



Left: *L'Expedition D'Egypte Sous Les Ordres De Bonaparte (1798)* - painted by Leon Cogniet in 1835 - Musée du Louvre

# THE ROSETTA STONE

IDEAS FOR SKIRMISH GAMING SET IN EGYPT By Steve Dake 

Miniatures from ranges by Foundry, Trent Miniatures, Copplestone Castings, Brigade Games, and Perry Miniatures

**The Rosetta Stone!** The name itself is exotic and instantly brings to mind images of Egypt – the pyramids, the pharaohs, and palm trees on the Nile, silhouetted by a setting, reddish sun. Most school children can tell you the stone's inscriptions provided the modern world with the ability to finally translate the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, but how many know the history of the actual finding of the stone? Gamers will be pleased to know that the discovery of the stone is set in the time of Napoleon's occupation of Egypt, and its subsequent transfer from the French to the British is the stuff of drama and intrigue – just the sort of thing to inspire a wargame.

## HISTORY

As all good wargamers know, Napoleon crossed the Mediterranean and invaded Egypt in 1798. For the task at hand, he brought with him a large force of 40,000 men and literally hundreds of transport vessels to supply them. With a nod to the wealth of Egypt as well as its strategic placement on the map, Napoleon and the French had come to stay. By occupying Egypt, they at once closed the easy door to India and its resources from the British, while opening the same door of opportunity for themselves.

After landing his army near Alexandria, Napoleon proceeded to act as if he meant business. In the space of a month he had taken not only Alexandria but Cairo as well, and beaten the ruling Mameluke army at the famous Battle of the Pyramids in the process. These successes did not mean the French hold on Egypt was secure, as British Lord Nelson's destruction of Napoleon's supporting fleet at Aboukir Bay proved eloquently, but they did allow for the administration of the land to begin.

To aid him in that administration Napoleon had brought with him a unique collection of some of the most learned minds of France from many different fields of discipline. There were scientists and engineers, mathematicians and artists, doctors and poets – all gathered to study the curiosities of both ancient and contemporary Egypt. Known collectively as savants, these gentlemen will come to play a major part in our story.

First employed in mundane tasks assisting the army, such as serving as quartermasters or secretaries to staff officers, the savants soon found their legs and used their own initiative to discover the paths to those things they held important. Soon examples were being taken of the differing flora and fauna of the region, while artists sketched, and writers wrote of the wonders they seen. Some ranged far, up the Nile or over to the Holy Lands, while others stayed near and actually helped the new colony with

technical studies on issues like improving crop production or reducing disease.

When the savants first came to Cairo, they were housed in very impressive surroundings, the palace complex of the past Mameluke overlords. The buildings of the palace were the stuff of the Arabian myths with courtyards and gardens, and high walls that hid them. Here the educational elite of France created an academic association, the Institut d'Egypt. Some French army officers were invited to join as well, strengthening the ties between these two groups.

As can easily be imagined, the study of the Egypt of Antiquity was of paramount importance to the savants. Truthfully, it was important to Napoleon, the ruling French Directory of the time, and the French people at home as well. While all of the middle east was something of an enigma to the population of Europe, Egypt was the most titillating. Here was the land of the Pharaohs and the pyramids, with all its mysteries of the past. It would be a major coup for France and its educational elite to bring back the answers and solutions to questions long unsolved. To that end it is most ironic that one of the greatest historical relics of the ages was found not by one of the savants, but by a lowly junior officer of the French expeditionary force.

By July of 1799, the fortunes of war had changed for Napoleon, beginning with the defeat of the French fleet at Aboukir Bay. Now it was the French who waited for an invasion force that would probably be composed of the British and their new allies, the Ottoman Turks, of whose crumbling empire Egypt was nominally a part. All along the coast near Alexandria the industrious French prepared their defenses, repairing fortifications as needed, or tearing down and rebuilding those places fallen through long neglect.



