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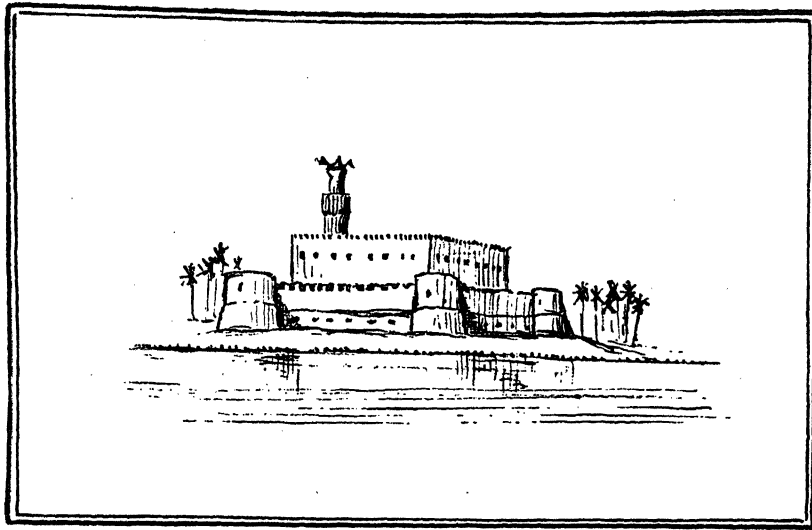


Fig. 1. — Fort Qâitbâi in Norden, *Travels*.

Notes on the Forts of Alexandria and Environs

It occurred to me, while on leave in the summer of 1937, that some sort of record should be made of the old fortifications of Alexandria and its environs.

Nothing materialised until March 1938 when Count John de Salis, a visitor to Alexandria, spoke to me regarding the old cannons lying about in the forts and elsewhere. This gave the necessary incentive, and we decided to pool our efforts regarding the forts and cannons and to ask the President of the Royal Society of Archæology to interview the Director General of the Coast Guards Administration (Omar Bey Fathi and later Ahmed Abdel-Wahab Bey) to grant permission for a small committee to visit the Forts. This permission was granted and the committee visited various forts in 1938-1939, photographs were taken and historical notes were collected by Dr. Etienne Combe and other members of the Society. We hope to publish these records from time to time.

FORT QĀITBĀĪ, ROSETTA.

Known also as Fort Jullien, and as the Castle of Rashid برج رشيد it is situated on the west bank of the Nile about six Kilometres below Rosetta, but it is seldom visited perhaps because Breccia in *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum* (p. 141) stated that it no longer existed.

Built by Qāitbāi, it was finished, according to Ibn Iyas, in 1479, the same year as Fort Qāitbāi in Alexandria, and the plan of the fort near Rosetta somewhat resembles the inner fort on the Island of the Pharos, that is to say, it was a rectangular building with round towers at the four corners.

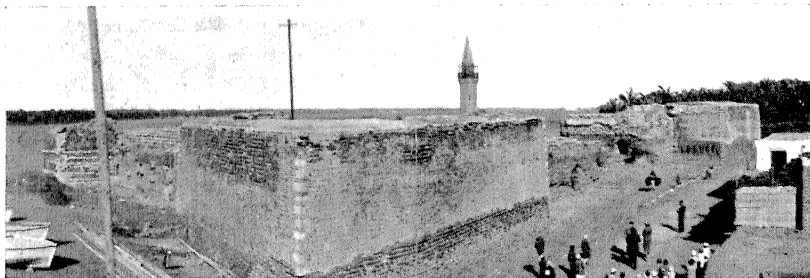


Fig. 2. — S. W. bastion.

Vansleb (in 1672-73) gives a description of the fort in its early form with the dungeon tower or keep rising 12 feet (according to Van Egmont) above the outer wall and corner towers. This central keep was for the last retreat of the garrison, and it contained the arched magazines below, mentioned by Vivant Denon and of which traces can be seen today ¹.

Paul Lucas (1699) wrote somewhat contemptuously of it and its companion fort on the east bank of the river, ² — «Il y a deux méchants

¹ VANSLEB, *Nouvelle Relation.... d'un Voyage fait en Egypte en 1672 et 1673*, p. 175.

