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0521560071 - All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his Army and the Making of Modern Egypt

Khaled Fahmy

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All the Pasha's men

While scholarship has traditionally viewed Mehmed Ali Pasha as the founder of modern Egypt, Khaled Fahmy offers a new interpretation of his role in the rise of Egyptian nationalism, firmly locating him within the Ottoman context as an ambitious, if problematic, Ottoman reformer. Basing his work on previously neglected archival material, the author demonstrates how Mehmed Ali sought to develop the Egyptian economy and to build up the army, not as a means of gaining Egyptian independence from the Ottoman empire, but to further his own ambitions for recognized hereditary rule over the province. By focusing on the army and on the soldiers' daily experiences, the author constructs a detailed picture of attempts at modernization and reform, how they were planned and implemented by various reformers, and how the public at large understood and accommodated them. In this way, the work contributes to the larger methodological and theoretical debates concerning nation-building and the construction of state power in the particular context of early nineteenth-century Egypt.

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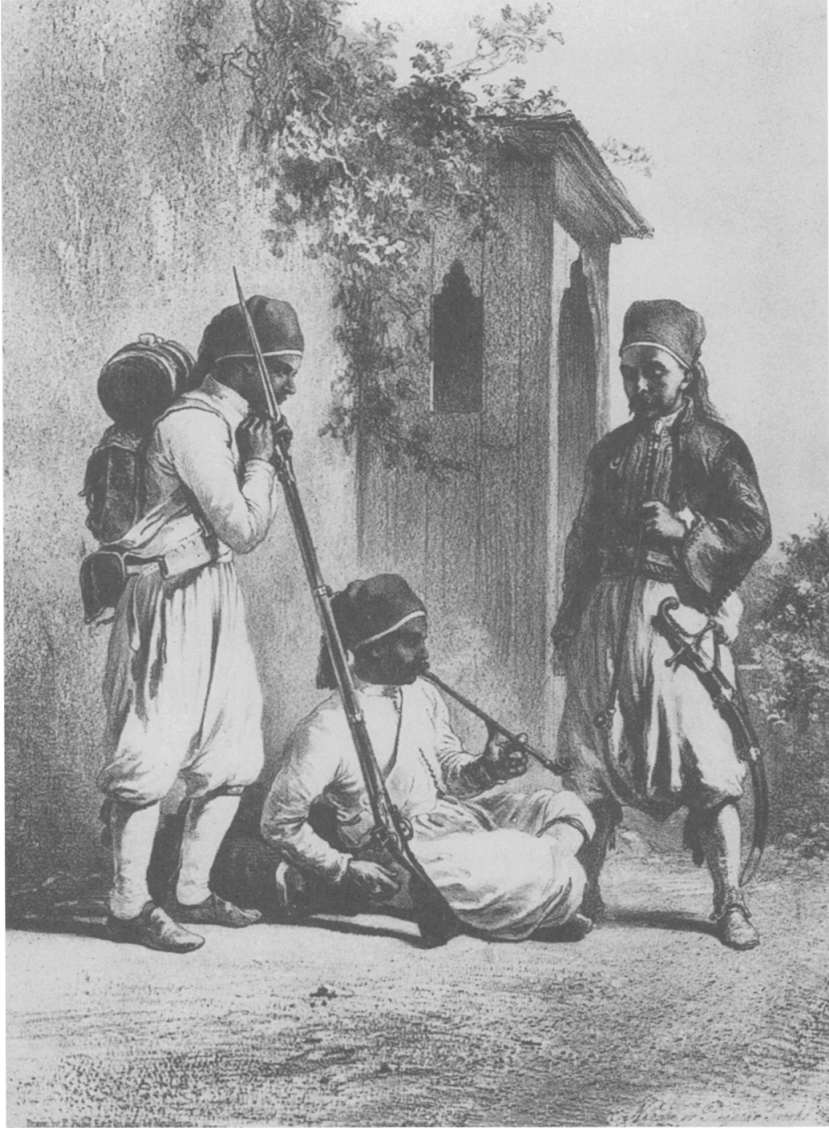
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“Troops of the Egyptian army”

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1997

Typeset in Plantin 10/12 [C E]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Fahmy, Khaled.

