



EGYLandscape
P R O J E C T

Working Paper 1

Albrecht Fuess

**Waqfization in the late Mamluk Empire:
A deliberate policy or chaos management?**

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Introduction

One of the main question for early modern societies is the aspect of how to organize land tenureship and its taxation. Here, the Mamluk Empire is no odd one out. Several reforms and re-adjustments took place during its existence, which were conducted in reaction to changing circumstances. A major development, in this context, thereby took place in the fifteenth century: the so-called *waqfization* of land tenureship. The term *waqfization* means here the increase of *waqf* lands (i.e. those held by religious endowments) issued by Mamluk authorities to members of the military and urban elite to the detriment of the traditional *iqṭāʿ* system. This was combined with an increase in forms of direct cash payments to soldiers instead of the indirect payments made through the *iqṭāʿ* system. While we know that around half of the cultivable land was transformed into *waqf* land at the beginning of the sixteenth century¹, we still are fumbling in the dark about the actual reasons that triggered the process. The present contribution will therefore look at the question of whether *waqfization* represented a planned policy of the Mamluk sultans or if it came about as a gradual change due to historical circumstances. In the following working paper, the development of land taxation under the Mamluks and some views on the issue by three Mamluk historians will be presented. This will be followed by arguments of modern scholars and then an elaboration of my own personal hypothesis.

Iqṭāʿ and Waqf under the Mamluks

The Mamluks inherited the Ayyubid taxation system and initially kept it.² It seems though that they did not continue the practice of inheritance of *iqṭāʿ*. Sultan Qalāwūn (r. 1279-1290), then ordered his governors to draw up detailed lists of the revenue of individual *iqṭāʿ*'s in their provinces.³ Other reforms trying to re-organize the fiscal administration followed.⁴ The most famous and long lasting of them was *al-rawk al-Nāṣirī* under Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r.1293,

¹ Imād Badr al-Dīn Abū Ghāzī, *Fī Tārīkh Miṣr al-Ijtimāʿī: Taṭawwur al-Ḥiyāzah al-Zirāʿiyah Zamān al-Mamālik al-Jarākisah* (On the social history of Egypt: the development of landholding in the age of the Circassian Mamluks) (Cairo: ʿAyn lil-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth al-Insāniyah wa-l-Ijtimaʿiyah, 2000).

² Robert Irwin, "Iqṭāʿ and the End of the Crusader States," in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, edited by Peter M. Holt (Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1977): pp. 66-68; Peter M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 147.

³ Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan. The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-689 A.H./1279-1290 AD)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998), p. 267.

⁴ Heinz Halm, "Die Ayyubiden," in *Geschichte der arabischen Welt*, edited by Ulrich Haarmann (München: Beck, 2005): p. 201.

1299-1309, 1310-1341). In so doing, the sultan's share of the cultivatable *iqṭā'* land was increased from 4/24 to 10/24, from which the sultan was supposed to pay his own royal Mamluks.⁵ The *rawk* remained in action after the sultan's death, but aspects of the financial administration had to be adjusted due to shrinking revenue in the middle of the fourteenth century, when the Black Death hit the Mamluk Empire hard.⁶ Then around the end of Qalāwūnid rule in the 1380s, *iqṭā'*s were increasingly transformed via legal procedures into religious foundations (*awqāf*). In theory, this should have prevented these former *iqṭā'* lands from being reclaimed by the authorities, as they now officially belonged to God.⁷ However, this practice did not go unchallenged. The later Sultan Barqūq (r. 1382–1389 and 1390–1399) summoned religious scholars in 1379 when he was still *atābak al-ʿasakir* and demanded that many *waqf* deeds of previous years should be nullified.⁸ Apparently, he insisted on this policy especially in the second half of his reign and tried again to bring back *waqf* land, which had been “illegally” endowed, back under the control of the sultanic fisc.⁹

However, *waqfization* continued on slowly before accelerating tremendously around the 1450s. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, 10/24 of the overall cultivatable land was already transformed into *waqf*-property, thereby only leaving 14/24 for the *iqṭā'* system of the Mamluk state.¹⁰ By that time, direct payments – instead of the granting of an *iqṭā'* – became increasingly common practice. According to Igarashi, the first amir of a hundred who received a direct payment of a thousand dinars instead of an *iqṭā'* was in 1481: an amir by name Uzdampur Qarīb al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy.”

