



THE CITADEL OF QAITBAY (882e-884e)

قلعة قايتباي (٨٨٢ هـ - ٨٨٤ هـ)

By

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Abstract:

The Citadel of Qaytbay is considered to be one of the most important defensive fortifications on the Mediterranean coast. When Qaytbay visited the city of Alexandria in AH 882 / AD 1477 to survey its walls, towers and fortifications, he ordered the construction of a citadel to protect the most important ports on the coast of northern Egypt. He was compelled to do this in view of his realization of growing Ottoman maritime domination, which posed a threat to many neighboring states for fear that they might fall under Ottoman influence.

Opening statement: The Citadel of Qaytbay - Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qaytbay- Sultan Qansawi al-Ghourri

Research problem: The research problem can be formulated through the following questions:

Who is Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qaytbay?

Who built the Citadel of Qaytbay? why?

Why did Sultan Qansawi al-Ghourri restore the castle?

What is the description of the citadel?

Research Hypothesis:

Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qaytbay ruled Egypt for about twenty-years that was relatively a stable era. The main threat during his reign was the increasing of the Ottomans and their interference in Asia minor .That forced Qaytbay to fight the Turcomans and several times. He also faced the problem of the plague towards the end of his reign.

Qaytbay was an active builder he is considered to be the most important builder of this period as he ordered the construction of a citadel to protect the most important ports on the coast of northern Egypt. He was compelled to do this in view of his realization of growing Ottoman maritime domination, which posed a threat to many

neighboring states for fear that they might fall under Ottoman influence.

Introduction:-

Alexandria is the second most important city in Egypt and the largest port on the Mediterranean Sea. It includes the ancient civilization spanning more than five thousand years, where there are many treasures of modern and ancient attractions embodied by castles, museums and monuments Pharaonic, Greek, Through mosques, churches and even ancient temples to form the city of Alexandria as a lighthouse of civilization.

Alexandria flourished in the Islamic era. Alexandria passed through the Ottoman period in a period of stagnation lasting several centuries. After the reign of Muhammad Ali, with the increase of foreign communities in Egypt and its concentration in Alexandria, Commercial, cultural and architectural fields flourished.

Alexandria has witnessed a flourishing period in the dissemination of culture and civilizations, and it was one of the largest cities that supported art, politics and heritage. It is a city that combines both European and Oriental typists. Alexandria has many landmarks, one of them is Qaitbay Castle. ¹

Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qaytbay:-

Qaitbay was one of the most important Mamluks who belonged to the Burji dynasty ,he was a mamluk of sultan Barsbay and was appointed to many important positions till he ascended the throne in 872 A.H /1468A.D .

١- بشرى علي شحاتة ، مقالة اسكندرية منارة في تضيئ البحر المتوسط والعالم ، أبناء الوطن في الخارج، ص. 4, 40

He ruled Egypt for about twenty-years that was relatively a stable era. The main threat during his reign was the increasing of the Ottomans and their interference in Asia minor². That forced Qaitbay to fight the Turcomans and several times. he also faced the problem of the plague towards the end of the his reign. qaitbay¹² was active builder he is considered to be the most important builder of this period with many monuments built around Egypt like the Madrassa and funerary complex in Cairo, his mosque in Fayoum, and many other monuments in Egypt. Nobody has ever imagined that this wonderful military complex would become the most important monument in Egypt visited by numerous tourists who spend their holidays in Egypt. he built and restored about 85 buildings in Cairo ,Alexandria ,Syria Palestine and Mecca . He also encouraged his emirs to build . the architecture during the reign of Qaitbay was not gigantic but tended rather toward refinement of proportion , and it was a golden age for stone , carving , and marble decorations. The style of qaitbay period was homogeneous , undisturbed by new ideas , foreign elements and daring innovation . sultan Qaitbay died in 901 A.H / 1496 A.D at the age of eighty – two . pl (2)³



The History of the Qaitbay Citadel :-

The Citadel of Qaitbay is considered to be one of the most important defensive fortifications on the Mediterranean coast. When

2 - Saad Heba, Islamic architecture of Egypt during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, El fatah library, 2019 , p 74 .