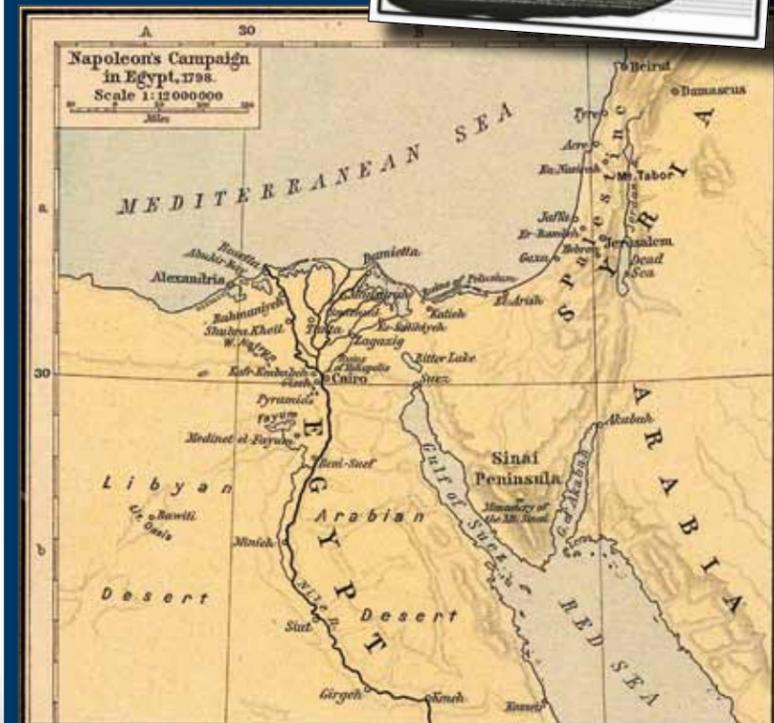
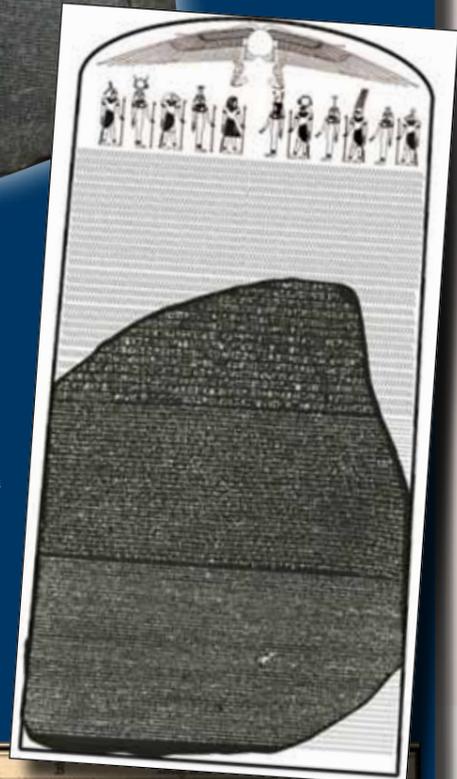
Above: Colonel Tompkins Turner. Foundry figure painted by Matt Parkes.



## WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

The Rosetta Stone is the first stone tablet to be found that included the same message inscribed in two or more languages. Knowledge of Ancient Greek by the scholars of the time allowed them to translate the Demotic script and then the Egyptian hieroglyphs, a task that had been thought Herculean at the time.

If knowledge is considered power, consider the power that this object held for the savants and antiquaries in Egypt in 1800, and the lengths to which governments would go to secure it for themselves.



At the coastal town of Al-Rashid a town wall facing the sea had just been collapsed when the sharp eyes of young Lieutenant Pierre Francois Bouchard noticed something amiss. Amidst the dust-colored bricks of the fallen wall lay a black, almost man-sized stone in sharp contrast. Native laborers and French soldiers swarmed about the object and cleared away the fragmented rubble, leaving a black basalt rock of rectangular proportions. Standing forty-five inches high, by twenty-eight inches wide and eleven inches thick, and weighing in at around 760 kilos, the most impressive thing about the stone was not its size. It was the inscriptions chiseled into its face that drew the attention of the junior French officer.

Fate was kind that day to those members of mankind who love knowledge. The young Lieutenant was not only an officer of engineers, he was also a junior savant, having just recently undergone his training and final tests at the newly opened Institut D'Egypt. By seeing

the three obviously different scripts implaced upon the rock he immediately recognized the potential importance of the stone. He reported the find to a superior officer, General Menou, who ordered the stone eventually taken to the Institut in Cairo, where it created a great deal of excitement.