Three Mamluk authors of the fifteenth century and their view on land tenureship

The first author, offering a view into land tenureship, is al-Maqrīzī (1364-1442) the well-known religious scholar and historian, who was born into a wealthy scholarly family. His paternal

⁵ Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn 1310-1341*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 142; see also: Tsugitaka Sato, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam, Muqṭās and Fallahun*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 135-161.

⁶ See: Michael W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁷ Lucian Reinfandt, *Mamlukische Sultansstiftungen des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Nach den Urkunden der Stifter al-Ashraf Īnāl*, (Berlin: Schwarz, 2003), pp. 27-28.

⁸ Taqī al-Dīn Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifa duwal al-mulūk*, edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda, (Cairo: Maṭbaʿa Lajna al-Tāʾlīf wa-Tarjam wa-Nashr 1972), vol. 3, p. 345.

⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, vol. 3, p. 878. Cf. Daisuke Igarashi, *Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy, and Imperial Power in Medieval Syro-Egypt*, (Chicago: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Chicago, 2015), p. 92.

¹⁰ Reinfandt, *Mamlukische Sultansstiftungen*, pp. 32-36.

¹¹ Igarashi, *Land Tenure*, p. 140; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, edited by Mohamed Mostafa, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963), vol. 3, p. 190.

family came from Baalbek. He held numerous positions in Cairo at madrasas and within the fiscal administration alike before he declined any new position after 1417 in order to concentrate on his historical writing. Nonetheless, his experience as a financial official helped him in his writings and might explain his special interest in economy.¹² When Sultan Barqūq (r. 1382–1389 and 1390–1399) tried to bring back, as explained above, *waqf*-land under the control of the sultan, al-Maqrīzī quotes the sultan with the following sentence in his discussion with the *ʿulamā*: “This is the matter [*i.e. the waqfization*] that has weakened the army of the Muslims”.¹³ Although al-Maqrīzī is generally highly critical of the financial administration, he acknowledges that Sultan Barqūq undertook adjustments in the financial system in the mid-1390s, when he introduced the so-called *Dīwān al-Amlāk wa-al-Awqāf wa-al-Dhakhīrah* (*Diwan of possessions, awqāf and provisions*). This *Dīwān* unified the income Barqūq received as sultan through the channel of the royal *waqfs*, his *milk* property, and his so-called *dhakhīrah* (provisions). After his reforms, Barqūq then tried again to bring back *waqf* land, which had been “illegally” endowed, back under the control of the sultan’s fisc.¹⁴

With Ibn Taghrībirdī (1409/10-1470) we encounter another kind of a Mamluk historians, *i.e.* the son of a very powerful amir and former commander-in-chief of the Mamluk army who died when Ibn Taghrībirdī was around 3 years old.¹⁵ As such, Ibn Taghrībirdī had – as a member of the ruling class – many insights about what was actually happening in the interior power system of the Mamluks. In several instances, he remarks about riots of Mamluk soldiers demanding more cash to which the sultans usually complied after some days of struggle.¹⁶ The cash problem and shortage of fiefs however stayed on. Ibn Taghrībirdī praises here Sultan Al-Muʿayyad Shaykh (r.1412-1421) who in 1418 asked soldiers who had a fief (*iqṭāʿ*) of the “standing” army and were additionally employed with a salary by an amir to choose one of the two: *i.e.* keep the fief and leave the amir or stay with the amir and leave the fief. In case that either of the two choices would lead to the loss of income, the sultan offered compensation. Ibn Taghrībirdī comments on this as follows: “This was reckoned

¹² Franz Rosenthal, “al-Maqrīzī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Online, First published online: Brill, 2012.

