

Biog 10 The Hamet Family

Morag Cross 1 Jan 2014

*****10.1**

Lascars were predominantly-Asian seamen taken on as deckhands and engine-room crew by British merchant ships during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their origins were ethnically diverse, as reflected by their name 'Lascar' (sometimes 'Lashgar'), borrowed from Portuguese, via Persian. They were predominantly Indian, and therefore British subjects due to Imperial control of India, but there were many Chinese, African and Arab sailors also referred to as Lascars. This was considered the correct, and non-derogatory term. [Sources: 'Why were Indian sailors called 'lascars'?', Royal Museums Greenwich, at www.rmg.co.uk; F A Kala, 2011, 'Seafarers, Introduction: Lascars', *Maritime History Archive*, at www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/index.php].

*****10.2**

Most Lascar families remained at home, but some single males married white British women, forming early immigrant communities in ports like Cardiff, London and Liverpool. Rather unusually, the Hamet family all moved from Egypt to Glasgow in the early 1880s, which, despite being a major shipping centre, did not have a large Arab population. Several of the large Glasgow-based shipping companies, like the Anchor, Clan and City Lines made extensive use of Lascar labourers, who were cheaper to employ than their European equivalents. [Sources: F A Kala, 2011, 'Seafarers, Introduction: Lascars', *Maritime History Archive*, at www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/index.php; *The Glasgow Herald*, 31 Jan 1889, p8; R G W Prescott, 'Lascar Seamen on the Clyde', in *Scotland and the Sea*, (ed T C Smout, 1992), pp200-208].

*****10.3**

Egypt belonged to the Turkish Ottoman Empire, nominally ruled from Istanbul, but the governor, or Khedive in Cairo was largely autonomous. Because the Suez Canal allowed Britain rapid access to its eastern colonies, principally India, Egypt was of great strategic importance to the British. Their forces entered Egypt in 1882 to put down a nationalist revolt against the Khedive, and to protect British financial and trading interests.

*****10.4**

Thereafter, Egypt was unofficially occupied and administered by the British until the First World War. Unsettled conditions in Cairo, or better opportunities abroad, possibly prompted Hassan Hamet to bring his family to Glasgow, by 1885. Lascars were frequently transferred between ships berthed on the Clyde, and were not unfamiliar to Glaswegians. They were hired in groups under an overseer, or 'serang', and Hassan Hamet (probably the Glasgow immigrant), fireman of the cargo-vessel 'Intrepid' at Sunderland in 1881, was likely in this position. Catholic Goans were traditionally cooks, and 'Arabic' [speaking, Muslim] and Chinese firemen were valued by chief engineers for generally avoiding alcohol. [Sources: 'Ranks aboard ship', 'The Merchant Seaman's War', and J P Jones, 1931, 'Lascars in the Port of London', at *Lascars*, [Online Historical Resource], www.lascars.co.uk/ranks.html; Census 1881, at www.ancestry.co.uk; *The Scotsman*, Aug 8, 1882, p5; 19 Nov 1888, p6; *Glasgow Herald*, 31 Jan 1889, p8; 25 Feb 1893, p4].

***10.5

Hassan Hamet, (born Suez, c 1849), and Nefisa Mattaffy, (or Neficia Matapha, born mid-1850s, various dates recorded) married in Cairo in 1870. They were probably either Muslim or Coptic Christians, and had four sons. Hamed (who used the surname Hassan) and Ali were born in Suez in the 1870s, and Alexander was born at 22 Lancefield Quay, Finnieston, in 1885. The last child, Hassan junior, was born in 1889 in Stobcross St, Anderston in 1889, while their father was working as a steamship fireman, or donkey-engineman (tending an auxiliary engine). [Sources: 1891, 1901, 1911 Census, Statutory Register of Births, Marriages, Deaths, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