The Stone of Al-Rashid immediately became a focus for many of the savants. Detailed examination revealed three different languages written on the stone: hieroglyphs, ancient Egyptian (or coptic/depotic), and ancient Greek. Since the Greek was a known language, all saw the implications. Here there was a chance to finally be able to translate the maddeningly elusive hieroglyphs, a task seen at the time as insurmountable as going to the moon. The savants busied themselves with making copies in a variety of ways, including rubbings and plaster casts.

Their work was invaluable and went back to France with Napoleon when he left Egypt in August of that year.

Fortunes continued to decline for the French left behind. Recognized as an able administrator by Napoleon, the same General Menou was placed in overall command of the military and colony, following the assassination of the first popular choice, General Kleber. Called "eccentric" by sympathizers and a "raving lunatic" by detractors, Menou's bizarre ways and pompous manner eventually left him universally despised by his soldiers and the savants alike. When the British finally landed at Aboukir Bay and through force of arms put siege to most of the French military at both Alexandria and Cairo, General Menou would prove to be difficult and unpredictable. He was so unpredictable the savants would take the extreme measure of negotiating with the enemy - the British - in order to insure the stone's survival for posterity.

All of this would not happen quickly or easily, however. Holed up in his citadel in Alexandria, Menou would not surrender his forces or sign his armistice of



*A British officer meets with an local informant to discuss the whereabouts of Alexander's tomb. A group of Marines keep watch.*



*Two British officers bravely (from the rear) direct their Egyptian allies in an attack on a French camp.*

capitulation until after the fall of Cairo. It was during the writing of the treaty that the real intrigue for possession of the stone tablet began.

By now, all of the principals in this international affair were well aware of the stone now known as the Rosetta Tablet (Rosetta after the European name for the coastal town of Al-Rashid). Possession of the prestigious stone had taken on serious political and academic ramifications for the three governments involved. Even the possessive Menou wanted it, thinking it would make an impressive centerpiece in the foyer of his family home in France. Jockeying for ownership of the Rosetta Stone and the other antiquities collected by the savants became the main item of contention as the treaty was written, and attempts were made to enforce it.

As time passed, a frustrated General Hutchinson of the British forces was forced to accept that General Menou intended to spirit away as much of the collectable booty gathered by the savants as he possibly could. Engaging in a bit of

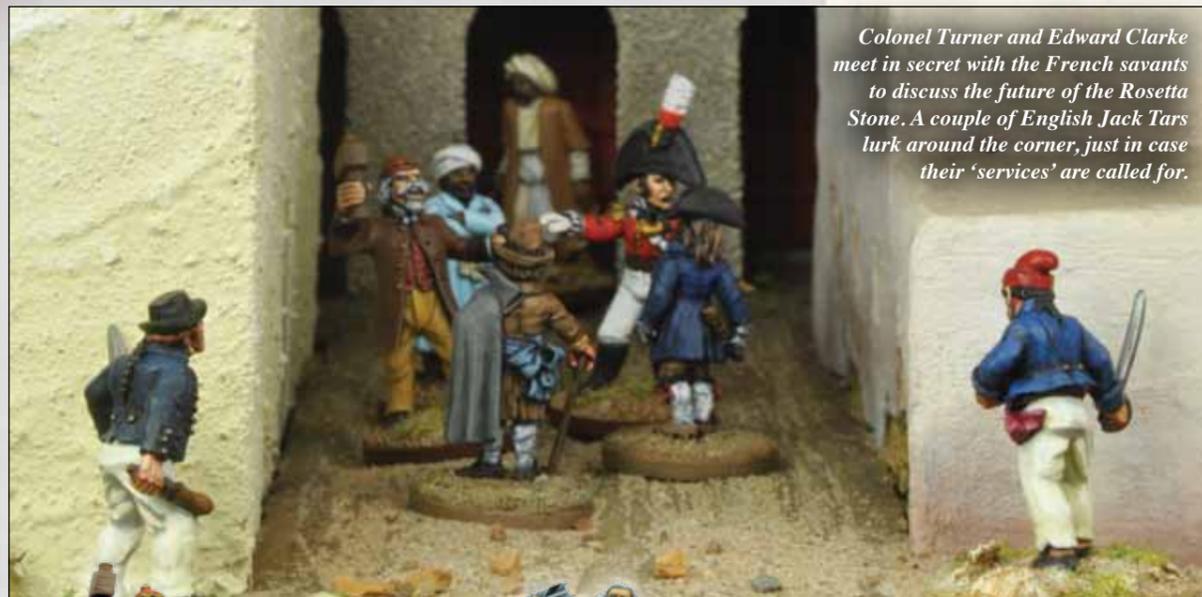
intrigue of his own, the British general sought help from three traveling British subjects who had the credentials to assist, and sent them into Alexandria.

