

# THE DATING METHOD OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE ON A GOLD COIN OF SELIM III AND WHAT IT REFLECTS

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## ABSTRACT

[AR]

طريقة التأريخ الخاصة بنابليون بونابرت على نقد ذهب لسليم الثالث

يعتبر نابليون بونابرت أحد أشهر الشخصيات التاريخية العالمية، والذي غزا مصر بحملته الفرنسية في فترة حكم السلطان العثماني الثامن والعشرين السلطان سليم بن مصطفى. وعلى الرغم من قصر مدة الحملة الفرنسية التي كانت قرابة ثلاث سنوات فقط، إلا أنها شكّلت نقطة تحول في تاريخ مصر حتى بعد انسحابها، خاصة وأنها كانت تمثل أول غزو أوروبي على مجتمع إسلامي متمسك بقيمه وعاداته. أما فيما يخص السياسة النقدية التي كانت متبعه في مصر وقت مجيء الحملة الفرنسية، فهي نفسها التي عرفت في مقر السلطنة العثمانية باعتبار مصر ولاية تابعة لها، وبالتالي كان الزر محبوب النقد الذهبي الرئيسي للدولة. وتأتي أهمية النقد الذهبي قيد الدراسة من كونه مصنف على أنه عملة نادرة ضربت في فترة وجود بونابرت في مصر، خاصة وأنه قد تم ضربها في العام الأخير من الحملة الفرنسية. ومن خلال دراسة طريقة التأريخ التي سجلت على هذه القطعة من منظور جديد، فقد عكست ما كان يعرف عن نابليون بونابرت لموهبته في الدهاء السياسي، وشخصيته الجاذبة، وعقليته الحكيمة. فقد تبني نابليون بونابرت سياسة الاقتراب من الشعب لتلبية أغراضه الخاصة، خاصة وأنه كان يدرك مدى أهمية الرأي العام. هذه الأغراض في مصر كانت اقتصادية في المقام الأول، وليست السيطرة السياسية. كان هذا واضحاً من خلال الاتجاه الذي اتبعه في سك العملات المعدنية، بينما كانت مصر تحت سلطته. لذلك ساعدت الدراسة التحليلية للعملة في تأكيد نواياه الحقيقية، وعكس وتأكيده سمات شخصيته الرئيسية.

[EN] One of the world's most famous historical figures was Napoleon Bonaparte, who conquered Egypt with his French expedition in the reign of the twenty-eighth Ottoman Sultan Selim B. Mustafa, known as Selim III. Despite the short presence of the French expedition, approximately three years only, it marked a turning point in Egypt's history even after its withdrawal. It was considered the first modern European conquest into the heartlands of the Islamic World, on an Islamic community that adhered to Islamic customs and values. Regarding the monetary system of Egypt at the time, Egypt abided by the trend of the Ottoman Empire in minting gold coins, as it was notable that there was a unified prototype for all Ottoman coins minted in the different Ottoman countries. Therefore, the main gold coin by this time was the Zeri Mahbub. The specimen investigated in this study is classified as a rare coin minted by Bonaparte, as it was minted in the last year of the French expedition. Studying its dating method from a new perspective reflected what was known about Napoleon Bonaparte regarding his political savvy, charisma, and smart thinking. Napoleon adopted a policy of getting closer to the people to achieve his main goals, which were primarily economic rather than aiming at political control. His manner was evident in the trend he followed in minting coins while ruling Egypt. Therefore, the analytical study of the coin helped demonstrate his real ideological intentions and reflect his primary personality traits.

**KEYWORDS:** Dating method, personality traits, Napoleon Bonaparte, Selim bin Mustafa, Zeri Mahbub.

## I. INTRODUCTION

«There are but two powers in the world, the sword, and the mind. In the long run, the sword is always beaten by the mind»; is a quote from Napoleon Bonaparte that hints at a glimpse of his ideology. During the reign of the twenty-eighth Ottoman Sultan Selim B. Mustafa (1203 AH/1789 AD, until 1222 AH/1807 AD), known as Selim III<sup>1</sup>, the French Expedition concurred Egypt on 17 Muharram 1213 AH /2 July 1798 AD, when Napoleon Bonaparte<sup>2</sup> arrived to Alexandria and effortlessly occupied it<sup>3</sup>. The opportunity started to be handed when Sultan Selim attempted to take some actions for the progress of his country and its construction by sending a request to France, calling for engineers, officers, and proficient artificers<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, the French community in Egypt always complained to its home government about the treatment of the Mamluks and their tyranny towards the French, prompting Napoleon to claim that he brought the expedition to Egypt to discipline the Mamluks and protect his nationals<sup>5</sup>. After the battle of Abukir, Bonaparte was trapped in Egypt because of the British blockade. Therefore, he decided to conquer Egypt, establishing a French colony on the Nile which would prosper and serve France<sup>6</sup>.

