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The Citadel of Cairo
Introduction

The Citadel of the Mountain (Qal‘al-Jabal) in Cairo is an architectural complex with a long history of building and rebuilding. Situated on a spur that was artificially cut out of the Muqattam Hill, the Citadel originally faced, and overlooked, the city of Cairo in the east and northeast, and the city of Misr in the south; its northern and western sides were bordered by either rocky hills or the desert. The site was certainly chosen for its strategic importance: it dominated the two cities, formed the border between the built environment and the desert, and was connected to the city so that the Citadel would not be cut away from its urban support in the event of a siege. Today, the scene is no longer the same. Not only has the cityscape around the Citadel changed tremendously over the centuries, but the interior organization of the Citadel has continually been changed, and its ground level is always rising as a result of the process of erecting new buildings on top of older ones. Founded by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi in 1176, the Citadel was, for almost seven centuries (1206-1874), the seat of government for the Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, and Khedival rulers of Egypt. It was, during this long period, the stage upon which the history of Egypt was played. The continuous building and rebuilding process may be viewed both as a reflection and as a formal expression of changing political and cultural conditions. This study of the evolution of the Citadel adopts this approach. It is arranged so as to connect each stage in the architectural development of the Citadel with the surrounding circumstances of the period. The study is divided into six sections to correspond to the six important stages in the history of the Citadel. Each section is composed of an outline on the evolution of the Citadel during the period reviewed, followed by a more elaborate description of the extant and excavated structures or remains which belong to that period. Each section is accompanied by a plan of the Citadel with the studied structures marked on it.
One day, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, the founder of the Citadel of Cairo, rode to its site when it was still under construction with his brother al-‘Adel. Once there, he turned to his brother and prophesied: “O Sayf al-Din [al-‘Adel’s honorific title], I think I am building this Citadel for your sons. “Dumbfounded, al-‘Adel nonetheless aptly retorted: “O Lord, may God Almighty grant the world to you, your sons and the sons of your sons.” “What Salah al-Din is supposed to have meant is that his nephews and not his sons are going to be his successors on the throne of Egypt and thus they will occupy the Citadel he was building to be his seat of government.

If this were not an invented story, then Salah al-Din was a true clairvoyant, for neither he nor his sons inhabited the Citadel. He left Cairo for Syria a year before the date of his inscription on the Gate of al-Mudarraj (579/1183-84) and
died there without coming back. His amir Qaraqush carried on the building of the Citadel during that period. We know that he completed most of the walls of the present northern enclosure and dug up the famous Spiral Well (*Bir al-Halazon*). We do not know if he built anything besides the well in the area of the actual southern enclosure. We also have no references to any work done in the short reigns of Salah al-Din’s sons, or that of his brother al-‘Adel, who did in fact become the ruler of Egypt (1200-18), but also never lived in the Citadel. Al-‘Adel’s son and successor, al-Kamil, completed the construction of the Citadel and moved to it during his viceroyship in 1206. He apparently extended the building to the southwest of the fortified enclosure. We have scattered references to the structures he erected. Ibn Sa’id reported that al-Kamil “built in the Citadel palaces worthy of his Sultanate, moved his treasury and private quarters there from the House of the Vizierate (*Dar al-Wizara*), and lived in it during his reign (1218-38)”. We are also told that “he moved the animal markets to the vicinity of the Citadel, built the royal stables, and planned a *maydan* south of it for military parades and training.” Thus, al-Kamil fixed the Citadel’s general configuration for centuries to come: the northern part became the fortified military enclosure, the southern part contained the ceremonial and private quarters of the sultan, and at the foot of the hill, to the west of the Citadel, lay the establishments for equestrian activities.

Al-Kamil’s second son, al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, apparently opted for more security and seclusion from the city’s population and built himself another citadel on Roda Island opposite the city of Misr. In it, he kept and trained his *corps d’élite*, chosen mostly from Mamluk Kipchak Turks, who became his most efficient troops and played a crucial role in his campaigns. They were identified with their place of residence, the Citadel of the Nile (*Qal‘at al-Bahr*), Bahr being the name of the Nile in Egyptian parlance, and thus they were called the Bahri Mamluks.

These Mamluks of the Nile were destined to become the real masters of the Citadel of the Mountain (*Qal‘at al-Jabal*, as it became known). Shortly after the death of al-Salih, they killed his son, wrested the power from the Ayyubid house and established a Sultanate that was to last for two and a half centuries (1250-1517). During this long period, their sultanate was ruled from the Citadel of the Mountain, just as Salah al-Din had intended.

In addition to the northern enclosure’s towers and walls, which have been thoroughly studied by Creswell, four elements at the Citadel that can almost surely be attributed to the early Ayyubid period have survived. They are the Spiral Well (*Bir al-Halazon*), sometimes called Joseph’s Well (*Bir Yusuf*) after Salah al-Din whose first name was Yusuf, the Gate and vestibule of al-Mudarraj, the path carved in the rock that leads to the southern enclosure’s entrance, and the double-headed eagle fixed on top of the wall overlooking the carved path.
The Spiral Well is firmly dated to the time of Salah al-Din for all Arab historians credit Qaraqush with its digging. It is located outside the actual fortified northern enclosure. This means that the well was the first structure in the second stage of the Citadel’s building, which was the royal palace complex. Otherwise, we have to revise the extent of Salah al-Din’s walls and include the well within them.