¹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, vol. 3, p. 345.

¹⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, vol. 3, p. 878. Cf. Igarashi, *Land Tenure*, p. 92.

¹⁵ W. Popper, “Abu ʿl-Maḥāsīn Djamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Taghrībirdī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Online, First published online: 2012.

¹⁶ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History of Egypt 1382-1469*, 9 vols., transl. William Popper, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954-1960), vol 18, p. 64; vol. 23, p. 145.

as an element in al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad's good government and his procedure was in accordance with old principles.¹⁷ Sultan al-Malik Ashraf Īnāl (r. 1453-1461) had to deal with the same cash flow dryness and therefore planned in 1454 to take away the stipends of the *awlād al-nās*, the sick and orphans, but he was refrained from this by his councilor. "This was accounted among amir Bardak's good deeds," comments Ibn Taghrībirdī.¹⁸ Another interesting story related by Ibn Taghrībirdī deals with Sultan Khushqadam (r. 1461-67) and his giving out *iqṭāʿ*s including from *awqāf* lands of the former sultan Īnāl and his followers. Moreover, Khushqadam apparently split *iqṭāʿ*s into small pieces in order to curb the demand by the Mamluk soldiers.¹⁹

The third Mamluk author presented here is Ibn Iyās (1448- 1524), who as a grandson of a leading Mamluk was not as near to power as Ibn Taghrībirdī. He did not have the same scholarly reputation as al-Maqrīzī as well, and we do not know of any office held by Ibn Iyās.²⁰ At several instances, he complains about the hardships which fell on people like him, meaning the *awlād al-nās*, whose right for their *iqṭāʿ*s came increasingly under pressure as they received stipends but were seldom capable of any efficient service for the state. In this context, Ibn Iyās recalls the episode of how Sultan Qāyṭbāy (r.1468-1496) made stipend holders draw a bow in 1468 in order to find out their capability. The people who could not draw the bows were excused from participating in an expedition but had to pay a penalty fee to the royal treasury instead.²¹ But it got even worse for Ibn Iyās under Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r.1501-1516) when his personal *iqṭāʿ* became threatened. According to him, in 1508 *mamluks* entered the houses of the *awlād al-nās* and beat them in order to take away their *iqṭāʿ* documents. Ibn Iyās was one of the victims of this treatment. He lost his *iqṭāʿ* to four *mamluks* but recovered it later.²² Ibn Iyās was furious; and as he knew the outcome of Mamluk rule, as eye-witness of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, these measures were clearly ascribed by him as reasons for the Mamluk Sultanate's downfall.

In all the three cases, we can detect a negative attitude towards the central government and its policies of landownership, with Ibn Iyās especially highly disapproving of the Mamluk *iqṭāʿ*

¹⁷ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *History of Egypt*, vol. 17, p. 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 22, p. 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 23, pp. 36-37.

²⁰ W.M. Brinner, "Ibn Iyās," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Online, First published online: Brill, 2012.

²¹ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*, vol. 3, 22.

²² Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*, vol. 4, p. 136;

policy at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the three authors depict a fluid system in which land tenure did change its status, between *iqṭāʿ*, *waqf*, leased land, and *milk* on a regular basis.

Modern Scholarship on Waqfization

David Ayalon is among the first contemporary scholars who remarked on the interplay of *waqf* and *iqṭāʿ* in his article, “The System of Payment in Mamluk Military Society” in 1958. Here, he wrote, “an interesting problem, which deserves a much deeper study than the scope of the present paper permits, is the existence of a constant antagonism between the financial interests of the army and the institution of religious endowments (*waqf*).”²³ He did not dwell further into the matter but he started an interest, which was followed up by other scholars.