٣ - السر وليم موير، تاريخ دولة مماليك في مصر، مكتبة مدبولي، القاهرة، ص ١٧٠، ١٧١

Qaytbay visited the city of Alexandria in AH 882 / AD 1477 to survey its walls, towers and fortifications, he ordered the construction of a citadel to protect the most important ports on the coast of northern Egypt. He was compelled to do this in view of his realization of growing Ottoman maritime domination, which posed a threat to many neighboring states for fear that they might fall under Ottoman influence.

the castle was built the place of the ancient light house of Alexandria , which was destroyed in 702 AH, and took two years from (882 A.H to 884 A.H)

Sultan Qansawi al-Ghouri took care of the castle and extended the castle with weapons, but the castle was neglected in the Ottoman era

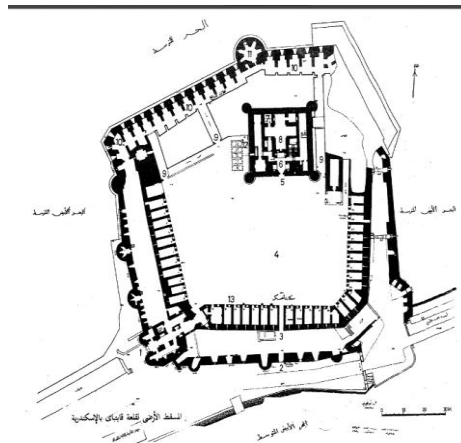
At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Sultan Qānsūh al-Ghawrī organized the restoration of the fort in order to counter the Ottoman threat in the Mediterranean. A decree promulgated by this sultan appears in an inscription which was inserted above a postern gate and dates from 1501. 43 According to this decree, the borrowing of arms stored in the citadel was prohibited and the theft of arms was punishable by death. In 950/1514, Sultan al-Ghawrī visited Alexandria with his amirs in order to inspect the works being carried out on the ancient Citadel of Alexandria. The sultan watched some military training with cannon-shooting maneuvers. The Citadel of Alexandria was endowed with a new wall, which surrounded the first one. 44 This new wall was flanked by large semi-circular towers and a bastion facing towards the harbor in the southeast. The bastion and the large circular tower to the north were very wide structures which could accommodate heavy artillery pieces. Blockhouses with embrasures were positioned along the coast to the northwest and northeast. A new gateway chatelet was built in the axis of the main door of the first wall. This projecting gateway was very similar to the one built for the Aqaba Fort by Sultan al-Ghawrī. 45 Finally in the nineteenth century, the citadel was modernized by

Muhammad ‘Alī. Unfortunately, it was to be severely damaged during the Egyptian rebellion led by Aḥmad ‘Urābī, when the British fleet inflicted severe damage on Alexandria during its heavy bombardment on 11 July 1882. Thereafter, the Citadel was no longer used for military purposes. The fortification was restored by the Committee in 1938 with major anastylosis on the higher parts. Other works were also under-taken by the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities between 1980 and 2000.⁴

The Plan:-

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ٢ - مسقط أفقي للدور الثاني | ١ - مسقط أفقي للدور الأول |
| لوحة السلطان العوري | ١ - باب القلعة الرئيسي |
| ٤ - فناء القلعة | ٢ - باب القلعة الحامل |
| ٥ - باب البرج الرئيسي | ٦ - دركاه |
| ٧ - ضريح | ٨ - المسجد |
| ٩ - زلاثة | ١١ - برج كبير |
| ١٠ - محلات المدافع | ١٢ - صهرج تحت الأرض |

Pl:(6)



٤- هيئة الآثار المصرية، قلعة قايتباي الاسكندرية، مطبعة هيئة الآثار المصرية، ص ١١ ، ١٢ ، ١٣ .