The well itself is a masterpiece of medieval engineering. It is almost 90 meters deep, almost 85 meters of which are carved out of the rock. Its section is made out of two almost-equal shafts which are not on the same vertical line. The lower shaft is 2.3 m^2 in surface, while the upper one is 5.0 m^2. Two oxen were used to turn a waterwheel (saqiah) at the bottom of the upper shaft, which brought the water from the bottom of the well to a cistern half way up. Then another pair of oxen brought the water up to the surface by means of another saqiah, whence it was distributed through channels. The first shaft had to be wide enough to accommodate the descent of the oxen. For that purpose, a gently-sloping ramp 2.0 m. wide surrounds the core of the upper shaft and spirals around it to its bottom. The most astonishing aspect of this well, besides its depth, is the mastery shown in carving the extremely thin wall separating the inner core of the upper shaft from the spiral ramp.

The Gate of al-Mudarraj is one of the two original gates of the Citadel. It was named after the steps (daraj), carved in the rock, which led to it from the end of the road ascending from the Horse Market (some of whose carved steps have been uncovered in the excavation of 1988). The gate and the barbican (bashura) behind it are easily datable to the period of the Citadel’s first building on stylistic ground and from the foundation inscription fixed in its center. The shape of its arch, the arrangement of its vousoirs, and the disposition of tripartite carved columns on the sides of the three alcoves inside its bashura are all characteristic of early Ayyubid architecture. The inscription (text reproduced on first page) provides the
definitive date (579/1183-84) for the whole structure, although the dome over the bashura and the arches of its four squinches are covered with a painted inscription band bearing the name and titles of al-Nasir Muhammad and the possible date 709 (1310). Casanova has proved that al-Nasir, who returned twice to the throne, painted his name and titles on three superimposed layers of stucco on these three occasions, but the stone surface underneath is undoubtedly Ayyubid.

The Carved Path, or Road of the Sultan, winds up from the site of the present Katkhuda Gate (the possible placement of the orginal Gate of the Chain, Bab al-Silsila) until it meets with the wall of the southern enclosure near the present-day Middle Gate (al-Bab al-Wastani).

It is similar in its execution to the work done in the northern enclosure where the spur upon which the Citadel was built is cut away from the Muqattam Hill by a ditch obviously carved at the same time as the construction of the towers above it. The northern enclosure work is dated to the period between the reigns of Salah al-Din and al-Kamil, and this should be the same period in which the Carved Path was done. According to al-Jabarti, the infamous Massacre of the Mamluks took place here in 1811, when snipers sent by Muhammad‘Ali ambushed the Mamluk amirs and their retinues who were leaving the Citadel after a banquet given in their honor by the same Muhammad ‘Ali.

The Double-Headed Eagle, on top of the wall overlooking the Carved Path, was first reported by Evliya Çelebi (ca. 1670);
he located it on top of a tower that overlooked the Gate of 'Azab (probably where it is today, though higher up on the walls that were renovated by Muhammad 'Ali). He asserted that the eagle had two heads, which are now lost, and thought it was put there as a talisman. Egyptian pre-Ottoman chroniclers are conspicuously silent about the eagle, but this should not be construed as signifying that it was added at a later date. Neither Casanova nor Creswell fixed a date or a meaning for the eagle, but they both placed it in the Ayyubid period. This emblem can be attributed to either Salah al-Din or al-'Adel. The political circumstances surrounding the building of the Citadel support either contention.

When Salah al-Din started the Citadel's construction he was, at least nominally, a vassal of Nur al-Din ibn Zengi, the king of unified Syria who had originally sent Salah al-Din as his general to Egypt. The Zengids ruled regions formerly belonging to the Seljuk Empire, and the founder of their dynasty was initially appointed guardian (atabeg) of two minor Seljuk princes. The double-headed eagle was among the emblems of the Seljuks, and it is still referred to as the Seljuk Eagle in Anatolia to this day. It may have been an emblem for their atabegs such as the Zengids, as well. In fact, the Zengids of Sinjar engraved a double-headed eagle on their coins (the Islamic Museum in Cairo has on display four dirhams showing a double-headed eagle like that on the Citadel and bearing the name of 'Imad al-Din Zengi ibn Mawdud, who ruled Sinjar between 566 and 594 H., exactly the same time as the Citadel's construction. Could it be that Salah al-Din, or his brother, by putting the eagle in their Citadel, were paying allegiance to their nominal master in Syria? Or were they connecting themselves directly to the Seljuks, bypassing Nur al-Din, and therefore acquiring the right to rule from the original source? Be this as it may, it remains that the eagle loses its political meaning after the Ayyubids were securely established in Egypt and Syria, and no further connection with a legitimizing source was needed. This double-headed eagle must therefore have been ordered by Salah al-Din or his heir apparent and brother during those difficult times when they were asserting their independence, and when they built the Citadel.
The Citadel in the Early Bahri Mamluk Period (1250-1341)