The three gentlemen were antiquaries themselves and one of them, William Hamilton, was the attaché to the English Lord Elgin. The other two, noted mineralogist Edward Clarke and his student assistant, John Cripps, were on a years long marathon tour of Europe and Asia, and had been drawn to Egypt once the British and Turks invaded. Together they entered Alexandria, fortunately made contact with some of the savants, and even more incredibly, managed to gain their aid in recovering the Stone, and oh, one more item of importance of which Clarke and Cripps had knowledge - the tomb of Alexander himself.

It took several days to accomplish this mission. Joined now by an officer from the 3rd Foot Guards, Colonel Tomkyns Turner, the four went into Alexandria, Hamilton and Turner to see General Menou, and Cripps and Clarke to seek out an informant. Hamilton and Turner



*Left: Jolly Jack Tars. Foundry figures painted by Dave Woodward.*



*Colonel Turner and Edward Clarke meet in secret with the French savants to discuss the future of the Rosetta Stone. A couple of English Jack Tars lurk around the corner, just in case their 'services' are called for.*



*Left: Edward Clarke.  
Right: John Cripps.  
Both Foundry figure converted and painted by Matt Parkes.*



had little success with the corpulent French commander, but Clarke and his student hit the bulls eye. After meeting with the informant they were soon rowing to a French hospital ship in the harbor, where under piles of bloody rags they located the coffin of the legendary

Alexander. Described as a large green stone shaped into the likeness of a cistern, the object stayed aboard while the two travelers hurried to Hamilton and Turner to share the news. A guard was placed by the boat, and so the four continued their search, finding piles of riches and

antiques about the city that exceeded their wildest dreams. The Rosetta Stone itself remained elusive until Cripps and Clarke met an unknown Frenchman, identified only as a military officer and member of the Institut, at a warehouse near the docks on the last day. There inside lay the already notorious Stone, wrapped in mats and protective rugs. They located Hutchinson, who in turn found Colonel Turner. For his part Turner secured an artillery crew and gun-carriage from the British pickets, and soon the relic was stored behind British lines. From there it made its way back to Great Britain, and eventually to the British Museum of London, where it still resides today.

## WHAT IF?

And that is the concise, rather dry story of how the Rosetta Stone came to occupy its favored place in the British Museum, but as always in history, there is much more to the story than that.

What's most important is seeing the potential this has to become a fascinating wargaming scenario. Even at this early date, the importance of the Stone is obvious, and what about the matter of Alexander the Great's coffin? Both the French and British governments' want possession for reasons of politics and national prestige, while members of their rank and file see the monetary value of such a thing. An interesting side note is that the Egyptians and ruling Mamalukes had little interest in the Stone, as antiquities like that were literally laying around everywhere in that time frame. No, the Mamalukes were far more interested in regaining the Alexander's tomb, which had a fair degree of religious significance to them. As for the Savants,

while securing the Stone for France was the goal, those learned individuals were shocked when French General Menou threatened to break it into fragments or drop it into the muck of Aboukir Bay if it was impossible to keep the object for France or himself. To them, it was far better for the Stone to reside in a British museum than for it to be lost to mankind once more.

