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*The Mamluks
and Naval Power*

*A Phase of the Struggle between Islam
and Christian Europe*

by

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THE MAMLUKS AND NAVAL POWER¹

A Phase of the Struggle between Islam and Christian Europe

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COMPARISON of the military exploits of the Muslims on land and sea throughout their history will demonstrate that the attainments of their naval forces, while not to be discounted, were far below those of their armies on land.

There is as yet no detailed and comprehensive study of this phenomenon, which influenced profoundly the course of human history. It is already possible, however, to indicate some of the factors which led to the *relative* weakness of the Muslims at sea.

A major cause of this weakness was the absence or scarcity of timber and metals in most of the Muslim countries bordering on the sea. Another important reason was the fact that the Muslims, outside the Mediterranean Sea, were never challenged by a serious naval power until the circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope by the Portuguese. A third factor, which to my mind outweighs the first two, was the domination of the Muslim world, for the greater part of its history, by military societies of cavalry who scorned any man or group not belonging to their exclusive class. This was one of the determining causes of the backwardness and inferiority of the Muslim infantry, of the abstention from large-scale use of such weapons as the crossbow and arbalet, and, at a later date, of the inferior status of firearms, which fact was to prove so disastrous to Islam. The predominance of cavalry characterized Christian Europe as well, though not to the same degree. Furthermore, Christian Europe witnessed technical development without parallel in the Muslim world. This development swept aside the barriers of conservatism, though in many instances not without a long and bitter

1 This paper is based on a chapter from my unpublished book on the Mamluk military society. A summary of the chapter is to be found in the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, under the entry *Bahriyya* (The navy of the Mamluks), I, pp. 945-947.

struggle. The disinterest of Muslim cavalrymen in the sea and everything related to it was reinforced to a great extent by the fact that their military camps were generally far inland.

It is true, of course, that in their relation to the sea the Arabs, the first rulers of the Muslim world, cannot be included in the same category as the Turks, Mongols and Mamluks. These later rulers of the Muslim world came from regions most distant from any great sea, whereas the Arabs originated in a peninsula, and many of them were able seamen. Nevertheless, I do not think that the attitude of the Arabs to the sea, when they were the ruling people in Islam, was markedly different from the attitude of the other dominant Muslim races. There seem to me to be a number of reasons for the similarity.

First, on the Mediterranean Sea, major battleground of the contending forces of Muslims and European Christians, navigation was substantially different from navigation on the seas washing the Arabian peninsula: the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. The vessels used on the Mediterranean were far superior to those which plied the other waters. Muslim conquest of the seas and sea routes east of Suez, maintained for about 900 years, was possible only because of the absence, during the entire period, of any adversary, whether worthy of the name or not. Secondly, it has not yet been proved that many inhabitants of the Arabian shores emigrated from Arabia as a result of Muslim expansion. Thirdly, even if it were possible to prove that large-scale emigration took place, one would still have to ask whether those emigrants would have persisted in their seafaring occupation in a world which opened immense opportunities to the relatively small number of Arab conquerors, a world where the nomadic cavalrymen were the elite and the backbone of both the army and the ruling class. From the little that is known about the formation of the early Muslim fleets and the composition of their crews one may infer that the Arabs employed indigenous inhabitants of the Mediterranean coast for those purposes. These were accorded, from the beginning, an inferior status which no doubt precluded the utilization of their seagoing skills to the full. Insofar as *Arabs* were to be found on warships, they were usually *soldiers*, assigned to go down on the beaches and wage war on land.

Of all the Muslim States, it seems to me that the Ottoman Empire showed the greatest understanding of naval power, even though its actual attainments fell behind those of the early Muslim powers. The difference in the Ottoman attitude was due to a number of causes. These were: an abundance of timber and metals within the boundaries of the Empire (mainly in Anatolia and Turkey-in-Europe); long coastlines, bordering on two seas, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea; the

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situation of the capital, Constantinople, on the seashore in a maritime position of singular importance to this day, no other Muslim capital being so situated; the existence within the Empire of a large Christian seagoing population (mainly Greek), who dwelt not only on the mainland shores but also on the many islands of the Aegean and Ionian Sea;² Ottoman pragmatism in solving problems; finally, and not less important, close and uninterrupted links with Europe, in peace and war. It should be stressed that as a result of their pragmatism and of the confrontation with Europe, which led them to attempt to defeat it militarily or to defend themselves against its steadily growing military power, the Ottomans developed both their infantry and their firearms much more thoroughly and on a much larger scale than any other Muslim State. The actual naval accomplishments of the Ottomans, it is true, fell below those of the Umayyads (661–750) and the Fāṭimids (909–1171), but this was due mainly to the fact that the adversaries of the Ottomans were much more powerful than those of their predecessors. One of the most striking manifestations of Europe's constantly growing technological superiority in modern times was its naval preponderance. To sum up, it may be said that nowhere in the Muslim world did a naval empire ever develop, that is to say, an empire the chief source of whose strength is a navy to which the land army is a mere adjunct.