The Description of the Qaitbay Citadel :-

The entrance comprises a diamond-encrusted, vaulted porch, similar to the one on the Tina fort. The straight entrance is divided into two bent or right-angled passages, one on the right and the other on the left. The main chamber on the ground floor comprised four *īwāns*, with a small mosque which is situated in the center of the building and illuminated by a skylight.pl (8)⁵

It is difficult to provide a description for the brattices or the projecting balcony as these elements were reconstructed by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments Arabes in 1938, using an engraving from *La Description de l’Egypte* as a template. This master tower or keep, a veritable fort in itself and detached from the curtain wall, is also rather special in that it was apparently built atop the ruins of the lighthouse of Alexandria.

The citadel is surrounded by a large curtain wall almost hexagonal in shape and pierced with semi-circular towers quite small in diameter. The main entrance has a south-westerly aspect and faces the isthmus that connects the fortress with the city. The end result is a citadel whose general layout comprises a large central donjon surrounded by a concentric city wall. This is the layout, with some variations, that is also seen in Rosetta and Tina⁶

The Citadel of Alexandria was endowed with a new wall, which surrounded the first one. This new wall was flanked by large semi-circular towers and a bastion facing towards the harbor in the southeast. The bastion and the large circular tower to the north were

٥- Stechane Pradines, *The mamluk fortifications of Egypt* , Age Khan University ,2016 ,p 33,

6- Stechane Pradines, *The mamluk fortifications of Egypt* , p34.

very wide structures which could accommodate heavy artillery pieces. Blockhouses with embrasures were positioned along the coast to the northwest and northeast.

A new gateway—chatelet—was built in the axis of the main door of the first wall. This projecting gateway was very similar to the one built for the Aqaba Fort by Sultan al-Ghawrī.

The Qaitbay Citadel was built using the stones salvaged from the huge lighthouse on an area of a squared shaped land that looks very much like a peninsula as it is surrounded by the Mediterranean sea from three sides.

It has three floors in the first floor there is a big mosque and the second is an octagon containing corridors, halls, and a breathing interior while the third and final floor is a large circular room holding the seat of the king .

The entrance is through a gateway made of red Aswan granite. Located beside the mosque is a cistern that was used to store water in case of a siege. Also located inside the fort is the Naval Museum which contains artifacts from the Roman and Napoleonic sea battles.⁷ The Qaitbay Citadel was brilliantly designed in the square shape with its dimensions being 150 meters long and 130 meters wide. The Citadel has many towers, walls, and chambers.

There are actually the inner walls and the Outer walls. The Inner walls, which are shorter, consist of the barracks of the soldiers and the weapons' storage rooms while the outer walls contain four large defensive walls in order to protect the Qaitbay Citadel completely against any threats.

7- Ibid.

The Eastern section of the outer walls overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and the walls are two meters thick and eight meters high with no protection towers added. The Western section of the outer walls is the thickest among the four. With three colander shaped towers, this is considered the oldest surviving part of the citadel.

The Northern section overlooks the Eastern Harbor of Alexandria. It consists of two parts. The lower is a roofed passageway with many rooms that was used for tactical reasons during attacks while the upper part has a smaller passageway with narrower openings that were used by soldiers to protect the citadel.

The inner walls of the citadel were constructed using solid rocks. They surround the main tower from all directions except for the Northern section. Many rooms and chambers were constructed inside the inner walls of the Qaitbay Citadel to be used as barracks for the soldiers.pl(11).