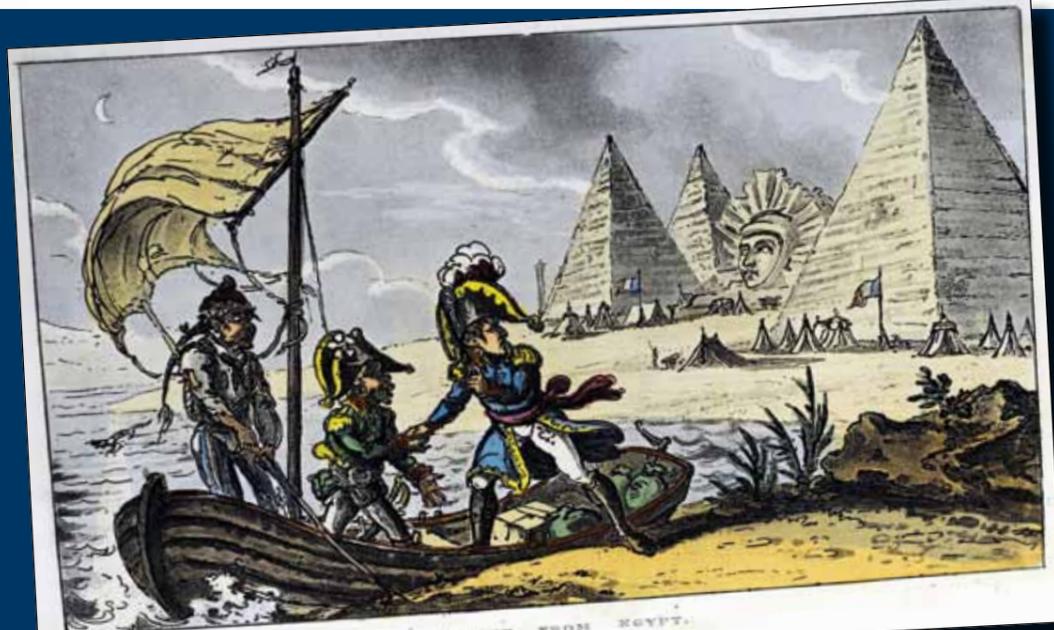
It is worth noting that as the world became aware of the Rosetta Stone and its significance, the principals – Hamilton, Colonel Turner and Clarke – gained prestige, wrote memoirs, and presented papers, but that did not clarify the facts entirely. The stories of the main players conflict - with Colonel Turner's version finding him taking the Stone from Menou's house, while Clarke noting it was originally stored in Menou's tent. Hamilton's memoirs of the event blithely make no mention at all of where the Stone was found. Clarke and Cripps make no mention of a tent at all, but find it in a warehouse with the help of a mysterious unnamed Frenchman.

Does anyone feel like they are trying to get the truth out of teenagers here? How is it no one can put a handle on how exactly the Stone passed from the French to the British? Where do Clarke and Cripps fit into this? Doesn't their sudden presence in Egypt at exactly the right place seem a bit convenient, perhaps even contrived? It's fun to imagine they are in fact British government agents.

Yes, a gaming adventure this definitely could be, with twists and turns and exotic characters aplenty. Contrived some of those facts may be, but in that fog of shrouded truth lays the inspiration that leads us to great gaming ideas. How easy was it for the four adventurers to find their way to the Stone and other artifacts? It sounds almost like a scavenger hunt when the layers of people and obstacles they had to contend with are considered. What if Hamilton and the rest failed, where would the Stone go then? To France, to Istanbul, or by chance to the murky bottom of Alexandria Harbor? Or would it indeed find its way to Menou's family mansion?