In light of such political events, one would expect that the Ottomans would have done their best in Egypt to abolish the Mamluks and control the country more. Surprisingly, they seemed to have made no real effort to gain power because the Mamluk system survived. They even increased their power. In fact, it is logical to argue that they would break away from Ottoman control and Napoleon would not invade Egypt.

Concerning the primary goal of Napoleon in Egypt, it was to achieve economic purposes, including obtaining a distinguished position in the Middle East due to Egypt's geographical location, where a canal could be built between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, which would bring France a huge financial profit from imposing taxes on pedestrians<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the main objective of taking over Egypt was not political control, but the realization of economic benefits.

The duration of French occupation in Egypt lasted approximately three years only when a peace treaty was concluded between Bonaparte and the Ottoman Empire on the first of Jumada al-Akhra 1216 AH/the ninth of October 1801 AD, stipulating that the French soldiers would retreat from Egypt and it shall be returned to the Ottoman Empire<sup>8</sup>.

It is worth noting that the short French occupation of Egypt greatly impacted subsequent events in Europe. It also impacted the history of Egypt. It was considered the first modern European raid on an Islamic community that adhered to its customs and

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<sup>1</sup> Selim III was one a son of Sultan Mustafa III. His reign was distinguished by the strife that took place in Egypt, which indicated the weakness of the Ottoman Empire. YUNUS (N, D): 135.

<sup>2</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte was born in Corsica Island in France in 1769 AD and died in 1821 AD. He was the emperor of France from 1804 AD to 1815 AD. LAROUSSE 1973.

<sup>3</sup> FARID BYK 1896: 180.

<sup>4</sup> AL-SERFI 1908: 150.

<sup>5</sup> LIHYTH 1944: 56.

<sup>6</sup> COLE 2007: 20.

<sup>7</sup> LIHYTH 1944: 56.

<sup>8</sup> FARID BYK 1896: 185.

values. In addition, the French expedition had a direct impact on the history of Egypt even after the French withdrawal, as among the Ottoman forces that were sent to confront the French was an officer named Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Albanian military commander of the Ottoman Army- who seized power in Egypt. By working to gain popularity for himself, Muhammad Ali Pasha succeeded in becoming the governor of Egypt in 1220 AH/1805 AD<sup>9</sup>. His reign was a turning point in Egypt as he built an economic and political foundation<sup>10</sup>.

## II. DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

Throughout the Ottoman era, Egypt abided by the trend of the Ottoman Empire in minting gold coins. It was noticed that there was a unified prototype for all Ottoman coins minted in the different Ottoman countries, based on the decree which was sent whenever a new Sultan took the throne<sup>11</sup>. The main gold coin in Egypt at the time of the French arrival was the Zeri Mahbub<sup>12</sup> alloyed with silver<sup>13</sup>. It was estimated at sixteen and three-quarters carats<sup>14</sup>.

Before the French expedition, the mint was managed by a person appointed by the Ottoman sultan himself, and the coins were minted by the governor (pasha) of Egypt, and dated by the accession date of the Sultan on the obverse, along with the regional year of the ruler<sup>15</sup> inscribed among the inscriptions of the reverse. After the French invasion, the coins were minted in the Cairo Mint under joint French-Egyptian supervision<sup>16</sup>.

During the era of the French expedition in Egypt, the main patterns used in minting gold coins did not change from how they had been since the beginning of the rule of Sultan Selim III, considering that the expedition came to Egypt in the last years of this Sultan's rule. Thus, it was logical not to change the form or pattern used in the coin mint, especially since that change must go through stages to ensure that it did not confuse monetary transactions in the markets<sup>17</sup>. Significantly, Napoleon Bonaparte followed the same method of dating that prevailed before his presence<sup>18</sup>.

These facts were reflected in the specimen<sup>19</sup> under study [FIGURE 1], which Napoleon Bonaparte minted in Egypt during the reign of Sultan Selim III. Its legends are as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> RMDĀN 2021: 366.

<sup>10</sup> DALY 1998: 70.

<sup>11</sup> AL-SĀWĪ 2001: 20.

<sup>12</sup> Zeri Mahbub: A gold coin, whose name consisted of two parts; the first is «zeri» which is a Persian word meant gold, while the other part was «mahbub», which means loved. It was also known as «Sequin», among the European traders. BERNARD 2002: 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> MŪBĀRK 1889: 46.

<sup>14</sup> BERNARD 2002: 181.

<sup>15</sup> GOUSSOUS N.D: 87.

<sup>16</sup> BLANCHET 1908: 7.

<sup>17</sup> ARAFA 2006: 31.

<sup>18</sup> LANE POOL 1883: 31.