The main tower of the Qaitbay Citadel, the main structure of the complex, has a square shape as well with its dimensions being 30 meters long and 17 meters wide. This tower consists of three floors with cylinder shaped towers at the four corners of the main building which have some small windows carefully distributed to enable the soldiers to protect the citadel by throwing arrows.pl(12)⁸

a) The first floor

The first floor of the citadel hosts the mosque of the citadel. Constructed in the Mamluk architectural style of Madrassa, or Islamic teachings schools. It consists of four small iwans, or galleries, an open courtyard, Sahn, in the middle, with its ground coated with the finest marble pl(15), and a wonderful ornamented Mihrab that is not

8- Ibid , p34,35

pointing towards Mecca as the architecture who designed the citadel cared for the military usage of the complex as his most important priority. This mosque, situated inside the citadel, had a minaret that collapsed with time passing by.pl(14)(16)⁹

b) The second floor:

1-This floor is reached through a stone stairway of high steps.

2- It has two parts: The first part contains the passages along the four sides, with subsidiary passages communicating between the passages and the corner towers.

3 -The second part is a collection of large chambers and smaller rooms, all of which surround one axis formed by the center lighting shaft.

4- This leads down to overlook the sahn of the mosque on the ground floor.pl(18)

It also contain the original maquette.-5

6-The original maquette it is a model of the original design of the citadel.¹⁰

7-It is containing the real entrance, the minret that had been destroyed in 1882 by the English occupation, and other details which does not exist now.pl(19)¹¹

c) The third floor:

1- This floor is also reached by a stone stairway.

2- It consist of a series of side passages and several rooms and magazines.

9- Ibid.

١٠- الهيئة العامة للآثار، ص ١٥ ، ١٦ ، ١٧ .

١١- الهيئة العامة للآثار، ص ١٥ ، ١٦ ، ١٧ .

3-It will be noted that the ceiling of this floor's units were all made of red bricks in the form of vaults, while the ceiling of the ground and second floors were made of stone.

4-The intention may have been to lighten the load of the ceiling of the third floor and on the building as a whole.(1)pl(20)¹²

It also contains the sultan iwan.-5

d) The sultan iwan:

It is a wide room with two windows.it overlooks the citadel courtyard.-1

2-It used by the garrison commander to follow up the trainings at the citadel courtyard.

3-On the other side there was the north sultan iwan for watching the ships coming from the sea .pl(21)(22).

The cistern of the citadel:

1-The citadel is far from natural resources of fresh water, a reservoir of potable water must have been necessary for those settled here.

2-The resource was not previously known , therefore a search was made for it by excavation.

3-This resulted in discovery of a huge cistern in the limits of the ground.

4-The cistern lies parallel to the west side of the main tower. Constructed of red bricks, it measures 13.10 meters in length and 5.05 meters in width.

5-It is divided Lengthwise by a row of four columns supporting five stone arches which meet to form ten shallow domes on both sides.

١٢- د/ حسني محمد نوصير ، العمارة الاسلامية في مصر في (عصر الايوبيين _ والمماليك) ، مكتبة زهاء الشرق.

6-The cistern is 4.50 meters in depth. It is to be noted that there was a connection between this cistern and the roof of the neighbouring buildings, particularly those of the northern and western sides of the ramparts, evidenced by an earthenware pipe running toward these places.

7-This suggests that the cistern was supplied with water by gathering the rain water which is abundant in the Alexandrian region, from the roofs of the nearby constructions and running it through the earthenware pipes to pour into the cistern.

8-The mortar used in covering the roofs is the same mortar which lines the interior sides of the cistern. This is a hard, non-porous mortar strengthened by a proportion of red brick-dust, which is not affected by water.

9-There is a communication between the cistern and the main tower through a vaulted passage under the western wall to the interior of the building.

10- The monumental discovery of the cistern has resolved the question of how water was supplied and stored for daily consumption by those stationed here.(2)pl(23)¹³



the original maquette

Conclusions:

- 1- Qaitbay was one of the most important Mamluks who belonged to the Burji dynasty; he was a mamluk of sultan Barsbay.
- 2- The castle was built the place of the ancient light house of Alexandria. .
- 3- Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī organized the restoration of the fort in order to counter the Ottoman threat in the Mediterranean.

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