VAN EGMONT and HEYMAN, *Travels*, Vol. II, p. 117.

² PAUL LUCAS, *Voyage au Levant*, 1705, page 22.

châteaux avec fort peu d'artillerie ; » yet Vansleb was told the main fort contained 74 cannon, seven of which were extraordinarily large, the garrison consisting of 184 Janissaires commanded by an Aga who was a renegade Spaniard. It is true however that although this garrison had to sleep in the fort by night they were allowed to earn their bread by working in Rosetta by day.

Van Egmont and Heyman describe the towers as multiangular about 20 feet in diameter, and the parapets between the embrasures were covered with tenter-hooks, probably some form of defence in this case. There were loopholes in the upper part, and gun ports in the outer wall as seen by Pococke. The number of cannon was then 15 but many were unserviceable.

Norden (pl. XV, 2) has left us a reliable picture and Pococke a very full description of the Fort of Qâitbâi as it was in 1737. Norden's plate shows also the minaret of the earlier mosque (the predecessor of the mosque existing in the fort today), rising above the central keep (fig. 1).

Richard Pococke ¹ writes as follows :

« I went about two miles north to the Castle of Rosetto, on the west side of the river ; it is a building, with round towers at the corners ; there are port holes near the bottom of it : I observed about them several pieces of yellow marble, many of which had hieroglyphics on them, and might be the pieces of some broken obelisk. I saw here several iron cannon made in the old way, with bars and rings, being in two or three pieces, which fit into one another : and three large brass cannons. On one were ornaments of Flower de Lucis, on the other was a tree with two letters for the arms. This castle is built of brick, cased with stone and said to be the work of Keyck Bey, who lived, as I was informed, about three hundred years ago ; but I should rather think it was built about the time of the holy wars, and that this Bey might repair it, and make the port holes.

A little lower down, on the other side of the river, is a platform of guns.....»

By 1777, according to the report of de la Laune, the castle was

¹ RICHARD POCOKE, *A Description of the East*, Vol. I, Observations on Egypt, London, 1743, p. 15.

falling into ruin and there were but two old cannon ¹, and it was in this state that Vivant Denon found it about twenty years later.

Qâitbâi had built his fort probably at the very mouth of the Nile but the annual deposit of delta mud has pushed out the mouth of the river which today is over eight kilometres to the north west. Denon was struck by this, and, after stating that the fort had been constructed

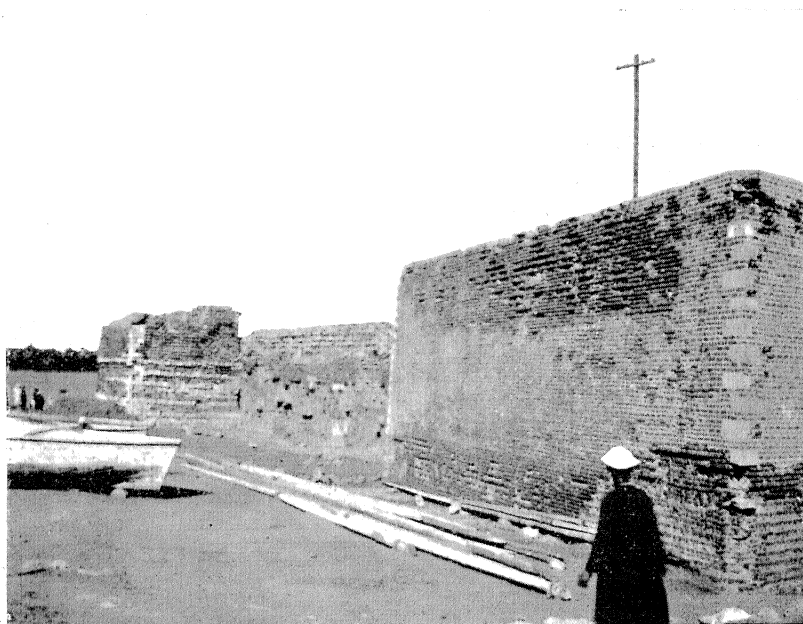


Fig. 3. — S. E. bastion.