Salah al-Din had built his Citadel for defense, as a refuge, and possibly as a residence away from the population of Cairo, of whose loyalty he was not sure. In so doing, however, he was following an established pattern of citadel-building in the Middle East. The Citadel should, therefore, be viewed both as a stronghold in the fortified walls of the two cities of Misr al-Fustat and Cairo, and as a real and symbolic barrier between the rulers and the ruled. Under al-Kamil, who chose the Citadel as residence, the royal complex developed out of the northern enclosure in the direction of the city. The early Mamluks carried on the same process. During the first half of the Bahri Period, the southern enclosure spread out to encompass a magnificent congregational mosque, an audience hall (al-iwan al-kabir), private royal palaces, smaller palaces for the sultan’s most trusted amirs, gardens, courtyards, and all the necessary dependencies. Four great Bahri sultans, Baybars, Qalawun, al-Ashraf Khalil, and, especially, al-Nasir Muhammad were creating in the Citadel a royal Mamluk setting in an almost
uninterrupted process. The buildings they erected were intended to fulfill this function, but they also exhibited a new characteristic: visually they dominated the city. This change of emphasis from seclusion in the early Ayyubid period, to physical separation, coupled with visual connection in the early Mamluk period is the most interesting aspect in the evolution of the Citadel up to that time.

The monumentalization of the southern enclosure of the Citadel was intentional. Whatever the reasons behind the construction of the specific structures, the overall motivation was an attempt on the part of the sultans to give shape to the image of the great ruler of the sultanate they were building and trying to preserve.

Of this palatial complex, hardly anything remains today. Not surprisingly, the only structure that survives is the congregational mosque built in its final form by al-Nasir Muhammad in 1335. The remains of the major royal structures were razed by Muhammad ‘Ali when he refurbished the Citadel and built his own mosque in the first half of the nineteenth century. Recent excavations in 1985 and 1988 uncovered a wall of the Great Iwan and a hall (qa‘a) in the modern Place of the Flag (Sahat al-‘Alam). This qa‘a was ascribed to the famous Striped Palace (al-Qasr al-Ablaq) of al-Nasir Muhammad, but this ascription must be contested.

The **Mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad** originally occupied the southeastern side of the Red Court (al-Rahba al-Hamra); while the Great Iwan stood in the northwest. The present-day court extending from the New Gate to the walls of Muhammad ‘Ali’s Mosque is almost the same as the original. The mosque has three doors. The main door today, set in a deep recess, faces the northwest and opens into the court. It has above it an inscription in the name of al-Nasir Muhammad and the date 718 (1318). The southwestern door is blocked, but it originally led to the sultan’s private quarters. The third door, the northeastern one, is opposite the Qulla Gate which separates the Citadel’s two enclosures. The façades of the mosque are uncharacteristically plain and fortress-like for the period, with crenellations on top. They may have made a different impression in the past when the now-blocked arched doors were still open and when the now-buried ground floor of the mosque was still above ground.

The mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad is the only Bahri structure still standing in its entirety. It is one of the most serene and dignified mosques in Cairo with its
simple, almost square plan, its tastefully reused Pharaonic and Ptolemaic columns, and the voussoirs of its arcades made of alternate red and white stone, a treatment called mushahhar in Arabic. The mosque is of the hypostyle type, with a prayer hall made of four arcades, and three porticos each with two arcades. A square, central part of the roof in the prayer hall, supported on ten monolithic granite columns, is higher than the rest of the mosque. This square is surmounted by a green-tiled dome (the one there now was rebuilt in the 20th century). The ceiling, made of octagonal wooden coffers, was painted with bright colors with gilding (some original colors can still be seen, although most of the actual ceiling is new).

On both northeastern and southwestern walls are remains of intricate marble mosaic work.

The two minarets, one on the southeastern corner and one above the main door, are situated so as to face the two audiences to whom the call to prayer (azan) was directed: the mamluks in the northern enclosure across from the Qulla Gate, and the amirs and administrators in the Great Iwan area. The minarets are architecturally different from each other, and both are quite unusual in shape and surface articulation. The upper parts of both their shafts and their finials are covered with greenish enameled tiles, with bands of white Qur’anic inscription on a blue background surrounding the bases of the finials. There is nothing else quite like them in Cairo, and they are believed to be the work of a Tabrizi master builder who was active in Cairo around the year 1335, when al-Nasir renovated the mosque for the second time.

The Great Iwan (al-Iwan al-Kabir), or the Iwan of al-Nasir, was still standing at
the beginning of the 19th century, when it was documented for the *Description de l'Égypte*. Excavations in 1988 in the garden in front of the Police Museum uncovered part of a wall believed to have belonged to it. This iwan did not overlook the maydan directly, but it was monumental enough to dominate the skyline of the palatial complex which faced towards the city.

The French plan shows the iwan to have consisted of five parallel aisles made of rows of reused granite column. The central aisle was almost twice as wide as the four lateral ones. The structure was opened on three sides. Its main façade, the northeastern, which commanded a large court, was formed of a triumphal arch in the middle and two flanking arches. The five arches were slightly

*Plan of the Great Iwan after "La description de l'Égypte"*
pointed. The main feature of the iwan was its central dome, which was covered with greenish faience. The dome, constructed of wood like other contemporary domes, was supported on four wooden *mugarnas* squinches. We know nothing about the surface articulation of either the interior or exterior walls, except for the broad inscription band situated under the dome on the inner side of the supporting arcade.