In examining the naval power of the Mamluk State (1250–1517), it should be remembered that it was the third and last of the Muslim States which contended with the Crusaders and had their capital in Egypt. It should be remembered, as well, that the Crusaders maintained their rule for so long a time primarily thanks to the naval might of Christian Europe. This naval might, it must be noted, was only partially revealed in the Christian-Muslim struggle, but was nevertheless sufficient to tilt the balance. The naval strength of the Crusader States themselves was very feeble, and they were totally dependent on the fleets of European States and merchant cities, which had different and often opposing interests and used their navies according to policies which often clashed with those of the Crusader States. There were even long periods during which no appreciable Christian naval force was present in the coastal waters of the Crusader States and in their harbours. Hence the fears of Muslim naval might sometimes expressed by the Crusaders are quite understandable. With the Muslims, the reverse was true: insofar as a Muslim naval force existed in the eastern Mediterranean during the Crusades, it was concentrated in Egypt. In addition, the Egyptians often maintained naval bases on the Syro-Palestinian coast. Furthermore,

2 This factor, to be sure, worked against the Ottomans in the Greek War of Independence (1821–1827).

whereas on land the Egyptians had sometimes to contend with various Muslim rivals, on sea they did not encounter any Muslim competition. In the struggle with the Crusaders, then, the major Muslim navy in the eastern Mediterranean was permanently stationed at the scene of battle. This gave the Muslims an advantage which could occasionally be used against the Crusaders.

Of the two States which preceded the Mamluks, the Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid, the former was known for its powerful navy. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstruct the history and composition of this navy on the basis of contemporary sources, and it is to be feared that the descriptions given by later historians, particularly Ibn Khaldūn and al-Maqrīzī at the end of the 14th and first half of the 15th century, are grossly idealized. As for the Ayyūbids it is known that only under Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn did they have a strong navy. But after closer study of the strength of Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn's navy the picture is not so bright. In 1182 Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn laid siege to Beirut by land and sea. The Muslim navy numbered 30 ships. When 33 Christian ships sailed up, the Muslim fleet fled without giving battle. In 1187, after the victory at Ḥaṭṭīn (Ḥiṭṭīn), the same Sultan besieged Tyre (Ṣūr) by land, while 10 Muslim ships blockaded the harbour. Since it was winter, there was virtually no possibility of reinforcements from Europe. Nevertheless, the defenders were able, in a night raid, to capture five of the Muslim vessels. The other five were immediately ordered by the Sultan to set sail for Beirut, which was already in Muslim hands. Several Christian ships which had previously been imprisoned in Tyre harbour gave chase to the departing Muslim fleet, whereupon the Muslim crews dived overboard and tried to swim for the shore. The historian al-Kātib 'Imād ad-Dīn al-İṣfahānī, the biographer and friend of Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, comments on this episode in the following revealing words:

“It became clear from this disaster... that the rulers of Egypt had not attended to the needs of the navy nor recruited suitable men for its service; instead they had collected obscure, ignorant, weak and untried men on a random basis. It was therefore no surprise to see that when confronted with danger they were gripped with fear, and when ordered to obey they were unable to do so.”

Of all the mediaeval Muslim fleets, it is only in the case of the Mamluk navy that we can indicate with certainty the social and psychological reasons that determined its inferior status in a ruling military society. Within the short space at my disposal I shall review in brief the two following, closely-linked, subjects: I. The attitude of the Mamluks towards the navy and the consequences thereof; II. Mamluk policy regarding their ports and coastal defences.