Carl Petry then intensively used documentary evidence in his 1994 work on the last great Mamluk sultans Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468-1496) and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501-1516). He points out the politics of extortion and forced measures used by both sultans, which however were legalized in the documents by religious scholars, but were perceived apparently by contemporaries as forced measures. Petry is not sure about the insight of the sultans when taking these measures: “In their sum, the trust deeds compiled by Egypt’s last autocrats tell a sobering tale of short-range ingenuity but long-term myopia.”²⁴ However, he then goes on to ask the question if there could be something essential behind this policy: “Do all these disparate phenomena, once pieced together, reveal a budding master plan by which the *iqṭāʿ*-system would be scrapped outright once the sultan garnered the means to replace it?”²⁵ Building upon this finding in a later article called “Waqf as Instrument of Investment”, he points out that the *awqaf* income of Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī produced up to ninety percent of free-floating profits. Other endowments of the contemporary Mamluk elite were extremely profitable as well. He then hypothesizes that this surplus money was used to finance the army.²⁶

²³ David Ayalon, “The System of Payment in Mamluk Military Society,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1/3 (1958): p 291.

²⁴ Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as a Great Power*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 196.

²⁵ Petry, *Protectors*, pp. 208-209.

²⁶ Carl Petry, “Waqf as an Instrument of Investment in the Mamluk Sultanate: Security vs. Profit?,” in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa* edited by Miura Toru and John Edward Philips, (London: Kegan Paul, 2000), p. 105.

The Egyptian scholar ‘Imād Abū Ghāzī is another scholar working with archival documentation. He has analyzed forty original Mamluk sale documents and another five hundred and thirty deeds from the Ottoman archives in Cairo, publishing his findings in 2002.²⁷ He thereby did find that the majority of endowments he examined came from former *iqṭāʿ* lands and were issued after 1453 during the reigns of the sultans Īnāl, Khushqadam, Qāyṭbāy, and al-Ghawrī.²⁸ For him the results of the analysis were that land tenure went from the monopoly of the Mamluk military class towards an ownership of the urban elite. Further, he argues that as the *iqṭāʿ* system collapsed, the social structure of the land changed in favor of the new urban elites, and corruption became extremely widespread.²⁹ While the work has contributed to increasing our knowledge of the land tenure transformation process as such, it has encountered some critical remarks on its conclusion. There is, for example, the idea that without the Ottoman conquest, the Mamluk Empire would have turned into a proto-capitalistic society, which seems highly hypothetical and unlikely.³⁰

The last author who shall be presented here is Daisuke Igarashi, who coined the term “*waqfization*” in his 2006 article on the establishment of the *dīwān al-mufrad*.³¹ In a series of articles, he very profoundly elaborated on the financial organization of the Mamluk realm culminating in his 2015 book, *Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy, and Imperial Power in Medieval Syro-Egypt*.³² In the book, Igarashi argues that *waqfization* was ongoing since the middle of the fourteenth century as land did regularly change its status between *iqṭāʿ*, *waqf*, leased land, and *milk* from then on. This mixed system was especially prevalent under Sultan Barqūq who had initiated new financial institutions to cope with challenges of his time. These institutions were then re-adjusted by subsequent sultans. In general, Igarashi explains that there was an overall tendency from the granting of land income from *iqṭāʿ* holdings towards direct payments of Mamluk soldiers.³³ Following up on Igarashi’s work, one might consider that it was maybe this diversification of the

²⁷ Abū Ghāzī, *Fī Tārīkh*.

²⁸ Abū Ghāzī, *Fī Tārīkh*, pp. 11, 16. For a thorough discussion of the work, see: Adam Sabra, “The Rise of a New Class? Land Tenure in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: A Review Article, *Mamluk Studies Review* 8/2 (2004): p. 207.

²⁹ Abū Ghāzī, *Fī Tārīkh*, pp. 80, 103.