The iwan was rebuilt twice by al-Nasir Muhammad, in 1315 and 1334, on the site of earlier halls erected by his predecessors. It served as the formal audience hall for the sultan, just as its predecessors had. There, al-Nasir sat on his ebony and ivory throne on Mondays and Thursdays, while he administered justice to his subjects as part of his duties as sultan. He also used it on official occasions to receive ambassadors, or when he reviewed his troops and distributed the warrants of *iqta* (roughly fief assignments) to his amirs. The iwan was obviously the most public and most ceremonial of the sultan’s palaces, and its monumentality must have been deliberate in order to impress both foreign officials and his subjects.

The Striped Palace (*al-Qasr al-Ablaq*) has also disappeared. It was connected to the Great Iwan through a corridor and overlooked the maydan. This palace was reserved for daily receptions and private ceremonies. It acquired its name from its exterior walls which were built of successive courses of black and ochreous stone, an arrangement called ablaq in Arabic. It was inspired, we are told, by
the example of the Striped Palace in Damascus, which was constructed by al-Zahir Baybars in 1264. Parts of the striped walls can still be seen on the outer walls of the Tower of the Canopy, but we cannot be sure whether they belonged to the Striped Palace or to one of the other palaces built in the same manner. The Striped Palace was only the first of a series of four aligned palaces, of which the other three, called the Inner Palaces, al-Qusur al-Juwaniyya, were reserved for the sultan’s afternoon audiences.

The palace had a qa’a plan, with two unequal iwans and a durqa’a (space with a higher ceiling between iwans in a Cairene qa’a) in the middle topped with a dome. The large northern iwan overlooked the sultan’s stables, the maydan and Cairo beyond; the southern one led to the private door through which the sultan and his retinue entered the Great Iwan on official occasions. All the other palaces had a similar disposition to benefit from the same view. The chroniclers tell us that the interior of the palace had “dadoes of marble and gold and floriated mosaics, heightened with mother of pearl and colored paste. The ceilings were all gilded and painted with lapis lazuli. The light came through windows filled with colored glass resembling necklaces of precious stones. All of the floors were paved with marble, which has no equal, transported from all the countries of the world.” The Inner Palaces communicated with the sultan’s private quarters, al-Addur al-Sultaniyya, where the wives and concubines lived.

The area proposed as the site of the Striped Palace is a platform adjacent to the outer courtyard of the mosque of Muhammad ‘Ali. It extends along the enclosure’s walls to the site of the men’s quarters of the Bijou Palace. Under the platform, two huge superimposed vaulted halls, whose façades run along the Citadel’s wall, open on to the maydan with two rows of eight windows. These two halls must have formed the lower two levels of the Striped Palace and the Inner Palaces built by al-Nasir Muhammad. This assertion can be supported by an analogy.

Ibn Taghri-Bardi said that “Baybars filled up the hollow ground under the palace he built for his son al-Malik al-Sa‘id by constructing sixteen vaults,” which presumably formed the basement of this palace. Surviving Bahri Mamluk princely palaces, such as the palaces of Alin-Aq, Beshtak, and Qawsun resemble in their arrangement the suggested disposition of the Striped Palace. They have vaulted halls on their ground floors, and corresponding first floor qa’as above. The Striped Palace must have had the same plan, except that it had two vaulted levels. The reconstruction of the no longer existing
qa'as of the Citadel palaces on top of the vaulted halls in an orientation that corresponds to the halls' disposition is further corroborated by the chroniclers' description of the view from the window of each qa'a as encompassing the whole city of Cairo. These qa'as must have been built in a row parallel to the wall, both to benefit from the commanding view and to project a majestic vision of the sultan's residence to his subjects in the city.

Al-Qa'a al-Ashrafiyya is most probably the original designation of the recently excavated qa'a. It stands at the tip of the modern terrace in an orientation almost parallel to what should have been the orientation of the qa'a of the Striped Palace. This qa'a could not have belonged to the Striped Palace, because it was joined to three other qa'as, and there is not enough space between it and the Tower of the Canopy to accommodate three similar structures. Another piece of evidence comes from the excavation team's finding. Four monolithic granite columns unearthed from the site bore exaltations in the name of the Sultan al-Ashraf, the honorific title of Khalil ibn Qalawun, the builder of this qa'a.

Built in the year 1291, the Qa'a al-Ashrafiyya was used throughout the reign of al-Nasir, who demolished and rebuilt all the other palatial structures attributed to his predecessors. In its present, incomplete form, it is, like many qa'as of that period, composed of two iwans with a durqa'a in the middle. Its floor level is almost at the same level as the rooftop of the vaulted hall of the Striped Palace, which proves that they belong more or less to the same period. On its walls are remains of marble dadoes and fragments of mosaic representations of kiosks, gardens and rivers reminiscent of those in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus.