All the Pasha's men: Mehmed Ali, his army, and the making of modern Egypt/Khaled Fahmy.

p. cm. – (Cambridge Middle East studies)

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 0 521 56007 1 (hb)

1. Egypt. Jaysh – History – 19th century. 2. Egypt. Jaysh – Military life – History. 3. Muhammad 'Alī Bāshā, Governor of Egypt, 1769–1849.

4. Nationalism – Egypt – History – 19th century. I. Title. II. Series.

UA865.F26 1997

355'.00962'09034 – dc21 96–53340 CIP

ISBN 0 521 56007 1 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

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For
my parents and
Kouross Esmaeli,
with respect and gratitude

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Preface

Although this book is a study of the army that was founded in Egypt in the first half of the nineteenth century, it does not offer a straightforward account of military history. While dealing with Egypt's history during the reign of Mehmed Ali Pasha (1805–48) by closely studying the army the Pasha founded midway through his long career, it does not follow the generals and officers of this army whilst they trained their men in camps, commanded their troops in battle, or basked in their military victories. Rather, this is a book that is primarily interested in the men who did most of the “dirty work” of this army, those thousands of Egyptian peasant-soldiers who were conscripted to serve in this army: it follows the soldiers from the time they were recruited, to the time they were sent to the training camps, then to the bloody sites of pitched battles, and finally back to their barracks where they recuperated from past battles and prepared for future ones.

The purpose of following the soldiers of this army so closely is not only to document their unprecedented experience and to check their reactions to what were novel and unfamiliar practices and institutions; it is also, and primarily, to check the validity of the common belief that this army was instrumental in raising Egyptian national consciousness and, indeed, in founding modern Egyptian nationalism specifically by giving these thousands of men the opportunity to bear arms and to defend their nation, a “right” that they were denied for centuries, if not millennia.

By closely studying this army – how it was fed, supplied, and medically cared for, and more importantly, how its soldiers were conscripted and trained, how they reacted to their officers' commands, and how they resisted the military authorities – this book argues that this army was, indeed, instrumental in founding the modern Egyptian nation. This it did, though, not by enlightening Egyptians regarding the essential truths of the “nation,” but by instituting novel practices of surveillance, control and management that radically altered the nature of the government in Cairo and fundamentally changed the manner in

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which it dealt with the Egyptian population. This army was also a crucial element in changing the ethnic and linguistic configuration of Egypt's middle and upper classes in a manner that unwittingly gave rise to "nationalist" sentiments among the soldiery who were mostly Arabic-speakers and who resented being ruled and dominated by a Turkish-speaking military/bureaucratic elite.

This book, then, is not a biography of Mehmed Ali; it does not follow him from the time he arrived in Egypt in 1801 till his death nearly half a century later, tracing his wonderful deeds; nor does it give an account of this long period as if seen from his perspective. Rather, its subject is the army he founded and the men who fought in it. Instead of looking at the army as *the* national institution that gave those conscripts the "right" to bear arms and to defend their nation, or of writing its history in a manner that the Pasha himself would have liked, this book sees it as an institution of power that forced these tens of thousands of men to carry arms and to fight for Mehmed Ali and his family, and in the process changed the nature of Egyptian society and affected the lives of the men who served in it. The book tries to investigate how these men resisted and/or accommodated this most powerful of the Pasha's institutions, an institution which was unrivaled in the way it touched their bodies and sought to control their minds.