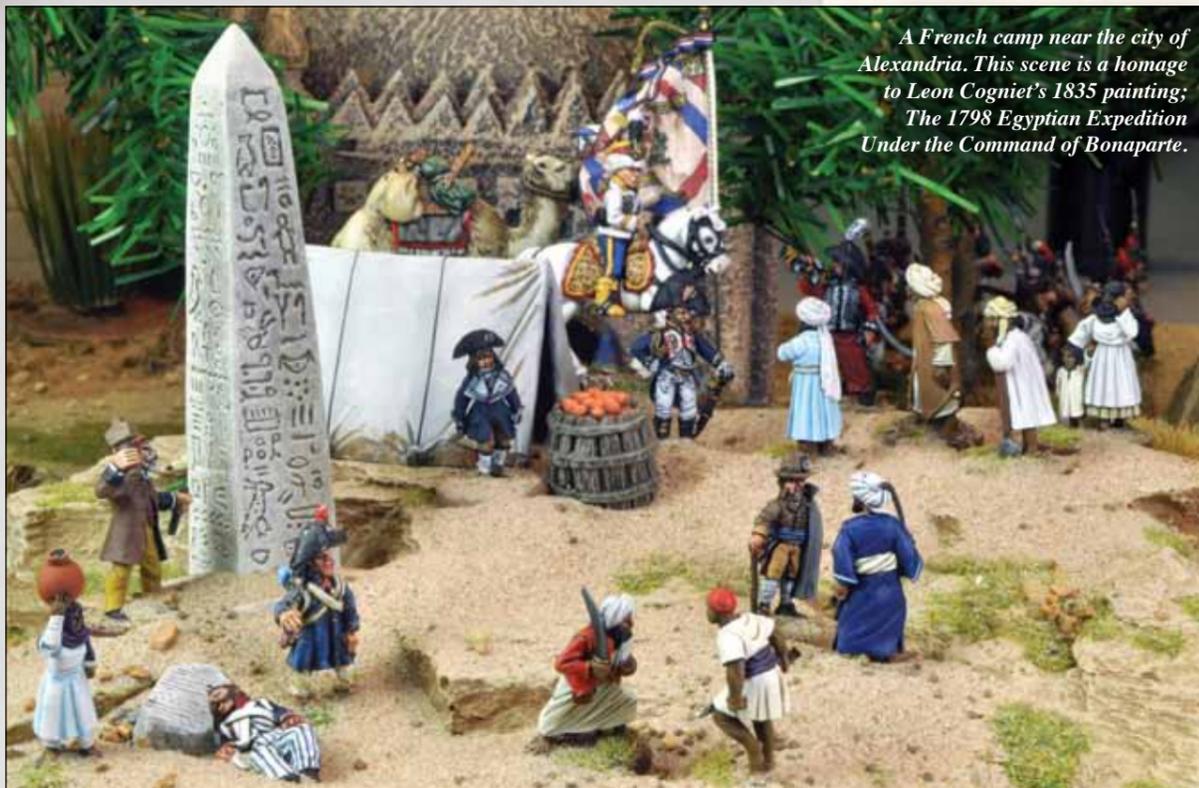


*The British and French face off as Pasha Kapudan and his men look on.*



## CONTEMPORARY SATIRE

A hand-coloured aquatint engraving by George Cruikshank for William Combe's *The Life of Napoleon*. Published by Thomas Tegg in 1815.



*A French camp near the city of Alexandria. This scene is a homage to Leon Cogniet's 1835 painting; The 1798 Egyptian Expedition Under the Command of Bonaparte.*

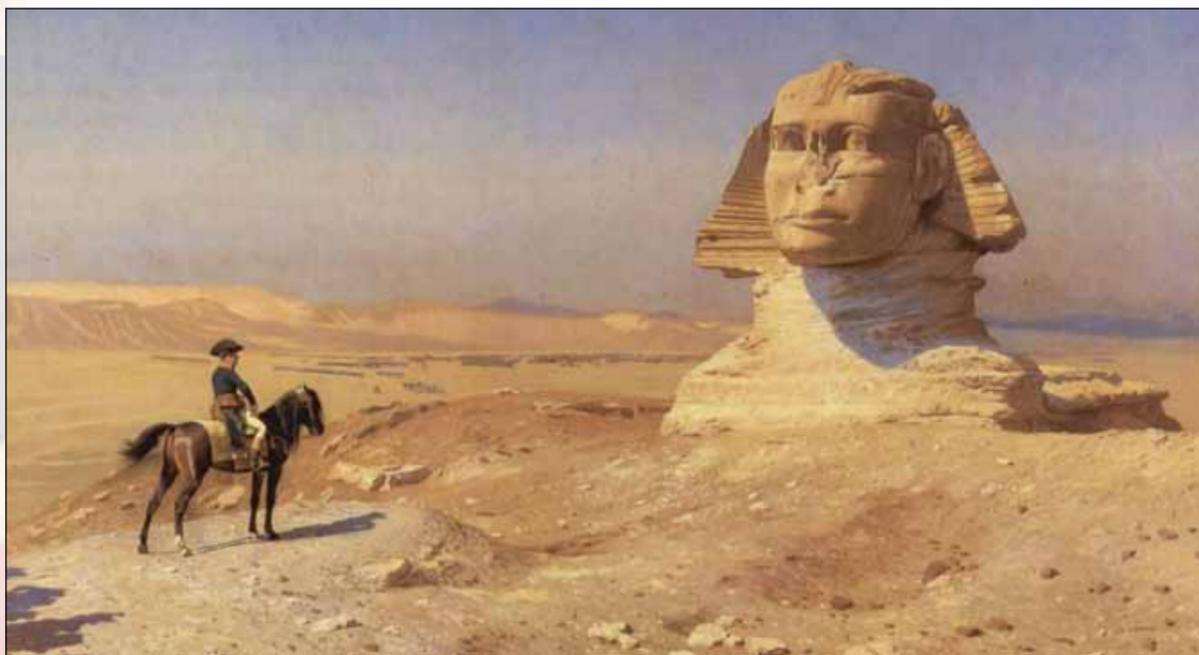
## WARGAMING THE CAPTURE OF THE ROSETTA STONE