to defend the entrance of the Nile whereas it was then a league inland, he wrote (in 1798) :

« As these fortifications were not built until after the invention of gunpowder, and are consequently not more than three hundred years old, this circumstance may serve to show the progress of the river has made in gaining ground at its entrance. The former of them (the forts), to the west of the river, is a square fortress, flanked with thick towers at the angles, and having batteries, in which are guns twenty-five feet

¹ DOUIN, *La flotte de Bonaparte sur les Côtes d'Égypte*, P. 15.

in length. The latter (fort) is a mosque, in front of which is a battery in a ruinous state, provided with a single gun of twenty-eight inches bore, the only use of which at present is to procure a safe delivery to the pregnant women who sit astride on it..... the fortress of Raschid, from whence, in the time of the Emperor Selim, the guns had full command of the sea, and which are now a league from the sea shore.....»¹.

After the destruction of the French fleet by Nelson at the Battle of the Nile the French army of occupation decided to put the coastal



Fig. 4. — Interior.

defences of Egypt into order and to establish garrisons in them, and Fort Qâitbâi at Rosetta was re-constructed, the fifteenth century round towers being encased in salient bastions built of brick. This is how we find them today and the destruction of the north-west bastion by the

¹ DENON, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, translated by A. Aikin, London 1803, Vol. 1, pp. 137-169. The distance from the fort to the sea about 1800 was one league (about 3 miles), according to Denon and Wittman, and sheet No. 40 (Rosette - Lac Bourlos) of the Atlas Géographique, published with the «Description de l'Égypte», makes the distance nearly six kilometres, about $3 \frac{3}{4}$ miles, so that the mouth of the river has been pushed out quite two kilometres in the last 100 years, and it is possible that in Qâitbâi's time the fort was at the very mouth of the Nile.

wash of the river has laid bare one of Qâitbâi's round towers. The S. W. and S. E. bastions are in good condition about seven and a half metres high, (figs. 2 and 3) the other two bastions have been very badly damaged by the river, and the curtain walls which are more than four metres thick are in a bad state (fig 4).

The folio *Etat Moderne*, Vol. I, plate 81, published with the «Description de l'Égypte», is a fine engraving, from a drawing by a draughtsman of the name of Balzac, showing the out-work on the island, mounting three cannon, which like its predecessor described by Pococke ¹,

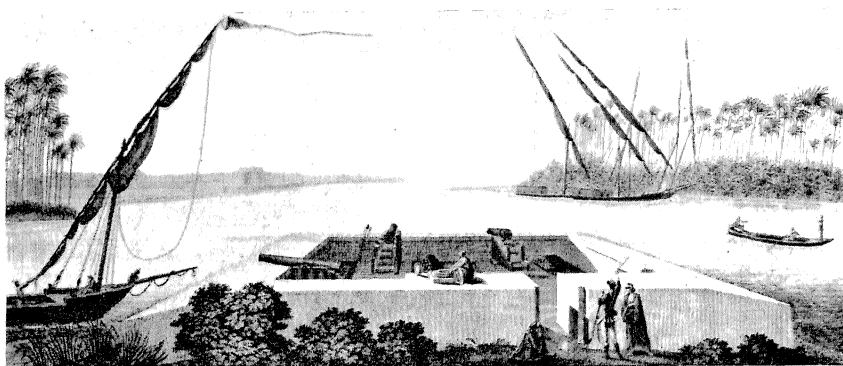


Fig. 5. — Battery on the island, *Description de l'Égypte*.

has completely disappeared. In the distance on the west bank is a very smooth representation of Fort Jullien as reconstructed by the French, but there is no indication of the crenellations or embrasures, probably owing to the distance of the view. The plate in Wittman from a sketch by F. B. Spilsbury, surgeon of H.M.S. Tigre, although not so fine, is probably more accurate. Wittman visited the place in February 1802, after the siege ².

¹ Probably Burg Migheizel (ج مڨيزل) or Borg Sogair as shown on sheet 40 of the *Atlas Géographique*, situated below Fort Jullien on the east bank. The later battery shown on the Plate 81 of *Etat Moderne*, Vol. I, was above Fort Jullien on the northern tip of the island (Gezeret Farcheh), which once existed between Rosetta and Fort Jullien.