³⁰ Abū Ghāzī, *Fī Tārīkh*, p. 112.

³¹ Daisuke Igarashi, “The Establishment and Development of al-Dīwān al-Mufrad: Its Background and Implications,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 10/1 (2006): p. 121.

³² Daisuke Igarashi, *Land Tenure*.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 57, p. 140.

Mamluk financial system which suited the Mamluk Empire best. So it might not have been a question of *iqṭāʿ* vs. *waqf* but maybe more about the right quota between the two. In this context, one could maybe interpret the financial institution of the al-dhakhīrah (treasure provisions) initiated by Qāyṭbāy as an individual financial back-up system of the sultan in order to balance its financial systems and help the divans to function properly.³⁴

Was waqfization a deliberate policy or not?

In what follows, the arguments in favor of the possibility that the “*waqfization*” was indeed initiated as deliberate policy by the Mamluk officials in order to cope with the challenges of the second half of the fifteenth century will be presented. Then the counter arguments shall be discussed.

Arguments for a deliberate policy

One, if not the main challenge of the Mamluks in the second half of the fifteenth century, was the expanding Ottoman Empire after its conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In this context, I do not think that it was by sheer coincidence that the *waqfization* accelerated with Sultan Īnāl's (r.1453-1461) ascension to the throne in the same year. The mighty Ottoman army was known for its cannons and foot soldiers – the Janissaries – who were paid in cash. We also know that Mamluk spies and delegations were present in Istanbul thereafter. They certainly informed the Mamluk sultans about how the Ottoman state and how its army were organized.³⁵ Since the fifteenth century and the large conquests in the Balkans, the intense use of *waqf* was throughout “Ottoman society, urban and rural, both in the form of individually functioning units and as (...) institutional system”. Moreover, Randi Deguilhem has stated that, “... it is now a well-documented fact that sums of cash were also widely possessed by Ottoman waqfs,” and she explains further:

“Primary research has also dismantled the misconception of waqf as a secure tax shelter. Ottoman administrative records reveal that both buildings and agricultural properties belonging to the foundations were indeed subject to taxes. Work by Barkan clearly demonstrates that waqf and freehold lands (calculated together as a unit) contributed

³⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

³⁵ See for example: Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Sea-Power and Levantine diplomacy in the Age of Discovery*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 84.

rather more than 13% in the form of taxes to the overall revenue budget for the Ottoman Empire in 1527-28.”³⁶

Therefore, I would hypothesize that it was this kind of *waqf* system that the Mamluks tried to install in order to generate more cash. Still, they had to adjust to the local circumstances causing these reforms to oscillate back and forth. However, the positive effect of *waqf* for the state’s income situation was, as Heidemann has already shown for the late Abbasid and Ayyubid periods, important in the overall process of generating wealth in Middle Eastern societies.³⁷ The Mamluks would have known this as well. The need to generate more cash for direct payments was urgent and can be witnessed as well by reforms in the trade sector. From the 1450s onwards, the Mamluk sultans agreed to a so-called “stock system”, whereby Venetian merchants had to buy a certain stock of spices from the sultan each year, before being allowed to buy on the free market. However, the sultans sold this stock below the price of the free market. Their interest was in having a fixed and steady yearly amount of revenue, which they could rely on in advance for their budget previsions. The interest of the Venetians in this arrangement is obvious as well.³⁸ Francisco Appellaniz has therefore argued that Qāyṭbāy was looking for alternative funding methods for the military, as the *iqṭā’* system seemed less and less appropriate for his military needs.³⁹ In several recent articles, I have shown that starting during the reign of Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468-1496) there was a continuing military policy of the Mamluks to create foot soldier units with firearms, which were directly paid. Moreover, firearms, canons, and other material had to be imported.⁴⁰ In the unruly times of al-

³⁶ Randi Deguilhem “Waḳf: IV in the Ottoman Empire to 1914,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Online, First published online: Brill, 2012.