Besides being a study of nationalism and nationalist historiography, therefore, this is a book on power and resistance. Looking at the army as the modern institution of power *par excellence* this book attempts to see how power with its modern manifestations and institutions is perceived, accommodated and resisted by its subjects. While finding Michel Foucault's notions of power useful and insightful, this book critiques a particular reading of his work that stresses the monolithic nature of the institutions of power and accepts the inevitability of its forms. Instead of an impressive and consistent picture of how modern power objectifies its subjects, what is offered below is an attempt to present a more complex, and – intentionally – more blurred picture of power, one that can incorporate fractures, dissonance and resistance. By highlighting the small acts of defiance and resistance undertaken by the soldiers in this army, the intention is to undermine the impressive representations of power and its unceasing desire to silence its subjects. These small, every-day acts of resistance, while not grand or heroic, were still effective in challenging the attempts of power to control and manipulate the soldiers' lives and bodies, and alarmed the military authorities precisely by showing them that, through these small acts of resistance the soldiers managed to distance themselves from the Pasha and his grand projects.

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This obviously leads to the question of whether it is feasible to write a history of an institution of power in a manner that not only avoids reproducing its own narrative but which can also incorporate the dialog that it constantly has with resistance. Given that the overwhelming majority of the people with whom this book is concerned were illiterate and did not leave behind written accounts which could inform us of what it was like to be objectified in this insistent manner, the question is whether it is still possible to include them as subjects and not merely as objects of power. Fortunately, the documents that this book relies upon made possible the incorporation of the soldiers' perspective in narrating the history of Mehmed Ali's army.

While some of the British Foreign Office documents housed in the Public Record Office, London, were of some value in understanding how the army functioned, these offer mostly an outsider's view of the events and personalities touched upon in this study and, therefore, they have been used only minimally. Similarly some accounts by contemporary travelers and military observers are used, but again only to give further descriptions to material gathered elsewhere. More substantially, this book relies on material collected from the Egyptian National Archives and, to a lesser extent, from the Egyptian National Library, both in Cairo. Broadly speaking, these are of three different kinds. On the one level, there are the numerous letters and regulations issued by the Pasha and his top officials. These include the correspondence between Mehmed Ali and the Commander-in-Chief of his forces, his son Ibrahim Pasha, letters to and from the Sublime Porte and various notables in Istanbul, as well as the numerous letters of the top officials issuing regulations to make sure that the army was well trained, well fed and regularly paid. The various military laws and training manuals which were the earliest publications of the Būlāq Press and which are housed in the Egyptian National Library make up the second group of contemporary documents that this study relies upon. In contrast to the very monolithic picture of power that comes across from reading these sources, the Archives, fortunately, also contains very valuable information in the form of the "journals" (*yevmiyyet*, lit. daily accounts) from the military camps and war fronts that include such documents as roll calls, inventory lists, courts martial, pay rolls and descriptions of marches and of battles. By relying on this diverse array of official documents it is possible to present an integral view of the army which not only avoids the usual concentration on the person of Mehmed Ali that often characterizes the historiography of Egypt during his reign, but also allows one to have a closer look at the every-day performance of that army and the manner in which the soldiers reacted to their officers'

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commands and orders. While this book does not claim to have “captured the voice” of the soldiers, given that the sources it relies on are still the sources of power itself, it attempts to challenge the monolithic picture that is usually offered of the performance of such an impressive institution of power and provides instead a more fractured, and, for this reason, a more telling image of that army.

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Acknowledgements

This study is the result of several years of work in Cairo, Oxford and Princeton and has benefited greatly from the help and guidance of various people to whom many thanks are owed. Foremost are my professors at the American University in Cairo, and especially Galal Amin and Enid Hill to whom I am grateful for their unmatched generosity with their time and assistance as well as for showing me an example of dedication to teaching and encouragement of young scholars that I have rarely seen elsewhere.

At Oxford I was most fortunate in having Roger Owen as my supervisor. His help, advice and supportive comments were very valuable in guiding me throughout the difficult task of writing my D.Phil. dissertation. His insistence on rigorous scholarship and his love of, and dedication to, his students will always be most inspiring. Michael Gilsean, although not supervising my work in an official manner, gave freely of his time and assistance in guiding me through writing my dissertation. During numerous walks in the beautiful gardens of Magdalen and St. John's Colleges I came to develop a friendship that added considerable warmth to my "Oxford experience."