<sup>19</sup> A Zeri Mahbub of Selim III, minted in *Miṣr* in 1203/14 AH, W.: 2.60 g., D.: 24 mm., Cond.: VF, scratches & clipped. This specimen is preserved in the private collection of Mr. George Lotfy.

	Obverse	Reverse
<b>Field</b>	طغراء السلطان سليم في ب عز نصره ضر مصر سنة 1203	سلطان البرين وخاقان البحرين السلطان ابن السلطان
<b>Margin</b>	A double circle with annulets in between	



[FIGURE 1]: Zeri Mahbub minted in *miṣr* in 1203/14AH. Preserved in the private collection of Mr. George Lotfy.

This coin is distinguished in terms of its general form. The inscriptions on the obverse and reverse were in horizontal lines inside a prominent lined double circle with annulets in between. On the observe, the tughra<sup>20</sup> of Sultan Selim bin Mustafa is found, along with the date of ascending the Sultan to the throne in 1203 AH and the location of the mint *miṣr* for Cairo, which was usually preceded by the preposition «in», with the praising phrase «his victory is glorified». While on the reverse, the new Ottoman formula was added, stating: «the sultan of the two lands, and the ruler of the two seas, the sultan son of the sultan». This formula came after the expansion of the Ottoman power over many lands, so it came to show their dominance over the two lands of Asia and Europe and the two seas; the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Also, the title sultan son of the sultan showed pride in the pedigree of the Ottomans.

The remarkable feature on this coin was the number «14», which comes over the letter «ن» of the word «ابن» in the third line among the inscriptions of the reverse, which represented the actual date of mint. This digit showed that the specimen was minted in the fourteenth year of Sultan Selim's reign, «1203+14-1=1216». As revealed, the coin under study was minted in 1216 AH, the last year of the French expedition; consequently, it is classified as a rare coin minted by Bonaparte.

<sup>20</sup> Tughra: it is the Sultan's signature or name in ornamental design, used on different official papers, documents, and decrees. It includes the sultan's name, title, along with a praising phrase. RMDĀN 2008: 410.

As for the amount of mint in Egypt during the thirty-three months, which was the period of the French seizure of the Cairo mint from the Zeri Mahbub, it was two hundred and sixty-one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one, which was about an average of seven hundred and fifty pieces per month<sup>21</sup>.

### III. COIN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYTICAL STUDY

The effective substantial implementation of taking over Egypt achieved by Napoleon came from his military knowledge, cunning, charisma, and distinguished thinking, which were fundamental to his victories. In one-on-one situations, he typically had a hypnotic effect on people<sup>22</sup>. His intellectual vigor was accompanied by a mixture of remarkable charisma and willpower<sup>23</sup>.

These main personal traits which formed the character of Napoleon Bonaparte were reflected in the policy followed by Bonaparte in Egypt. This policy became clear through what was mentioned in some of the speeches he gave to the people, as it reflected the policy of getting close to them and aligning with their beliefs as much as possible. For instance, Bonaparte began his first sermon to the people in Egypt with the phrase: «In the name of the Lord the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, there is no god but *Allah*, He has no son and no partner in His dominion». This decree was also interspersed with the phrase: «I, more than the Mamluks, worship Almighty Allah and respect His Prophet and the Holy *Qur'an*»<sup>24</sup>. These phrases showed how Bonaparte was keen on approaching the people by embracing their religious doctrine. In his propaganda, he claimed to act on behalf of Sultan Selim III, not on his own. Therefore, he tried not to change anything, not even the coins.

«بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَا وَلَدَ لَهُ وَلَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ فِي مَلَكِهِ...» وَإِنِّي أَكْثَرُ مِنَ الْمَمَالِيكِ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى، وَأُحْتَرَمُ نَبِيَّهُ وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ»

Likewise, the political cunning and astuteness of Bonaparte were reflected in the events mentioned in contemporary historical sources. His personality was also evident in his approach to minting the coins during the expedition in Egypt. He did not mint foreign coins. Otherwise, Bonaparte continued to mint the same typical Arabic prototype of coins which were minted since the beginning of the reign of Sultan Selim III. Bonaparte adopted even the specific details of the dating method implemented by the former rulers. As revealed through the specimen published in this research, Bonaparte just recorded a number on the reverse that showed the specified year of minting the coin, dating back to his dominance.

Another dating method was also popular and implemented by the former rulers, namely engraving the initials of the ruler's name in the place of the number. Samuel Bernard mentions that there were pieces of gold coins that were minted at the time of the French occupation and were distinguished by the presence of the letter «B»<sup>25</sup>. Whereas,

<sup>21</sup> MÜBÄRK 1889: 49.

<sup>22</sup> JACK 1966: 187.