² WILLIAM WITTMAN, *Travels in Turkey, . . . into in Egypt during the years 1799-1792*, London 1803. page, 413.

During the reconstruction of the Fort by the French in 1799 the famous «Rosetta Stone» was discovered by lieutenant de génie F. Bouchard or Boussard. It was taken to Alexandria and was among the antiquities surrendered to the British at the capitulation of Alexandria in 1801¹. Today there still remain six or seven inscribed stones, some bearing cartouches and these are now under careful examination by an expert egyptologist before they disappear, as it is alleged that some of the stones were removed from the fort, some years ago, when the road was made between Rosetta and Kom el Burg كوم البرج. It will be observed that the stones taken to build Qâitbâi's fort were probably from various buildings dating over a period of about four hundred and fifty years. One is tempted to speculate that these remains came from the lost city of Bolbitine which may have been situated in the vicinity.

Denon, as Pococke before him, noticed that Qâitbâi had used stones from some ancient Egyptian site — « I observed », he wrote, « that it has been constructed of parts of old buildings and that several of the stones of the embrasures were of the fine free-stone of Upper Egypt, and are still covered hieroglyphics ». Wittman writes that the fort contained « a representation of one of the Nile boats » which probably referred to an ancient Egyptian representation of a boat inscribed on one of the stones used by Qâitbâi and which has since disappeared.

The reconstructed fort was named after Capitaine Thomas Prosper Jullien (1773-1798), aide-de-camp of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was assassinated by the inhabitants of 'Alqam (near Kafr Dâwud) on 2nd August 1798, while on his way with despatches from Cairo to Rosetta. He was the son of Adjutant Général Jullien, and, in consequence of the murder, Napoleon ordered the village of 'Alqam to be entirely destroyed and all the crops and cattle seized.³

Fort Jullien was besieged by a Turco-British force under Colonel Lord Dalhousie for three days from April 16th 1801. The first batteries opened fire against the south-west angle through a grove of date trees

¹ WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 258, the Rosetta stone and other antiques were sent to England in charge of Colonel Turner of the 3rd Guards in September 1802.

³ Sometimes spelt Julien, and on many maps from 1803 onwards misnamed St. Julien, but it is not known who was responsible for canonising Napoleon's-poor young aide. Jollois (*Description de l'Égypte*, Tome XVIII, 1^{ère} partie p. 500), appears to be wrong in saying that the fort was named after the Adjutant Général; see de la Jonquière, II, 325, V, 350, 386.