³⁷ See, therefore: Stefan Heidemann, “Charity and Piety for the Transformation of the Cities: The New Direction in Taxation and Waqf Policy in Mid-Twelfth-Century Syria and Northern Mesopotamia,” in *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, edited by Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev, (New York: De Gruyter, 2009), pp 153-174; Stefan Heidemann, “How to Measure Economic Growth in the Middle East? A Framework of Inquiry for the Middle Islamic Period,” in *Material Evidence and Narrative Sources: Interdisciplinary Studies of the History of the Middle East*, edited by Daniella Talmon-Heller and Katia Cytryn-Silverman, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 30-57.

³⁸ Francisco Javier Appellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, “Pouvoir et Finance en Méditerranée pré-Moderne: Le deuxième état mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517),” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales Anejo* 66, (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2006): p. 239.

³⁹ Appellániz, *Pouvoir et Finance*, 172.

⁴⁰ Albrecht Fuess, “How to Cope with the Scarcity of Commodities? The Mamluk’s quest for Metal,” in *The Mamluk Sultanate and its Neighbors: Economic, Social and Cultural Entanglements*, edited by Reuven Amitai and Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019), pp. 61-74; Albrecht Fuess, “Mamluk Politics,” in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art*, edited by Stephan Conermann, (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013), pp. 95-117; Albrecht Fuess, “Les Janissaires, les Mamlouks et les armes à feu. Une comparaison des systèmes militaires ottoman et mamelouk à partir de la moitié du quinzième siècle,” *Turcica* 41 (2009): pp. 209-227.

Nāṣir Muḥammad II (1496 -1497) we hear of an Italian canon caster who lost his life in a military fight in 1497.⁴¹ For him and other European mercenaries, receiving an *iqṭā'* holding in the Egyptian countryside was certainly less attractive than cash.

Arguments against a deliberate policy

The first and main argument against *waqfization* as a deliberate policy is the question: where is the smoking gun? I have no written proof whatsoever telling that by this and that date the Mamluk Sultan decided to copy the Ottomans and reform the whole system in the Ottoman way. There is only the indirect evidence of the rising percentage of cash payments to Mamluk soldiers in place of granting them land. Additionally, there is the tendency of changing the economy into a more cash-based system, which also points towards *waqfization*. However, I am not sure if *waqf* was taxed regularly in the Mamluk Sultanate. I can only say certainly that after the 1517 conquest, the Ottoman state taxed *waqf* holdings in the former Mamluk lands the same way as it did those in the rest of the empire.

Another argument against a possible *waqf* “master-plan” hypothesis is that there were a lot of disputes following deaths of sultans in the fifteenth century about how to deal with *waqf* property of royal widows and their children. New sultans often tried to get hold of these *waqfs*, which led to social unrest; this is not a sign of a functioning and cohesive plan but rather of a chaos management in order to prevent the worsening of the situation.

Conclusion

What do we have concerning the overall assessment of the *waqfization*? The main point is that it clearly happened on a large scale after the mid-fifteenth century. For the exact reason of the phenomenon, we still have to speculate. It might have been a sign of economic downturn as a whole and symptom of the Mamluk Empire falling apart. But, why should the leaders of the country act against the interests of their regime, which they had sworn to secure as Mamluk warriors? Hence my speculation: leading amirs tried to adjust the system in the direction of the very successful Ottomans, and in doing so, they were able to stabilize their reign for almost seventy years after the fall of Constantinople despite the fact that they had less resources at hand than the Ottomans. However, the way the Mamluk sources describe the situation of the Mamluk lands is

⁴¹ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, vol. 3, p. 375.

that of a realm which is in constant chaos and crises. But does the long survival of this crisis state not prove that the continuous reforms – including the mixing of different land tenure models – did work to a certain extent? Hopefully, within the current EgyLandscape Project, new facts might come to light which will help us to understand the processes of land tenure better.

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