehood which he invented. Then he proceeds to something even worse than that, may God cast him into perdition, with his words: ‘I more than the Mamlūks serve God ...’. There is no doubt that this is a derangement of his mind, and an excess of foolishness. What a worship he is speaking about,
however great its intensity, *kufr* (disbelief) had dulled his heart, and prevented him from reaching the way of his salvation. There is inversion in the words which should read *innanî a'dudu Allâh akthar min al-Mamâlik* (I serve God more than the Mamlûks do). However, it is possible that there is no inversion, and that the meaning is 'I have more troops or more money than the Mamlûks' and that the accusative of specification has been omitted. So his words 'I serve God' are a new sentence and a new lie.

His statement 'I revere His Prophet' is conjoined to what goes before, as one lie joined to another, because if he respected him he would believe in him, accept his truth, and respect his nation. His statement *al-Qur'ân al-azîm* (the glorious Qur'ân) is joined to 'His Prophet', that is, 'I respect the glorious Qur'ân', and this too is a lie, because to respect the Qur'ân means to glorify it, and one glorifies it by believing in what it contains. The Qur'ân is one of the miracles of the Prophet which proves his truth, and that he is the Prophet to the end of time, and that his nation is the most noble of all nations. These people deny all that and lie in everything they enumerate, 'And many as are the signs in the Heavens and on the Earth, yet they will pass them by, and turn aside from them'.

His saying '[all people] are equal in the eyes of God' the Almighty, this is a lie and stupidity. How can this be when God has made some superior to others as is testified by the dwellers in the Heavens and on the Earth?

In his statement *fa-huwa al-'aql* (it is the reason), there is no place for the *fa*, except that it is put in through the ignorance of the writer.

His statement *wa-bayn al-Mamâlik*, the word *bayn* is out of place and makes the language even more corrupt.

His saying *mâ 'l-'aql* (what is there of reason), is a subject and predicate, and a rhetorical question. In this sentence there is an omission, that is 'to them', and the meaning is that the Mamlûks have no reason.

His statement *kamâ yahlû* (everything which sweetens) is an object to his word *yatamallâkû* (to possess). His statement *Haythumâ* (wherever) is a new sentence, mentioned to enumerate the favours which the Mamlûks obtained.

His statement *fa 'l-yuwarrûnâ* (let them then produce), this is a colloquial word which is not in accordance with Arabic style. His saying 'the title-deed, which God conferred upon them': this is base ignorance
and *kufr* (heresy), because God does not give men possession of anything by writing a title-deed. What he means is that the people pass the country from hand to hand from their masters as these Mamlûks did, or from their masters' successors, or by conquest and compulsion. Prefixing *lâkin* with *fa* is proof of ungrammatical language. The word *lâkin* is as ungrammatical language as is the prefixing of *fa*.

As for his statement 'alâ 'l-bashar (toward mankind), it is more correct to say *bi* 'l-bashar, because the verb *ra'afa* (to show mercy) introduces its object with *bi*, but the verb 'adala is intransitive.

His saying *bi-*awnih (with the help of) is connected with his statement *lâ yustathhnâ ahad* (no one shall be excluded from) and so is his saying *min al-yawm* (from this day).

His statement *al-manaśib al-sâmiya* (eminent positions), that means *al-murtafi'a* (elevated). This is in order to avert blame from themselves by giving high posts of authority to the low and vulgar people among them, as for example their appointment of Barṭulmân (Barthélemy) the artilleryman to the post of Katkhudâ Mustaḥfizân. He says 'and thus the state of the whole population will be rightly adjusted'. Yes, that is to say, under the administration of wise and intelligent men. But they did not appoint them. The word *Muslimin* should be *Muslimûn* in the nominative. The point of putting the word in the *našb* (accusative) has already been mentioned. There is another point namely: that their Islam is *našb* (fraud).

As for his statement 'and destroyed there the Papal See', by this deed they have gone against the Christians as has already been pointed out. So those people are opposed to both Christians and Muslims, and do not hold fast to any religion. You see that they are materialists, who deny all God's attributes, the Hereafter and Resurrection, and who reject Prophethood and Messengership. They believe that the world was not created, and that the heavenly bodies and the occurrences of the Universe are influenced by the movement of the stars, and that nations appear and states decline, according to the nature of the conjunctions and the aspects of the moon. Some believe in transmigration of souls, or other fantasies. For this reason they do not slaughter ritually any animal they eat / or behead any man, before having killed them, so that the parts of his soul may not be separated and scattered, so as not to be whole in another body, and similar nonsense and erroneous beliefs. The word *sanjaq* should be *sanjaq* without the ā.

His statement *btâ' al-Mamâlik* (belonging to the Mamlûks) is des-
picable and a banal and trite word. The word *mutma′in* should be *mutma′inan* because it is *ḥāl* (circumstantial expression), and converting it to the nominative (*raf*') incorrectly is an indication of their state, and their insignificance. May God hurry misfortune and punishment upon them, may He strike their tongues with dumbness, may He scatter their hosts, and disperse them, confound their intelligence, and cause their breath to cease. He has the power to do that, and it is up to Him to answer.

On Thursday the twenty-eighth, news arrived that the French had advanced towards Fuwwa and then al-Raḥmāniyya.

On Sunday the first of Safar, news came that on Friday the twenty-ninth the Egyptian army had encountered that of the French but after a short while Murād Bey and his army were routed for they were not able to hold their ground. However only a small number of men from both armies were killed. The *dhayabiyya* of Murād Bey went up in flames, arsenal, equipment, and all. The commander of the artillery was also burnt to death. When Murād Bey saw what had happened, he ran away, leaving all his belongings and a number of cannons. His soldiers immediately followed suit and indeed there was a great number with him. Once news of these events spread, great alarm took hold of the people and Ibrāhim Bey set out on horseback for Būlāq, where the Shaykhs and men of distinction gathered around him. There they discussed this event, and arrived at a joint decision to erect fortifications extending from Būlāq to Shubrā. Ibrāhim Bey and the Pasha were to take position behind these barricades together with their Ṣanjaqs: Ibrāhim Bey the younger, Sulaymān Bey, Ayyūb Bey the elder, Qāsim Bey, Qāsim Bey the second, Marzūq Bey, ‘Uthmān Bey al-Ashqar, and others bringing with them their Kāshifs and Amīrs.

On Monday, Murād Bey disembarked at the Jīza, where he began setting up entrenchments on the west bank, extending from Bashtil to the end of Inbāba. He undertook this task with his Ṣanjaqs, Amīrs, and a group of his Khushdāshs, attending personally to the management and organization of affairs together with ‘Alī Pasha al-Ṭarābulsi. He began to pay the soldiers out of his own pocket. Naṣūḥ Pasha was also with him. All the while they moved their household effects from their large houses to smaller ones, and on to ships bearing southward. They sent for camels to bear their loads. On Tuesday, a general call to arms was proclaimed, and the people were summoned to the entrenchments. This call was repeated / time and time again. People closed their shops and markets, and everyone was in an uproar. The noise and confusion were very great. Some of the people said that this was by Imperial