The Tower of the Canopy (Burj al-Rafraf) is located on the western tip of the southern enclosure. It was named after the canopy constructed on its top by al-Ashraf Khalil in 1292. Maqrizi
states that al-Nasir Muhammad built a new tower next to it in 1312. Casanova located the tower and proved the dating to be correct by discovering an inscription of al-Nasir Muhammad that was put there after his first pilgrimage in 1313. There is a complete vertical break in the tower's walls, which proves that the protruding tower is a later addition to the original one. This would clarify the text of Maqrizi, which should be understood as saying that al-Nasir demolished only the canopy built by his brother, and not the whole tower.

The Tower of Lions (Burj al-Siba') was uncovered recently in the renovation work done at the Citadel. Its upper frieze, the only part above the actual ground level, is made out of carved lions. Its top is now occupied by the Police Museum. It is most likely the tower referred to in Mamluk sources as the Tower of the Corner (Burj al-Rukna), especially since the present location of the Tower of Lions is in a bend in the wall that creates a right angle or corner on the plan. This structure was built by al-Zahir Baybars, who used the lion as his emblem (rank).
The Citadel to the End of the Mamluk Period (1341-1517)

By the mid fourteenth-century, the whole façade of the southern enclosure, which dominated Cairo and the Southern Cemetery, was adorned with great palaces built or rebuilt by the early Bahri sultans. The view up from the maydan must have been impressive and awe-inspiring. This image, however, did not last for a long time after the death of al-Nasir Muhammad in 1341. In the second half of the Bahri period, and certainly during the whole Burji period (1382-1517), three major currents of change in the development of the Citadel can be detected. The first is the slowing down of the building and rebuilding process. The second is the construction of small structures, as opposed to the monumental achievements of the early Bahris. The third is the shift in the location of new buildings from the area extending along the southern wall facing the city to relatively remote areas inside the enclosure with no view over Cairo. There are certainly several possible reasons for these changes ranging from the security element, to political and economic considerations, to the mere availability.
of space inside the Citadel. But the shift from an emphasis on monumental constructions in highly visible locations during the early Bahri period to the later, modest, and relatively secluded additions is due mostly to the change of perception of power on the part of the Mamluk sultans after al-Nasir Muhammad.

Nine of al-Nasir's sons and grandsons ruled in the forty troublesome years following his death. Only three of them al-Salih Isma'il, al-Nasir Hasan, and al-Ashraf Sha'ban are credited with any important building. Each built a new qa'a in the area of the hosh, which was planned by their father as a private garden in the harem. During the Burji, or Circassian, period, this hosh slowly lost its private character and became the favorite reception area of the sultans. Consequently, the palaces of al-Nasir fell into disuse, and the sporadic efforts of later Burji sultans to restore them to their past glory proved short-lived. Some Burji sultans carried on the process of adding reception halls to the area of the hosh, and we hear about the Qa'a of the Fountain (Qa'a al-Bahra), Diwan Qaytbay, and Diwan al-Guri as structures built during the fifteenth century and used throughout the Ottoman period. All these buildings have disappeared without a trace, but we are almost sure that they stood in the area occupied today by the Bijou Palace and the House of Justice (Dar al-'Adl) of Muhammad 'Ali.

At the same time, the area of the stables below the palaces was being built up. Although the stables were outside the southern enclosure proper, they were connected to it by many passages and stairs, some of which were built by al-

*General view of the Stables and the Maydan from the Minaret of Muhammad 'Aliş Mosque*
Nasir Muhammad. Starting in the time of Sultan Barquq, who began his career as Master of the Stables (*Amir Akhur*), the hearing of grievances took place in a new hall in the stables, instead of the Great Iwan. The structure used by Barquq was called *al-Harraqa*, a term usually used for the largest type of Mamluk warship. The connotation here must have been that of grandeur and invincibility. Most later sultans retained this new practice, and some of them, such as al-Guri, extended the services to the maydan by adding new structures on the periphery. Today, *al-Harraqa* and the other structures in the stables and the maydan, like most other structures of the Burji period, have vanished.

**Three marble plaques** have survived from the Burji period. They are fixed next to each other in a triangular arrangement on the wall to the right of *bab al-Mudarraj*. They all commemorate some fortification work, or renovation, undertaken by three different sultans: Jaqmaq, Qaytbay, and Tuman-Bay. Jaqmaq, according to his inscription, renovated the stairs of *bab al-Mudarraj* in 1450, which should have been a routine project. Qaytbay claims to have renovated the “citadel” without further specification. This claim is not backed by any chronicler’s report, which prompted Casanova to deduce that Qaytbay’s fortification work must have been minor. Tuman-Bay may have usurped the credit for the work done by his predecessor, Janbulat, since the former ruled for too short a time to have been able to initiate any construction work, but Ibn Iyas reports that fortification work was ordered by Janbulat and does not attribute any to Tuman-Bay.
The Citadel was surrendered without a fight to the advancing Ottomans in 1517. The Ottoman Sultan Selim the Grim stayed in it for few months to organize the affairs of the newly conquered province, and then turned it over to the governor he appointed, Khayer-Bek, who had previously been the last Mamluk governor of Aleppo. This change of allegiance on the part of Khayer-Bek was not lost on the people who named him "Khayen-Bek" the Traitor. He moved to the Citadel, which from then on became the residence of the Ottoman governor of the province of Egypt, and therefore lost its predominance as the political center of a strong and vast sultanate. For three centuries, the structures of the Mamluks were left slowly to crumble. The new ones erected by the Ottoman governors were only functional and lacked the monumentality of royal constructions.