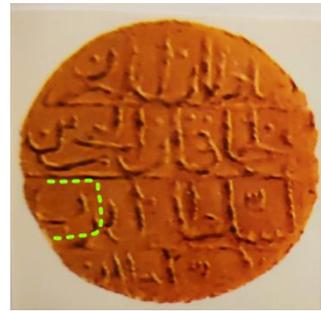
<sup>23</sup> PRICE 2014: 8.

<sup>24</sup> The events of 25 Muharam 1213 AH/9 July 1798 AD. AL-ĞABIRTY 2003: 4.

<sup>25</sup> BERNARD 2002: 121.

above the word «son», the letter «B» was minted, referring to Bonaparte, instead of the number that referred to the date of minting the piece<sup>26</sup>. This was proved by several pieces published in many studies<sup>27</sup>, such as the following specimen [FIGURE 2]<sup>28</sup>.

Obverse		Reverse
Field	طغراء السلطان سليم في ب عز نصره ضر مصر سنة 1203	سلطان البرين و خاقان البحرين السلطان ابن السلطان
Margin	A double circle with annulets in between	



[FIGURE 2]: Half Zeri Mahbub minted in *misr* in 1203AH, with the letter «B».

The phenomenon of engraving some letters on the reverse of Selim's coins appeared on many other specimens with different letters. The problem is to identify these initial letters, as some say that they are probably mint marks, while others argue that they may represent some official's name<sup>29</sup>. Bernard gave a detailed description of the Egyptian Mint in Cairo at the time of the French occupation in 1799 AD. He wrote Shaikh al-balad, or the governor of the country, which used to have their initials engraved on the coins<sup>30</sup>. For instance, some of Selim's coins had the initials «alf, seen»<sup>31</sup>, which might refer to Ismail Pasha, who ruled Egypt between 1203 AH/ 1788 AD and 1205 AH/1790 AD<sup>32</sup>. Another letter is the «sad», which refers to Salih Pasha, who ruled between 1208 AH/1793 AD and 1211 AH/1796 AD<sup>33</sup>. During the French expedition, Bonaparte followed this method<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> BLANCHET 1908: 12.

<sup>27</sup> W.: 1.28 g., D.: 19 mm., N<sup>o</sup>.860. KAZAN 1983: 383. For further examples of this prototype, see: LACHMEN 1977: 12; BERNET 1983; ARAFA 2006: 54-57.

<sup>28</sup> Preserved in the private collection of William Kazan.

<sup>29</sup> LACHMEN 1974: 221.

<sup>30</sup> LACHMEN 1974: 222.

<sup>31</sup> BALDWIN 2008: N<sup>o</sup>.535.

<sup>32</sup> BERNARD 2002: 121.

<sup>33</sup> AL-SĀWĪ 2001: 76.

<sup>34</sup> LANE POOL 1883: 31.

Consequently, whether the letter B refers to Bonaparte or Bernard, the head of the mint during the French expedition, it represented the time of Bonaparte in Egypt, who was keen to follow the same prototype of Selim's coins even in the minor details; therefore, he did not engrave his full name on coins due to spatial restriction by the size of coins as the space on it would not be sufficient for this. Also, he wanted to emphasize that he ruled under the Ottoman Sultan.

Hence, minting the same prototype of Sultan Selim III by Napoleon Bonaparte reflected and emphasized his real intentions, which were economic in the first place rather than aiming at political control. If it was for political control, coins had to be minted on the French prototype, especially since coins represented the most important emblems of kings and sultans that rulers were keen on immediately obtaining after holding power.

Therefore, the dating method conducted by Napoleon Bonaparte on the coins he minted in Egypt during the French Expedition shows his masterful, brilliant, and cunning traits. He was keen to embrace the people, even by the smallest details, by following the same popular trend of dating on coins, especially since he comprehended that coins were the main means of communication between the ruler and people through which he transmitted the principles of his reign and the foundations upon which it was based. He could reach for them by the mind and not the sword, as he said.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the analytical study of this rare piece minted during the last year of the French expedition in Egypt revealed that studying coins from an analytical perspective and connecting them to the historical, contemporary events helped in clarifying the real intentions of Bonaparte which were economic in the first place rather than aiming at political control. If it was for political control, coins had to be minted on the French prototype.

Conducting the analytical study more profoundly helped reflect Napoleon's personality and emphasize some of his main traits and ideologies. Following the same popular former trend of dating on coins, he emphasized his social intelligence. Thus, studying coins can be connected to personality psychology and may help determine the main traits of many prominent historical figures.

This embodies the interdisciplinary side of the study linking numismatics and a branch of psychology, the scientific discipline that studies personality traits and seeks to understand a person's major traits and how they are expressed in an individual's actions.

Accordingly, further analytical interdisciplinary studies between numismatics and other fields of humanities are recommended, taking into account other samples of different coins from various spatial and temporal circumstances.

#### **V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Appreciation are given to Prof./Atef Mansour for providing the coin under study in this research.

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