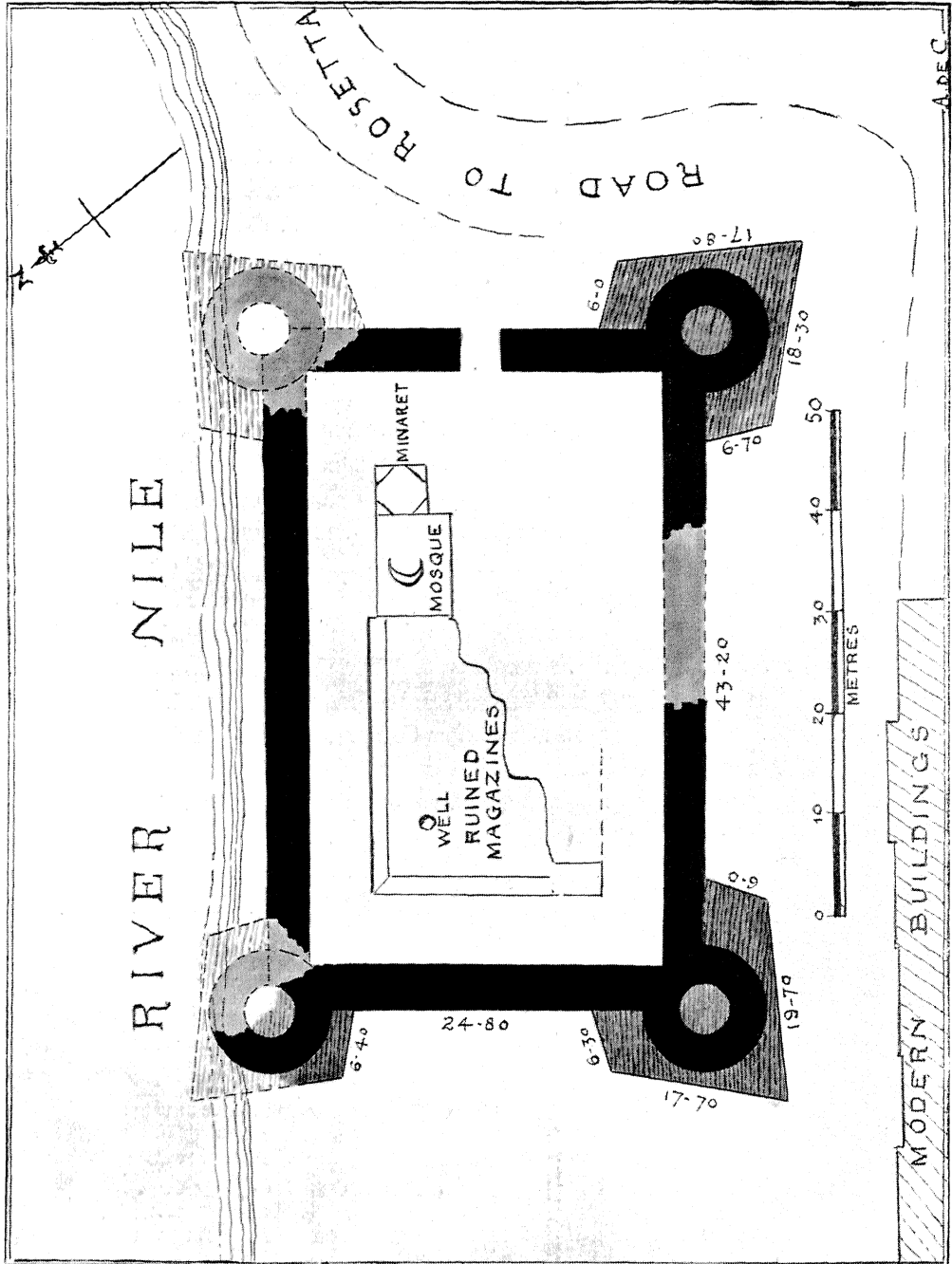


Fig. 6. — Plan of the Qait-Bai Fort.

which had to be shot away before the guns could be directed accurately on the fort, and all firing had to cease at night to prevent the cross fire from the gunboats on the river and the batteries on the shore doing damage to each other. The second battery was made by the Turks and was directed against the east side, and after the seige it was found that the river has already breached the wall and this breach had been considerably enlarged by the Turkish battery. On the 19th April the gallant little garrison surrendered and laid down its arms on the glacis.

The fort had been defended by fifteen pieces of cannon and four armed djerms (river boats) had been anchored under the north wall. These guns appear to have been removed by the English, the only gun remaining today being one by Ruelle dated 1834, and there are two oak gun-carriages, which prove that the fort was probably patched up and new guns mounted there in the reign of Mohamed Ali Pasha. The remainder of cannons of this period seems to have been moved to Fort Bûghâz el Gharbîya at the river mouth where they can be seen on their original carriages.

There is one other interesting item regarding Fort Qâitbâi; when Denon visited the subterraneous appartments in the fort he found «magazines filled with old arms and armour, such as cross-bows, arrows, swords in the shape of those used at the time of the crusades (sic), helmets, etc. In rummaging these magazines a great number of bats as large as pigeons flew out.....». (Denon, p. 170) ¹.

During the last hundred years Fort Jullien has become a ruin and it is now in an appalling state which is regrettable as its history and associations are sufficiently interesting for it to be conserved.

The ancient magazines inside can be traced, they are arched chambers. A new mosque has been erected inside the fort walls but there are portions of marble columns, apparently from the earlier mosque, used as kerb-stones of the path leading from the mosque to the river.

A. DE COSSON.

¹ Fort Qâitbâi, Alexandria, was full of similar ancient weapons and armour, see "Description de l'Égypte", tome XVIII, 1, p. 397, and this *Bulletin*, No. 31, pp. 229; 245-6.

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