

The Mamluks | The Mamluk System

‘One of the Mamluk's senior commanders, Baybars, emerged as the first great Mamluk sultan.’

The Mamluks of the Ayyubid sultan Najm al-Din (637–47 / 1240–9) were trained in and stationed at barracks based at Roda Island on the river Nile. The Arabic word for a large river is al-bahr and this elite corps was, therefore, known as al-Bahriyya. After the death of the sultan one of the senior commanders, Baybars I al-Bunduqdari (r. 658–76 / 1260–77), turned the resulting power-vacuum to the Bahri Mamluks' advantage and, after expelling the Mongols in 658 / 1260, emerged as the first great Mamluk sultan of an expanding empire. Bahri Mamluks now ruled until 784 / 1382, when they in turn had to yield power to another Mamluk faction, known as al-Burjiyya, named after the tower (al-burj) within the Citadel of Cairo that housed them.



Name:

Ayla (Aqaba)

Dynasty:

Hegira 1st century / AD mid-7th century Islamic, pre-Umayyad

Details:

Aqaba, Jordan

Justification:

The Mamluks built a castle near Ayla to oversee the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea.



Name:

Towers of the Citadel of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi: Burg al-Ramla and Burg al-Haddad

Dynasty:

Hegira 579 / AD 1184 Ayyubid

Details:

Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

The citadel embodied the military and political power of the Mamluk sultan and his empire.



Name:

Karak Castle

Dynasty:

Hegira 6th–8th century / AD 12th–14th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:

Karak, Jordan

Justification:

Karak Castle, built by the Franks, grew to resemble a small city in Mamluk times.



Name:

Citadel of Qaytbay

Dynasty:

Hegira 884 / AD 1479 Mamluk

Details:

Alexandria, Egypt

Justification:

This citadel-complex was constructed in order to defend the most important sea port in Egypt: Alexandria.
