

A Horse in History

The Fate of the Escaped Mamluk.....

The Massacre of the Citadel

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Photos by Karim Osman

A little less than 200 years ago, a Mamluk on his horse jumped over the wall surrounding the Citadel to escape the wrath of Mohamed Ali when he opted to end the class of Mamluks all together in the massacre of the citadel...

A Window into the Past:

Mamluk has many definitions with very little difference between each. However the most comprehensive was one by the Colombia Encyclopaedia which states that Mamluks were a warrior caste dominant and influential in Egypt and in the Middle East for over 700 years. Originally, Islamic rulers created this warrior caste by collecting and training non-Muslim slave boys as cavalry soldiers especially loyal to their owner and each other. They were known to be formidable fighters and expert horsemen. In the course of their training with the Muslim leaders, the Mamluks converted to Islam.

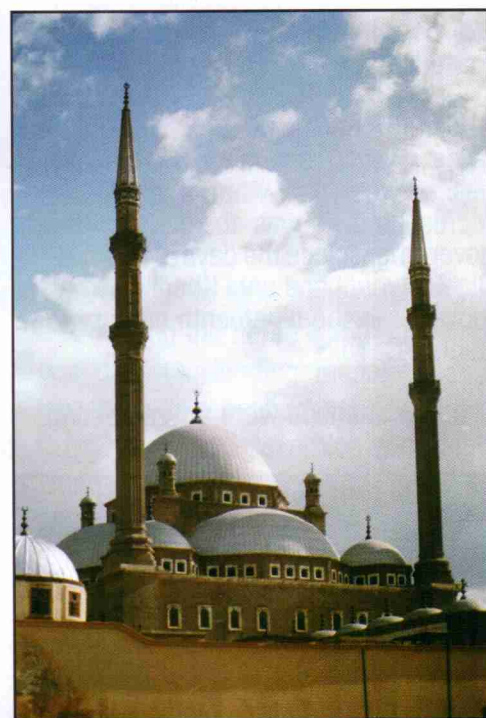
Most Mamluks originate from Caucasian or Georgian origins. The Mamluks were first used in Muslim armies in Baghdad by the Abbasid caliphs in the 9th century and quickly spread throughout the Muslim world. They served the Ayyubid sultans from the 12th century onward and grew powerful enough to challenge the existence of the rulers who were theoretically their masters. Aybak, the first Mamluk to actually rule, persuaded the mother of the last Ayyubid sultan to marry him after she had murdered her husband. For more than one thousand years thereafter, Egypt and Syria were ruled by Mamluk sultans supported by a caste of warrior slaves. The Mamluks took advantage of their power to become the principal landholders in Egypt.

The Mamluk Sultanate survived until 1517, and then it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The institution of the Mamluks continued under the Ottomans, albeit not the same strength and independence it previously enjoyed. In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte's army defeated Murad Bey at the Battle of Pyramids, however the French's stay was short-lived in Egypt, as they had been driven out in 1801 by a Turkish/British alliance. Among the soldiers in the Ottoman forces was an Albanian, who rose to power as Mohamed Ali the great. In 1805 the sultan of Turkey conferred on Mohamed Ali the Pashalik of Cairo.

Mohamed Ali knew that eventually he would have to deal with the Mamluks if he ever wanted to control Egypt. They were still the feudal owners of Egypt and their land was still the source of wealth and power. From his time of rule in 1806 Mohamed Ali tried various approaches

to rid Cairo of the Mamluks; he tried to gain their trust by offering them jobs and positions in Cairo, he initiated treaties of peace, and he forced them to his rule of authority through battles and wars. But none of his techniques kept them under his ruling thumb. The Mamluks did not trust Mohamed Ali and the latter was dissatisfied with their reluctance to his ruling power.