***10.6

In the 1890s, the sons were apprenticed to various local crafts, Ali as a brassfinisher (although he vanishes from the records and is untraced); Hamed as a sailmaker, and Alexander as a cooper's messenger boy. The Hamets were living in Govan when the sons, now established in various trades, married Scotswomen, starting with journeyman plumber Hamed Hassan (the second son) in 1902. Their father collapsed with a fatal heart attack in a Kinning Park street in 1903. Younger sons Alexander and Hassan junior married in 1908, and 1910 respectively, at the family home at 1 Mathieson (now Luath) Street. Alexander was an engine-fitter, probably in one of the nearby shipyards or engineering works, and Hassan junior worked for the City Corporation's Main Drainage Scheme, the largest of its kind outside London. Their mother Nefisa, who also used the name 'Louisa', was hospital in Paisley in 1911. [Sources: 1891, 1901, 1911 Census, Statutory Register of Births, Marriages, Deaths, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk; John Lindsay (ed) 1914, *Municipal Glasgow: Its Evolution and Enterprises*, Glasgow, p199].

***10.7a and/ or b

In the years before, and during the Great War, there was a 'Mission to Lascars' in Hillhead, Glasgow, run by an Indian Christian from Lucknow, Aziz Ahmad, and his English wife, as well as various maritime hostels catering for those between postings. In 1916, Ahmad, 'who for years has conducted services among his compatriots at the Glasgow Docks', was charged with breaking restrictions placed on his movements by the military authorities. [*Glasgow Herald*, Dec 27, 1900, p4; 2 June 1916, p6; Census 1911, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

***10.8

In 1915, both Alexander, an engineer, and Hassan Hamet and their children were living in tenements in Elderpark St, Govan. Their brother Hamed, in his 40s and beyond enlistment age, was working as a plumber in Coatbridge. Elderpark Street has since been dubbed 'Glasgow's Own United Nations' due to the multiple nationalities living there, but it was a home to diverse groups even a century ago. [Source: Valuation Rolls 1915, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk; Wendy Miller, Meet Glasgow's Own United Nations, *Evening Times*, 9 Oct 2007; 'Govan's Own United Nations', adapted from original by W Miller, *Local News from SunnyGovan*, at www.sunnygovan.com].

***10.9

While Alexander was probably involved in a reserved occupation in shipbuilding or munitions, Hassan joined The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) in June 1917, and in August was sent overseas. His

Battalion is not recorded, and there were at least 13 service battalions, as well as other units attached to the regiment. However, the 1st Battalion were on the Western Front, and during Hassan's service, fought in the Battles of Menin Road, and Polygon Wood, in September 1917, part of the Third Battle of Ypres (July-November 1917). They also participated in the Battle of Hazebrouck in April 1918. The 2nd Battalion took part in the Battles of Pilkem and Langemarck (August 1917), also phases of the Ypres actions, and the First Battle of the Somme (March-July 1918). In either of these battalions, Hassan would have seen fierce fighting. [Sources: Hamet, Hassan, Medal card, Ref: WO 372/8/227250, 'Armed Forces Service Records', *National Archives*, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk; UK, *Silver War Badge Records, 1914-1920* at www.ancestry.co.uk; 'The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)', 'The 8th Division', 'The 20th (Light) Division', 'The 33rd Division', *The Long Long Trail*, at www.1914-1918.net]

*****10.10a, b or c (alternatives of same subject) AND ALSO USE **10.11 (use both 10.10 and 10.11, they are two items that are a pair of commemorative books and its related plaque)**

Hassan was honourably discharged, due to illness, in August 1918, from the 4th Battalion, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), which was guarding ports on the Forth, where many of the Royal Navy's North Sea ships were based. The Silver War Badge was created in 1916, so that an ex-serviceman man in civilian clothing could publically show that he had already enlisted but was now injured or otherwise unable to serve. Hassan applied for one in 1918 to demonstrate his own contribution to the war. Hassan was still living in Elderspark Street, Govan when he reported his mother's Nefisa 'Louisa' Hamed's death in 1921. [Sources: UK, *Silver War Badge Records, 1914-1920* at www.ancestry.co.uk; The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)', and 'Records of the Silver War Badge ', *The Long Long Trail*, at www.1914-1918.net; Statutory Register of Deaths, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

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