Khayer-Bek’s organizational measures ushered in a new stage in the evolution of the Citadel. To prevent dissensions, he ordered the different groups of soldiers to be housed in separate quarters. For
the rest of the Ottoman period, the Citadel was spatially and administratively divided into three semi-independent and competing parts. Salah al-Din's northern enclosure contained the barracks of the Janissaries, who formed the regular troops. The stables and the areas surrounding them, including the maydan and parts of the southern enclosure, became the residence of the locally recruited troops, called al-'Azab. The governor, who held the title of pasha, and his troops, occupied the hosh and the area around it in the southern enclosure. As a result the Great Iwan and the palaces area appear to have become a no-man’s land and therefore further neglected. The Striped Palace became the place where the embroidered cloth cover of the Ka’ba, the Kiswa, was made.

The division of the Citadel among the various troops necessitated the addition of new congregational mosques to accommodate their worship. These mosques have survived, with the exception of the mosque of the Pasha, which seems to have been erected near, or planted in, the qa’a of the Bahri Mamluk sultan al-Salih Isma’il, called al-Duhaysha.

The Mosque of Sulayman Pasha was the first, and to a certain degree stylistically the purest, Ottoman mosque in Cairo. It was founded by Sulayman Pasha al-Khadim, the governor of Ottoman Egypt, in 1528. Built in the northern enclosure for the Janissaries, this mosque occupied the site of an older mosque, that of Sidi Sariyya built by a Fatimid governor of Alexandria, Abu-Mansur Qasta. The
burial chamber of Qasta, which has an inscription plate on it dating it to the year 1140, is under a dome on the western side of the mosque's courtyard (sahn). The outer side of this mausoleum facing the courtyard has four stone plaques, bearing the names of God (twice), 'Ali, and Muhammad. The style of writing is late and sluggish. These plaques cannot be attributed to the Fatimid phase of the mosque, and they do not seem to belong to the Ottoman original arrangement either. One explanation could be that the prayer leader of the first troops of Janissaries, who, according to some sources, was a Shi'ite himself, put these plaques there in possible defiance of the staunch Sunni tendencies of the Ottomans. The orthodox
Sunni message is expressed in the traditional Ottoman manner in the six large medallions which contain the names of God, Muhammad, and the four rightly guided Caliphs, arranged around the drum of the mosque’s central dome.

The mosque of Sulayman Pasha’s plan is of the Ottoman central domed type. The dome, which covers the prayer hall, and the semi-domes surrounding it are all covered on the exterior with green tiles. The interior of these domes is decorated with colored curvilinear designs; their drums and the bands around their oculi are covered with various Qur’anic quotations and maxims inscribed in a most intricate thuluth writing. There is a marble dado on the exterior wall leading into the prayer hall similar to those found in Mamluk mosques. The paving of the mosque’s courtyard, which resembles the sahns of older Mamluk mosques, is of the most beautiful marble panels arranged in geometric patterns. The fluted, cylindrical minaret is among the earliest of this Ottoman type in Cairo. Although this mosque is undeniably Ottoman in style, the presence of many Mamluk Cairene elements testifies to the persistence of local artistic traditions even when the structure is sponsored by Ottoman rule in Cairo. This hybrid style will later be found in all Ottoman religious buildings in Cairo.

The Gate of al-‘Azab was also only rebuilt, not constructed, in the Ottoman period. It opens into Rumayla Square, and was the main gate to the section of al-‘Azab during that time. Jabarti attributed its construction to Radwan
Katkhuda, another Circassian Mamluk amir, who died in 1754. It is probably constructed on the site of an older Mamluk gate. Its interior face was renovated in a pseudo-Gothic style during the Khedieval period. The exterior face, with its round bastions, is almost a copy of Bab al-Futuh, built in 1087 in the city’s northern wall. This reference to Cairo’s past was most certainly deliberate, though its political connotations remain unclear. The present-day double ramp with its ornamented balustrade is a reconstruction of a khedival addition.

The Mosque of al-‘Azab served as the congregational mosque for the ‘Azab troops in their part of the Citadel. It overlooks the Carved Path and faces the Gate of Katkhuda in the stables area. According to a surviving inscription in Turkish, it was built in 1697 by Ahmad Katkhuda, whose name indicates that he was a local amir, possibly a Circassian Mamluk, who led the ‘Azab troops. The mosque, which is today in poor condition, was probably renovated not built by Ahmad Katkhuda, who only added the Ottoman-type minaret. The flat dome which covers the prayer-hall and the stone-carved decorations in the sahn’s walls unmistakably belong to the early Burji period. This mosque could have been the one built initially by Faraj ibn Barquq, or the one built by al-Mu’ayad Shaykh a decade later, for both are credited with small religious buildings in the stables area.
The Citadel from 1789 until 1874