On March 1st 1811, Mohamed Ali invited all Mamluks to a ceremony at the Citadel to celebrate the declaration of war against the Wahhabis in Arabia. There were nearly 600 Mamluks (according to another source about 700) on parade in Cairo. Near the Al-Azab gates, in a narrow road down from Mukatam Hill, Mohamed Ali's forces ambushed and slaughtered almost all of the surprised Mamluks. Only one Mamluk named Amin Bey Murad, having put his horse at the great wall, was able to leap to safety, although his horse was killed in the endeavour. Over the following week hundreds of



Mamluks were killed throughout Egypt. In the streets around Egypt an estimated 3,000 Mamluks and their relatives were killed.

Despite these attempts by Mohamed Ali to defeat the Mamluks in Egypt, a party of them escaped and fled south into present-day Sudan. In 1811 these Mamluks established a state as a base in Dunqulah, Sennar in Sudan. In 1820 the sultan of Sennar informed Mohamed

Ali that he was unable to comply with the demand to expel the Mamluks. In response the pasha sent 4,000 troops to invade Sudan, clear it out from Mamluks, and reclaim it for Egypt. The pasha's forces received the submission of the kashif, dispersed the Dunqulah Mamluks, conquered Kurdufan, and accepted Sennar's surrender from the last Funj sultan, Badi VII.

Now that the history of this story is out of the way, we can ask what ever happened to the escaped Mamluk? Amin Bey Murad, according to some sources escaped to Syria, other sources say he escaped to Upper Egypt.

Present Day Cairo:

I went to the Citadel to visit the scene of the crime intending to meet just anyone who could tell me a little more about the fate of the escaped Mamluk. The surprising matter is that the Citadel has an air of peace like no other in Cairo.....how could a massacre have taken place there?

It is the location of the Citadel that gives it such charisma. Historically, peace was not what the Citadel represented. It was the seat of the government since the days of Salah El-Din Al-Ayoubi and until Khedive Ismail moved it in the nineteenth century to Central Cairo.

The tourist shops were an interesting sight, they sold everything that Egypt



offers, and so you'd find statues of the Sphinx over there for instance, even though the Citadel had nothing to do with Egypt's Pharaonic history. I tried to get a book about the Citadel, not a good idea, the shop keepers looked

at me with bewilderment when I asked this question: "A book about the Citadel? Why would we sell it here their eyes said!!" My journey in the Citadel also took me to Mohamed Ali's mosque. One of the moments I most cherish to capture inside the mosque is the sound of the chimes made by the crystals of the chandeliers of the mosque as the wind blows through pushing them against each other to make fascinating melodies.

I later walked to an area that over



looked Bab El-Azab where the massacre took place. One guide, intrigued by my interest, decided to throw in a bonus piece of information. We walked through what today stands as the National Police Museum to see a bare tree standing alone over what looks like a wall. The guide pointed to the tree and told me that the tree stands over a secret passage to Bab El-Azab!

My curiosity grew stronger over the fate of the Mamluk; I continued to search for clues until I encountered a young man that claimed to be a descendant of Amin Bey Murad! Bingo I thought. Of course I was put off by some pessimists that said every passer-by claims to be a descendant of the escaped Mamluk. Nevertheless, I chose to believe my source. His mom was my story teller.

Upon her request she asked me not to mention her name in this article. According to her, Amin Bey Murad escaped to Upper Egypt, his survival was very brief, for Mohamed Ali sent his son Ibrahim to find Murad Bey, and to kill him. It was not long until the Mamluk was found and murdered. He left his Tunisian wife pregnant with a son, and 3 other children. The widow picked her children and fled Upper Egypt to another town called Mithaflah. To conceal her identity from Mohammed Ali's spies, as the rich

widow of Amin Bey Murad, she hid her jewels in her little baby's clothes, until she was able to sell them and buy land in the new town. Amin Bey Murad's widow brought up her children on that land, and lived in sorrow memory of her husband. According to my source, his older son Abbass was a great horseman, just like his father.

Amin Bey Murad is survived by his grandchildren's children. His story echoes until today; the escaped Mamluk who leaped with his horse over the wall of the Citadel and survived only long enough to go back to see his wife and children for the last time end is passed on from one generation to the other. **HT**