I envision the "Rosetta" gaming field as a large section of the city of Alexandria, with one short flank being the docks and waters of the Harbor, and the other being the walls and pickets of the besieging British. Its time to game in the style of Peter Guilder and fill the city with

wonderful examples of exotic middle eastern buildings to go along with the docks, walls and picket lines. It would be nice to have a couple of buildings that opened up, so the figures could go inside past veil curtained walls, down torchlit hallways and into the catacombs... you get the idea.. You'll have to scour the figure manufacturers for suitable troops, looking for French, Turks, Egyptians, and British in that time frame. Europeans in civilian garb for that period will be hard

to come by, but you know that finding the stuff is half the fun of doing this.

In short, this could be a very pretty, atmospheric game. You could play it as a simple skirmish affair, with clear objectives, or as a matrix game, where players offer solutions to problems, then debate the soundness of their arguments. I personally prefer a mix of the two for this kind of game requiring few figures but offering a very interesting playing area, the streets of Alexandria.



*Above: Bonaparte before the Sphinx - painted by Jean Leon Jerome in 1867*

## MEET THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

### THE BRITISH

- Edward Clarke - British Antiquary/mineralogist with papers from General Hutchinson
- John Cripps - Student and Assistant to Clarke
- William Hamilton - British Antiquary and Attaché to Lord Elgin
- Colonel Tompkins Turner - British 3rd Foot Guards Officer

- A section of jack tars
- A section of Royal Marines
- Foot Artillery team and gun carriage

### THE FRENCH

- General Jacques Francios Menou - French military leader and Governor of Egypt
- Unknown French Officer and member of Institut d'Egypt
- Saint-Hilaire - Savant
- DeLile - French Savant
- Savigny - French savant

- Menou's men - soldiers, but not acting in the interests of France alone
- A section of line infantry
- Artillery team and gun carriage
- Savants

### THE "LOCALS"

- Kapudan Pahsa - Grand Vizier of Ottoman Empire
- Informant that led the foreigners to Alexander's tomb
- Agent of Kapudan Pasha

- Egyptian mob
- Mamaluke cavalry
- Mamaluke two-wheel cart

*Right: Kapudan Pasha. Perry Miniatures figure painted by Matt Parkes.*

Reviewing these lists will probably lead the reader to more factions to add, as there is indeed a lot of potential here. Feel free to add more characters and more supporting sections as you require.



*Above: "Scruffy" Frenchmen from Brigade Games, painted by Rob Townsend*

## ROSETTA STONE INSPIRES BRIGADE GAMES

Talking with Lon Weiss of Brigade Games last year about his early Napoleonic range it came out that there was a strong connection with the story of the Rosetta Stone.

With so many other miniature companies tackling the Napoleonic Wars, and such a potentially deep rabbit-hoe to head down, Lon was wary of taking the plunge. Until, that is, he read a book about the Rosetta Stone and realized there was a great deal yet to be explored (on a smaller scale) in the exciting sands and ancient walls of Egypt c.1798.

The rest is, as they say, is history.



*French and British forces clash over the destiny of the Rosetta Stone.*