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I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE MAMLUKS TOWARDS THE NAVY AND THE CONSEQUENCES THEREOF

As may have been expected of a military society of horsemen, the Mamluks' attitude to the sea was decidedly negative. It will suffice to quote some comments made by Sultan Baybars I (1260–1277), a ruler who was one of the greatest generals of Islam, a man of original and profound thought, a wide ranging mind, and a unique and comprehensive grasp of strategy. More than any other Mamluk Sultan he developed and cared for the navy which reached its zenith under his rule. When, in 1270, he learned of the disaster suffered by his new and powerful fleet at the hands of the Franks near Cyprus, his reaction was: "Praise be to God, who, since He raised me upon the throne, did not bring defeat upon my army nor suffer a flag of my flags to be dishonoured. I have long feared the Evil Eye, and indeed there can be no doubt of its existence. Blessed be God that *this* befell me from the Evil Eye and not anything else. Blessed be God that my army was saved by the sacrifice of peasants and rabble (الفلاحون والعوام)."3

This unequivocal statement ends with two words which shed light on the human composition of the crews that manned the Mamluk ships: peasants and rabble, people from the very bottom of the social scale, which was headed by the Mamluk horsemen. This does not mean that there were no crew-members of higher social origin: it is, however, interesting to point out that in the battle of Cyprus, almost the entire naval command of the Mamluks fell into Frankish hands, including the commanders (*rāyīs*) of the three major Egyptian ports: Alexandria, Damietta and Rosetta. A long list of the prisoners' names has been preserved in the famous biography of Baybars by Ibn Shaddād al-Ḥalabī, his contemporary and associate. This list does not contain a single Mamluk name.³ Of all the prisoners, not even one was considered important enough to warrant a biography. Furthermore, Mamluk historical literature contains many thousands of biographies, not one of which, to the best of my memory, is devoted to a naval commander. Al-Maqrīzī asserts that the designation *uṣṭūlī* (man of the navy) was considered an insult in the Ayyūbid period and thereafter.

Let us return to the Cypriot episode with which we began. In a letter of reply to the King of Cyprus, Baybars expressed admiration for the attainments of cavalry on land and scorn for the actions of the navy. In the course of his missive he wrote: "Anybody, given an oar, can row well, but not everyone can strike well if given a sword", and: "What

3 It is easy to identify Mamluk names, which were mainly Turkish. Local inhabitants bore Arab-Muslim names.

a difference there is between those who thrust with oars and those who thrust with lances into the ranks of the fighters... what a difference there is between those who hunt on Arab steeds and those who can only boast of hunting crows". (This is a play on words: "غراب" being both a crow and a type of battleship.) And in an additional, short sentence Baybars summed up the entire issue: "(For) you, your horses are (your) ships, whereas (for) us our ships are (our) horses" (انتم خيولكم المراكب ونحن) (مراكبنا الخيول). In other words: You are strong at sea, but our power is on land and on horseback.

Under such conditions it is not surprising that the Mamluk navy was only an unimportant appendix to the Mamluk army, which, at the height of its power, was the strongest in Islam and one of the most powerful in the world. The lack of timber and metals did, it is true, play a great part in weakening the Mamluk naval potential, but to my mind this was secondary to the primary cause, namely, the Mamluk attitude of disdain towards the sea.

Actually, there was never a permanent Mamluk navy. When the Mamluks launched a flotilla or fleet, this was done only to make possible a reprisal raid for some severe and humiliating Frankish victory. During their rule the Mamluks built six or seven of these fleets, roughly one every 40 or 50 years. As the ships were constructed hastily, they became unusable in a short time, with the result that whenever a naval raid was planned, a new navy had to be constructed, manned generally by raw recruits. A typical example of the Mamluks' mentality in sea warfare was their behaviour in connection with the large Frankish attack on Alexandria in 1365. At first the Mamluks, planning a reprisal attack on Cyprus, the invasion base used by the Franks, began to construct a gigantic fleet in Egyptian and Syrian ports. After construction was already well under way, the Mamluks changed their minds and gave up the project completely. The fate of the ships in the Beirut yards is particularly revealing. A special shipyard had been set up there for the construction of the reprisal fleet, and in order to defend it from Frankish attacks it had been placed at a distance from the shore, under the protection of strong army units stationed between it and the shore. When the Mamluks shelved the project, they abandoned the half-built ships which had cost huge sums. The timbers rotted and the metal was looted by the local inhabitants.