When Napoleon Bonaparte arrived with his army in Cairo in 1789, the Citadel had already lost its military importance. The French occupation did not last long enough to require building anything substantial in it, although French troops were stationed there. The main Egyptian source for the period, al-Jabarti, talks more about destruction in and around the Citadel than he does about any additions or replacements by the French occupation army. The major legacy of the French Expedition is, however, a positive and a very valuable one. During the three years of French presence in Egypt the savants attached to the expedition managed to produce the encyclopedic La description de l’Égypte, in which they collected, using nineteenth-century scientific method, all the facts pertaining to the past and present of Egypt. The maps and drawings of the Citadel they produced are our main source of information on its medieval form, since the alterations of Muhammad‘Ali, shortly after the French expedition, obliterated most traces of the Citadel’s past. Muhammad‘Ali Pasha came to Egypt
with the Ottoman army that replaced the French after a peace treaty was signed in 1801. It took him ten years of political manoeuvring (which culminated in the massacre of the Mamluks at the Citadel in 1811) to become the sole master of Egypt. During the remaining thirty-seven years of his reign, Muhammad‘Ali transformed the Citadel into a new royal city which combined the facilities needed by a nineteenth-century modern government with the amenities of an autocratic ruler’s palace. In the process, the Citadel regained its lost glory, though the new garb woven by Muhammad‘Ali erased even the faintest memories of the Mamluk period. The alterations brought about by the pasha both changed the interior organization of the Citadel and enlarged its surface area and established new entrance routes to it. In 1825, he constructed a new road to accommodate carriages and cars. A monumental funerary mosque, four palaces, a palace of justice, an arsenal, a mint, a powder house, a huge terrace, and numerous barracks for the troops were constructed during Muhammad‘Ali’s time. The pasha also built a structure for the archives (Daftarkhane) in 1828, outside the Citadel proper in a place that is believed to have been occupied by the Mamluk Guest House (Dar al-Diyafa). Most of the structures built by Muhammad‘Ali, with the exception of the barracks and the powder house, are still standing today. The Citadel remained the residence of Muhammad‘Ali’s descendants, and their seat of government until 1874, when Isma‘il Pasha built‘Abdin Palace in Cairo.

The Mosque of Muhammad‘Ali al-Kabir stands at the northwestern corner of the southern enclosure, where the Striped Palace of al-Nasir Muhammad once stood, and is visible from almost every location in Cairo. It is the best known structure at the Citadel today, and in the colloquial language its name was given to the whole complex. The mosque was also called the Alabaster Mosque because of the alabaster revetment on the exterior and interior walls and piers. It was constructed fairly late in the reign of Muhammad‘Ali. It is first mentioned in the memoirs of Pascal Coste, the famous French architect, who reported that in 1820 the pasha commissioned him to
design a mosque at the Citadel. It was not until 1830 that the construction following the design of another architect, Yusuf Bushnaq, began, and it was not finished until after the death of Muhammad‘Ali in 1848. The mosque’s surface articulation was completed later, during the reign of ‘Abbas Pasha I, who also added the bronze grille to the cenotaph of Muhammad‘Ali at the south-western corner of the mosque.

The mosque, which has a pure central-domed plan, has three entrances, one in the middle of each of its northern, southern, and western sides. The adjacent sahn is surrounded by three porticoes from its northern, western, and southern sides, whose arches, walls, and columns are all lined with alabaster. An octagonal Turkish baroque ablution fountain covered by a carved alabaster dome stands in the center of the sahn, above which is a large dome surrounded by an ornamented awning and supported on eight columns. The mosque’s two slender pencil minarets soar to a height of 82m. The central dome, with its four supporting semi-domes all covered with lead sheets, is 52m. high. The interior of the dome and semi-domes is articulated with painted and gilt ornament in relief, executed in a neo-baroque style. The interior decoration contrasts sharply in its profusion and eclecticism with the structural straightforwardness of the mosque.

In the middle of the western side of the outer courtyard, which overlooks the maydan, stands a brass clock-tower, which was presented in 1845 to Muhammad‘Ali by Louis Philippe, king of France, in return for the obelisk which adorns the Place de la Concorde in Paris today. This clock, it was remarked, does not seem mat odds with the rest of the mosque, even though it should.

The mosque is a rhetorical composition designed to emulate the early style of royal Ottoman mosques of Istanbul. Nineteenth-century guides and scholars both asserted that it was a copy of the Nur Uthmaniyya Mosque in Istanbul, but the plan of the mosque more closely resembles Istanbul’s mosque of Sultan
Ahmad. The archaism in the mosque of Muhammad‘Ali’s plan and appearance must have been intentional, and the messages of allegiance to the Ottoman past and the independence from the Ottoman present are equally well expressed in the mosque’s referential style, monumentality, and location.