For valuable comments on the present text and its earlier drafts I would like to thank, first and foremost, my D.Phil. examiners Eugene Rogan and Sami Zubaida who read the dissertation carefully and critically. Tim Mitchell, too, was most generous with his insightful comments and criticisms. I extend my thanks also to the many friends who have read parts of the text; these include: Nadia Benabid, Elliott Colla, Arthur Denner, Mine Ener, Jan Goldberg, Shamil Jeppie, Ussama Makdisi and Letitia Ufford. Both Youssef Nabil and Andy Shanken helped me with the illustrations, and Mrs. Virginia Catmur of Cambridge University Press copy-edited the text with care.

There are many persons who have contributed in more than one way to this project: Reem Saad by her unfailing support and most lively company has added much joy and richness to my stay in Oxford. Her perceptive comments and often deserved criticisms of the text were

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most valuable in helping me revise it. I would also like to thank my friends who were kind enough to tolerate me over the years with my burdensome companion, Mehmed Ali: Iman Hamdi, Hager Hadidi, Hania Sholkamy, Manal Fouad, Nadia Kamel, Naira Ijja, Randa Shaath, Sohail Luka and Ziad Bahaeldine.

I owe a very special debt to every individual member of the Egyptian National Archives, especially to Mr. Ibrahim Fathalla, Ms. Afaf Ragab, Mrs. Nadia Mostafa and, of course, Madame Sawsan Abdel-Ghani. The staff of the Radcliffe Camera of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, of Dar al-Kutub, Cairo, of the Firestone Library, Princeton, and my former colleagues at the Library of the American University in Cairo were all very helpful.

Last, but in no manner least, I wish to offer my deepest thanks to my sister, Rania, and her husband, Hany, for their support and understanding, and, above all, to my parents who have given me all their love and care and who encouraged me throughout my academic career.

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Note on transliteration, dates and references

Both Arabic and Turkish words are transliterated using the conventions of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Names of Arabic-speaking persons are transliterated as if they were Arabic names, while those of Turkish-speaking persons are transliterated as if they were Turkish.

Hijri dates mentioned in the notes are always cited with their Gregorian equivalents. The Ottoman abbreviations for the names of the months, which were used in the original documents, have been adopted here. These are:

- M: Muharrem (Arabic Muḥarram)
- S: Safer (Şafar)
- Ra: Rebiülevvel (Rabī ' al-Awwal)
- R: Rebiülahir (Rabī ' al-Thānī)
- Ca: Cemaziyülevvel (Jumādā al-Ūlā)
- C: Cemaziyülahir (Jumādā al-Ākhirā)
- B: Receb (Rajab)
- Ş: Şaban (Sha'bān)
- N: Ramazan (Ramaḍān)
- L: Şevval (Shawwāl)
- Za: Zilkade (Dhū al-Qi'da)
- Z: Zilhice (Dhū al-Ḥijja)

As mentioned in the comprehensive bibliography at the end of this study, material from Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya, the Egyptian National Archives, are either from *sijillāt* (bound registers) or *maḥāfiẓ* (boxes). The latter are referred to in the notes by name of the archival heading, then box number, followed by the document number within that box. For example, Sham 2/45 is document no. 45 of the 2nd box of *Maḥāfiẓ al-Shām*. References from the *sijillāt*, on the other hand, use the system devised by Dār al-Wathā'iq in its mimeographed subject heading list, *Qawā'im bi-Niẓām Tartīb Sijillāt al-Dār*. Accordingly, S/5/51/2/4 refers to letter no. 4 of the 2nd *sijill* (register) of the 51st sub-division of

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Sijillāt ʿĀbdīn, which is given the code S/5. S/1: Maʿiyya Saniyya (Viceregal Department), S/2: Dīwān Khedewī (Department of Civil Affairs) and S/3: Dīwān al-Jihādiyya (Department of War) are some of the other codes.

In both the *mahāfiẓ* and the *sijillāt*, the documents were overwhelmingly Ottoman and it is to these originals, rather than to their Arabic translations, that reference is made.