The absence of a permanent Mamluk navy is underlined by a number of facts. Except for several isolated instances, the sources do not tell of the capture of Frankish ships by the Muslims. There was no Mamluk piracy in the Mediterranean. Apart from the large expeditions against Cyprus and Rhodes, the Mamluks rarely attempted to prevent the

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Franks from landing on the beaches and seldom gave chase when they retreated. Furthermore, Mamluk naval intelligence of Frankish fleet movements was scant: alarms of impending attack were a daily occurrence, but these were always false alarms. Of the hundreds of such alarms, not one, as far as I know, ever heralded an attack. On the contrary, all the frequent Frankish naval raids on Muslim coasts came as a complete surprise. (The stereotyped description in the sources reads: “the attack came unexpectedly” or: “was due to inattention” [على حين غرة، على حين غفلة].) The usual retaliatory actions for these attacks took place on land: Frankish consuls and traders in Muslim ports were arrested, their goods impounded, and often native Christian populations were persecuted. Occasionally this proved effective, but the Muslims preferred not to use this tactic too often, for fear of harming trade relations with Europe. In the course of time the Mamluk navy became even less important, not only because the State itself declined, but particularly as a result of the fact that firearms were increasingly used in naval warfare. While in the Mediterranean, despite the increased Frankish pressure on the Muslim seacoast, the advent of firearms did not basically affect the pitifully weak seapower of the Mamluks, in the Indian Ocean the situation changed radically. A small Portuguese flotilla, thousands of miles from its home ports, wrested from the Muslims almost overnight the naval sovereignty which they had enjoyed in that part of the globe for centuries. This could be done with such speed only because of the combination of naval skill and firepower. In the vast area stretching from the African coast to the Far East, the only local power which could at all oppose the Portuguese was the Mamluks, but these were no match for the new conquerors who, without any difficulty, sank the Mamluk fleets sent against them. When the Ottomans inherited the domains of the Mamluks, it was already too late for the clock to be turned back. Thus, Mamluk naval weakness and lack of firepower enabled European powers to entrench themselves in vast domains east of Suez.

II. MAMLUK POLICY REGARDING THEIR PORTS AND COASTAL DEFENCES

It is only in the light of the steady decline of Muslim naval might in the Mediterranean Sea that the modern historian can pass a fair judgment on the destruction of the cities and fortifications of the Syro-Palestinian coastline by the Muslims. This deliberate and systematic campaign of destruction was begun by the Ayyūbids, but carried out chiefly by the Mamluks.

The Muslims reached this extreme decision — to my mind an unavoid-

able decision — only after a long and bitter struggle. The contest between Islam and Christianity for control of the Mediterranean began a few decades after the Hijra, and lasted for many centuries, successes alternating with defeats on each side. Nevertheless, throughout this long period, the deliberate razing of ports and coastal defences as a means of defence was a rare phenomenon. I can point to only one major case: when the fortifications of Alexandria were torn down by the Muslims at the beginning of their conquest of Egypt. This was done because of the brief reoccupation of the port by the Byzantines, who landed from the sea. Ultimately it was Crusader pressure that drove the Muslims to destroy large sections of their shores, but it should be stressed that the Muslims came very slowly to the conclusion that a “scorched earth policy” was the only way open to them. When the Crusaders took the Syro-Palestinian coast for the first time, the Muslims did not even consider destroying the shore, despite the fact that the occupation of this shore, or certainly of parts of it, was not carried out with speed. Tripoli fell only in 1109, Tyre — in 1124, and Ashkelon — in 1153.

The tide changed with the Battle of Ḥaṭṭīn (1187) and the developments which ensued in the following four or five years. Few victories in the history of Islam were as complete as Ḥaṭṭīn: the interior and most of the coast were reconquered with amazing ease, while the Crusaders remained in control of only a few coastal forts, including Tyre. Nevertheless, this bastion was enough to enable them to turn the tables on the Muslims in a very short time. The Muslims could reach only one conclusion: however great their military success might be, it could always be nullified by Frankish naval superiority. The failure of the Muslim attempt to defend Acre against the armies of the Third Crusade, and the ensuing defeat at Arsūf, determined Muslim coastal strategy for many generations. Ashkelon was the first to fall victim to the new policy. The city was destroyed by personal order of Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, victor of Ḥaṭṭīn; he gave his order with a broken heart, but there was no choice, since “the Muslims could not defend her”. From then on the Muslims pursued the policy of destruction with resolute purpose and rare consistency. Although the Ayyūbids laid the foundations for this policy at the beginning of their rule, the Mamluks were its chief executors. They, and not the Ayyūbids, cleared the Crusaders from most of the Syro-Palestinian coastline.

