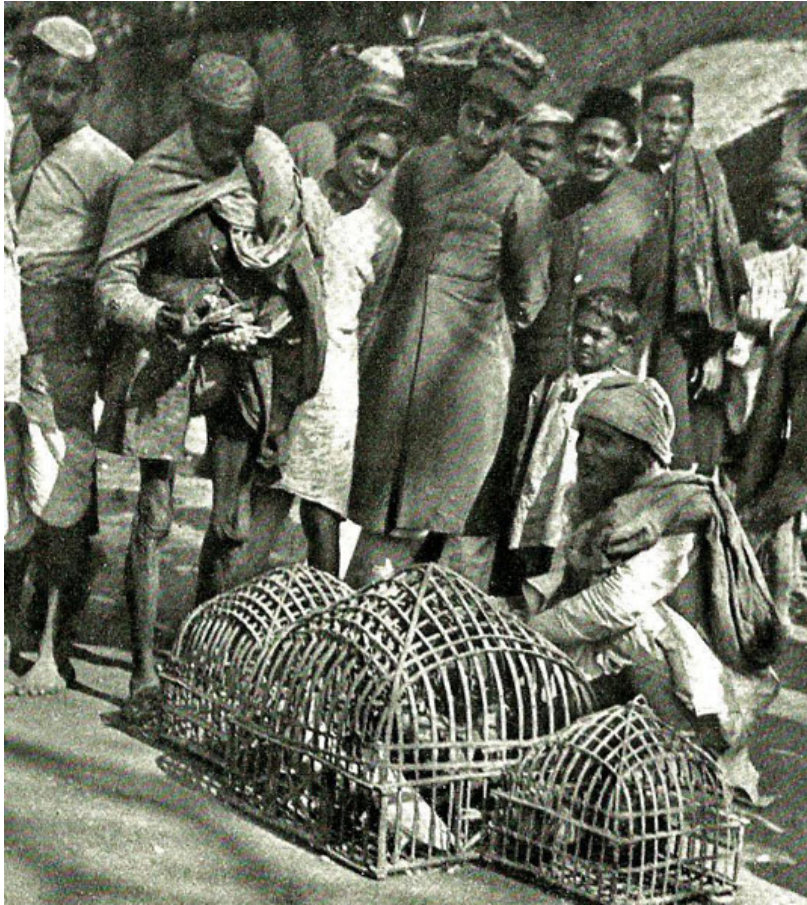


THE PIGEON MAIL, 1000 YEARS AGO

By: Josip Pekanovic (Serbia)



The Baghdad pigeon and the Syrian Dewlap were used for carrying mail. In 1171 Nur ad-Din paid 1000 gold coins for a pair of pigeons.

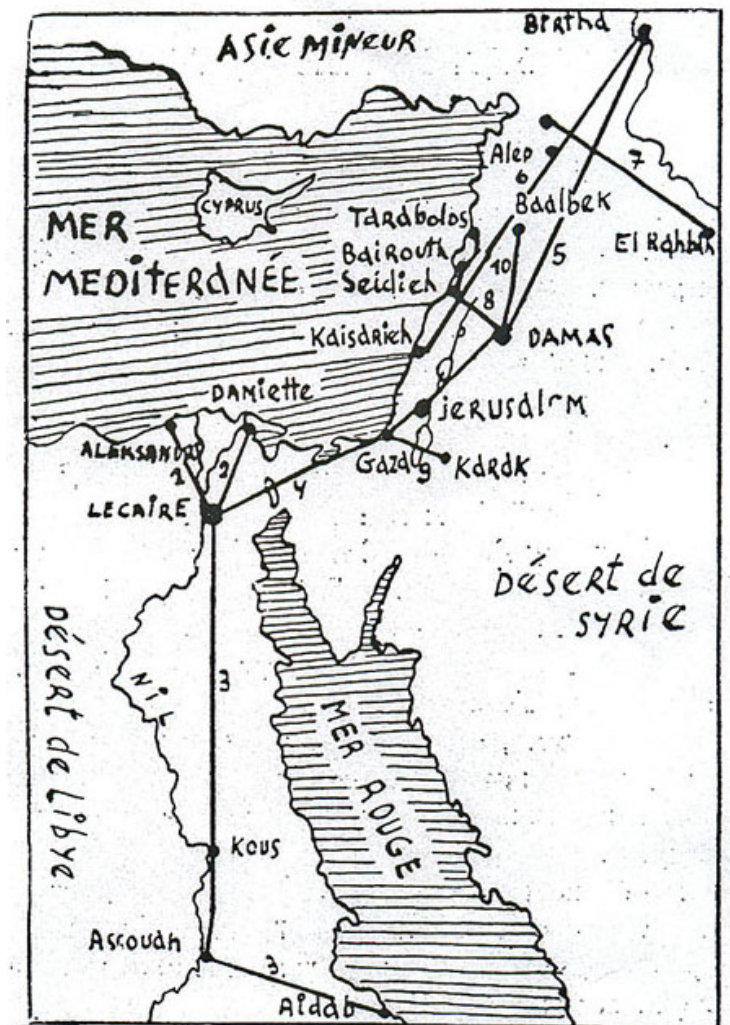
The pigeons carried news and orders between the capital, Cairo and other parts of the empire: Damask, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Aleph, Basra, Aswan and the other places, which can be seen from the map. Every seven miles there was a stop with one or more pigeon lofts. In each stop the pigeons from the neighbouring stop were withheld from carrying the news in that way, because every pigeon went back to its own pigeon loft.

The pigeon exchange service between neighbouring stops was functioning with the help of the mules from the Sultan's stables.

Right: The map with routes between important places at that time.

A few years ago, travelling through the Middle East and Egypt, I was very interested in pigeon breeding of that region. Among other things, I was listening to interesting stories and legends about pigeon breeding from past times.

One of the interesting stories is about pigeon mail that connected all of Egypt and the region of the Middle East. The pigeon mail was functioning from 1000 to 1500 year AD. The real mail service, that used carrier pigeons, was constituted by the Sultan Nur ad-Din (1118 – 1174) who came to the Arabian throne in 1146. He built the famous pigeon lofts in Damask and Cairo as well as at the other places.





Left:
Pigeons in Harem.

The accommodation and care for the mules, pigeons and the mails itself demanded a huge personnel.

The pigeons, prepared for flight, were released from the top of a platform at the stop.

At that time there were pigeon for carrying news over long distances and they were called *hawadi* which means “the fast pigeon”. When, for example, the Sultan wanted to send a message to the Governor of Damask, he sent it using the pigeon from Damask that was held in Cairo. In 1288 there were 2000 carrier pigeons in Cairo mail.

The Sultan's carrier pigeons were marked by hot brand that was imprinted on the beak and legs of the pigeon. For easier recognition, those pigeons had a special feather cut. Those that caught and kept in secret the Sultan's pigeons were severely punished. One cage, filled with collection of chosen pigeons from all regions, travelled everywhere with the Emperor. He was able to send the orders and news throughout the country; from hunting, war, and even from his ships.

The pigeon mail was the way of fast communication, and it was considered as a most important service. Only the Sultan had the right to take the parcel from the pigeon as it arrived. If the pigeon brought the message during his lunch, he interrupted the lunch, and if he was sleeping, he had to be awakened. In the history of that time there were many happenings that were written about in which pigeons had their place, such as administration, work, diplomatic correspondence, war, and trade etc.

For more information, see: www.pekanovic.rs by: Josip Pekanovic (Serbia)

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