The Bijou Palace (Qasr al-Gawhara) stands at the southern tip of the southern enclosure, where the palaces of the harem and the qa‘a s of the hosh once stood. Jabarti reported that Muhammad‘Ali razed the old halls of the Ottoman pashas in 1812 and started a new palace, the plan of which was in the “Greek manner.” Most of the palace’s halls were built of wood and decorated with painted gypsum panels. Its style was an amalgam of French and Italian Neobaroque styles, and the royal Ottoman kiosks and terraces. The result was rather mediocre, according to most reports, and the palace was totally rebuilt after two ravaging fires in 1820 and 1824. The new palace is an improved version of the old one, but still lacks the monumentality of the old Mamluk structures. It is a variation on the familiar theme of Ottoman palace organization, which divides the structure into a salamlık (men’s quarters) and a haramlık (women’s quarter). The Bijou Palace’s plan adapted this Ottoman division to the eighteenth-century European palace plan with its cour d’honneur, reception hall, and private quarters for the pasha and his family. The cour d’honneur burned down in 1974.

The palace is of very little architectural interest. Its surface articulation, however, which is heavily copied from European models, could be considered a testimony to the influence of European

Plan of the First Floor of the Military Museum
styles on the taste of the pasha of Egypt and his whole court.

The three Palaces of the Harem (*Qusur al-Harim*), are clustered together in the northwestern corner of the northern enclosure. They represent the first time since the Mamluk period that a royal residence was located in the northern enclosure, which is usually reserved for administrative and military structures. These palaces, built separately, are wrongly called the harem palaces, since they were constructed for various purposes, and not only to house the family of Muhammad‘Ali. The first palace to be built was the Middle Palace, then the Eastern one, also called the Palace of the Orphans (*Qasr al-Aytam*), and finally the Western Palace. The three palaces are interconnected, and their plans are organized in a similar way. They were initially surrounded by a wall, which set them apart from the rest of the northern enclosure, but this is now destroyed, and the palaces open onto a formal garden which has in its center a statue of Ibrahim Pasha, Muhammad‘Ali’s son, on his horse. The three palaces have recently been refurbished and turned into a military museum.

The Eastern Palace is the largest and richest of the three. It was initially constructed as a residence for young orphans of the pasha’s and Mamluks’ families who were being prepared to become officers in the newly founded army. The palace is dated by a Turkish inscription put above its arched gate to the year 1826. It consists of three floors, and its rooms are arranged around courtyards or on the sides of corridors. The same organization applies to the
plans of the two other palaces. Each palace has in its first and second floors a four-iwan qa‘a, which could be an adaptation of the old reception-hall scheme in Cairene architecture, or, which is more probable, an importation of an Ottoman Europeanized hall plan. The major method of decoration in all three palaces consists of natural or floral representations painted on panels in corners or on ceilings. The theme is Istanbul Ottoman and the style is baroque. An outstanding example of the palace’s baths has been preserved on the ground floor of the Middle Palace; all walls, niches, and floors are covered with whitish marble and ornamented with slender marble columns. In general, the three palaces are more interesting for their vastness and the repetitiousness in their luxurious baroque decoration than for their architecture.

In addition to these structures, Muhammad‘Ali built new gates for the Citadel, of which the most important architecturally is the New Gate (al-Bab al-Jadid), in 1825, constructed when the carriage route’s was completed. He also rebuilt the Qulla Gate (Bab al-Qulla), with two round towers on its sides, which could be interpreted as another reference to Bab al-Futuh in Cairo. He probably rebuilt the whole wall separating the northern and southern enclosures as well. Both these gates are composed of an arched entry that leads into a squarish corridor covered with a flat vault made of spiraling courses of white and yellow stone that give it the shape of a coiling snake. The stone carving on these gates, and the marble revetment when applied, are Turkish baroque in style.

*Quilla Gate*
The Citadel Today

The Khedive Isma‘il Pasha, who became the ruler of Egypt in 1862, was the last ruler to reside in the Citadel. He did some repair work to the walls, dated by an inscription to the year 1868, but then built the new ‘Abdin Palace in Cairo, in which he took up residence in 1874. Egypt was occupied by the British in 1885. The Citadel became the headquarter of the British occupation army shortly after, and British troops were garrisoned in it until 1946, when the Citadel was turned over to the Egyptian army. When its potential as a tourist attraction was convincingly demonstrated, the Citadel was given to the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in 1983, and plans to withdraw the army from it were almost complete in mid 1989. The Antiquities Organization is engaged in a major restoration and refurbishing operation that is still going on, albeit at a slower pace now than in the mid eighties, and has opened the southern enclosure and parts of the northern enclosure to visitors. The stables area, with its multitude of British and Egyptian army storage halls and remains of older structures, was not turned over to the Antiquities Organization until later, and is still inaccessible. Much could be done to develop this area both for tourists and commercially.

Archaeologically, the Citadel is still unexplored, even though some excavation work, with very promising results, has recently been carried out. The accumulation of rubble and the constant rise of the ground level over the centuries have preserved whole structures intact underground. Even excavations in sections that were reportedly razed by Muhammad‘Ali are yielding interesting results in terms of determining the extent and location of certain structures, such as the Great Iwan of al-Nasir Muhammad. Most new findings are being verified and corroborated by textual references, and a better image of the Citadel in the Middle Ages is in the process of being drawn. There are still other areas inside the northern and southern enclosures which have underground remains of Mamluk and possibly Ayyubid structures. Fortunately, these areas are away from the major touristic attractions in the Citadel, and their examination would not interfere with visitors‘tours. It is hoped that the study of the Citadel, which was for seven centuries the stage upon which the history of Egypt was decided, will go on.
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