From the beginning of the 13th century until 722/1322, when Ayās near Alexandretta was taken, the Mamluks razed to the ground fort after fort on the Syro-Palestinian coast and destroyed most of the harbours. They could not, to be sure, leave the shore completely unguarded: a lookout had to be maintained and some land forces had to be kept

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to stop the first blow of any Frankish invasion. For this purpose they set up small garrisons, but this did not mean a return to Crusader or pre-Crusader days. All the major fortresses (Ar. *qal'a*, pl. *qilā'*) on the shore disappeared. They were replaced by smaller towers (Ar. *burj*, pl. *burūj*) and a few walls (Ar. *sūr*, pl. *aswār*). The largest ports had no more than two such towers.

The harbours went into decline. Some disappeared, others dwindled into fishing villages of no importance, coming back into their own only much later, in some instances centuries after the downfall of the Mamluks.

The only cities to recover relatively quickly were Beirut and Tripoli, but their fortifications were much weaker than what they had formerly been. Beirut, incidentally, is the only city on the Syro-Palestinian coast, about whose systems of defence against Frankish attack we have information (thanks to the historian of the town, Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yaḥyā, who died after 1436). They had an alarm system of carrier-pigeons by day and mountain fire-signals by night to summon help from Damascus, though it invariably came too late to do any good. The situation in Beirut harbour is an excellent illustration of the naval weakness of the Muslims. Catalan, Venetian and Genoese ships often raided one another within the harbour, looted even goods stacked on the wharves and made off, without the local Muslim authorities being able to raise a finger. This occurred in a harbour which boasted the most important shipyard of the eastern Mediterranean.

The most devastated and desolate part of the shore was the section stretching south of Sidon (Ṣaydā) to al-Arīsh, that is the entire coast of Palestine. The reasons for this are clear: the closeness of Jerusalem and the existence of a broad plain along the coast which enabled an enemy with naval superiority to land with relative ease and secure a foothold. The degree to which the Palestinian coast deteriorated may be gauged from the fact that it was almost ignored by the Frankish corsairs who plagued the Egyptian and Syrian shores with pirate raids. Ashkelon, Arsūf, Caesarea and Atlit remained ruins till our time. Haifa did not begin to show signs of life till long after the disappearance of the Mamluk Sultanate. Jaffa and Acre became small towns under Mamluk rule.

The brevity of this survey precludes consideration of the Egyptian coast. We should, however, mention that it did not suffer the same process of destruction as the Palestinian shores. In the first half of the 13th century, the Muslims did destroy Tanis (Tinnīs) and Damietta, but only the former was permanently wiped out; the latter was speedily rebuilt near its old site. As for Rosetta (Rashīd), it lost its former glory, but was not razed by the Mamluks, and towards the end of their reign it

was even refortified together with other Egyptian ports on the Mediterranean and Red Sea. The fortifications of Alexandria did not undergo any appreciable change under Mamluk rule. The largest defence construction scheme in Alexandria was undertaken by Sultan Qāyrbāy in the second half of the 15th century, and included his famous tower, equipped with cannon. The principal aim in building this tower was to protect the largest port of the Mamluk state from Frankish corsair attacks, which now benefited increasingly from the use of firearms.

The reasons why the Egyptian shore was relatively free from the destruction which befell the Syro-Palestinian shore are the following: First, the Crusaders invaded Egypt only for short periods; secondly, the Mamluks could not afford to lose the transit trade which crossed Egypt on its way from India and the Far East to Europe (commercial factors also contributed to the revival of such Syrian ports as Beirut and Tripoli); thirdly, the structure of the Mamluks' military society and the relations which existed within it led inevitably to a difference between the Mamluk attitude to Egypt, on the one hand, and to Syria, on the other. The Royal Mamluks⁴ who formed the backbone of the army and the elite of the military society, were, almost without exception, encamped in Egypt, or to be exact, in Cairo. They regarded Syria as an inferior province and disliked serving there. In this way most Mamluk military strength was concentrated in Egypt, with second-class units stationed in Syria (apart from periods of military campaigns).

At the beginning of their reign the Mamluks tried to rectify the deficiency in the defences of the Syro-Palestinian coast by settling along the seashore and the neighbouring areas tribes of Turks, Mongols, Kurds and others, who had asked for asylum in the Mamluk State. By this means the Mamluks hoped to achieve two objects at one and the same time: to keep the tribesmen away from Egypt, where they would endanger the status and superiority of the Mamluks, and to strengthen the defences of the desolate shore. The first aim was fully accomplished, but the second only to a very slight degree, as the foreign tribes quickly assimilated into the local population and disappeared. The only exceptions were the Turkomans who, almost up to the Ottoman conquest, are described in historical sources as guardians of the coast.

The Egyptian coast had a further advantage over the Syrian, in that it was easier to defend from within the country. The arms of the Nile and the flat delta to the north enabled Cairo to control the Egyptian coast with far greater effectiveness than any inland Syrian city could dominate any strip of shore. In this manner, the Mamluk army of Egypt, with its

4 Mamluks who were bought, educated and freed by the Sultans themselves, as distinct from the Mamluks of the Amirs and other Mamluks.

powerful striking force and exceptional mobility, had an incomparably better chance of repelling a Frankish invasion of the Egyptian coast than a Syrian army with its weaker composition, when and if challenged by a landing on the shores of Syria.⁵

From what has been said above, one should not assume that the Mamluks paid particular attention to the Egyptian coast. The Mamluks, particularly the Royal Mamluks, had no desire to leave the capital for guard duties along the coast, and could be forced to do so only for short periods. Even the famous attack of the Franks from Cyprus on Alexandria in 1365, when the Franks had free rein for four days within the city, did not substantially change the defensive arrangements of this great port. In Alexandria and the other Egyptian ports, the garrisons continued to be second- and third-rate, including men of the declining non-Mamluk Ḥalqa regiment and Beduin from the vicinity who were equipped with primitive arms.

Mamluk apathy regarding the coastal areas and their defence is indicated, too, by the fact that the Mamluk Sultans, particularly the Circassian Sultans, rarely visited there to inspect the defences personally. Even nearby Alexandria was very rarely honoured with the Sultan's presence — generally — only when danger was feared or imminent. It is characteristic of Mamluk attitude towards the defence of the coast that Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (1500–1516), who during the latter years of his reign feared a Frankish attack on Alexandria, once inspected the city in a unique fashion. He went to an open square near Cairo where one of his engineers had constructed a scale model of the Alexandrian defences. The engineer added a personal touch: he modelled the Lighthouse, which had been destroyed 200 years earlier. The tower of Qāyṭbāy, which was erected in the latter half of the 15th century on the same spot, could therefore not be shown, and the engineer simply omitted this most important of Alexandria's fortifications at the time, for the sake of showing the Lighthouse. The Sultan, having duly inspected the defences as modelled, returned to his residence in the Cairo citadel and apparently considered his "inspection" of Alexandria quite adequate.

This was the situation along the shores of the Mamluk state. Further inland, particularly in the mountains of Syria and Palestine, the Mamluks adopted a different policy. Here they methodically and consistently rebuilt forts which were damaged or destroyed by Mongols and Crusaders. Tens of fortresses inland, from al-Bīrah on the Euphrates to Kerak (al-Karak) in Transjordan, were rebuilt on their foundations or repaired

5 It is clear that when Egypt is defended by a weak force, these accidents of geography become disadvantages, as was revealed by the French invasion of 1798 and the British invasion of 1882.

as necessary. The Mamluks paid particular attention to the strengthening of mountain fortresses commanding the coast. While the *qal'a* almost disappeared from the coast, it is often to be found inland, even in remote and obscure places. Typical of the contrasting Mamluk attitudes to land and sea defences was a remark of Baybars I. In reviewing his military exploits he said: "One part [of the Muslim armies] uproots Frankish fortresses and destroys [their] castles, while [another] part rebuilds what the Tatars destroyed in the East and increases the height of their ramparts [compared with what they were]."

Though it is true that to a certain extent the Mamluks adopted a scorched earth policy in their struggle against the Tatars, the system in this case was altogether different. In the face of an imminent Tatar attack the Mamluks sometimes burned the crops and vegetation on both sides of the border, but never touched the fortresses.

It was thus Mamluk naval weakness which dictated the destruction of the Syro-Palestinian coast; this step was unavoidable. In all its known history this coast never suffered such ruin. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, throughout the history of Islam, nowhere else in the Muslim world, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, was there destruction to equal in thoroughness, scale and gravity, of its lasting consequences, the destruction of this coast by the Mamluks.

Read 19 February 1963