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THE ORIGINS OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP
OF LAND IN EGYPT: A REAPPRAISAL

In the historiography of Egypt it has long been accepted that private ownership of land was introduced in the nineteenth century. This development in statute law has often been linked analytically to a process of "modernization." Modernization theory posits a fundamental dichotomy between two ideal-type societies, the traditional and modern, which implies an equally sharp discontinuity between historical eras: before and after the beginning of modernization. In this view, traditional societies lack the potential for generating significant social change from within. Change results rather from the expansion of communications and diversification of technology worldwide from modern Europe and North America. In the process of modernization, traditional norms and structures break down in the host societies, and new, rational values and institutions emerge in their place. The development of Egypt's new land regime is usually considered one such change.

In most historical studies to date, the impact of Europe and/or the rise of powerful reformers influenced by European ideas have been seen as crucial to the beginnings of modernization in the Middle East. For Egypt, the two events most symbolic of this are the French occupation of 1798–1801 and the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha, 1805–1848, the "founder of modern Egypt." On closer examination of the sources, however, the evidence shows not historical discontinuity but its opposite; not the shattering and replacement of institutions but their dynamic evolution, due as much to indigenous forces as to outside influences. This calls for a reappraisal of socioeconomic change in Egypt, of its relationship to European influences, and of the significance to it of reform legislation.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PROPERTY RELATIONS

Contrary to the received tradition in most history texts, the transformation of property relations in Egypt and other Ottoman lands was already underway, and had led to the appearance of forms of private ownership of land, long before the famous reforms of the nineteenth century. This becomes evident upon examination of the behavior of landholding elements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of their struggles to acquire or maintain control of the land at three levels: as a source of revenue, as a disposable source of income, and as a means of production and subsistence.
As these different levels of utility of the land indicate, a hierarchy of shared rights or claims to it and/or its produce existed in the period before Muhammad Ali’s rise to power, similar to other precapitalist orders in Europe and Asia.\(^5\) Political, economic, and social relations were intimately connected with property relations. Or to put it another way, property relations were social relations in the broadest sense of the term, sanctified in law.

The establishment of private ownership of land in place of this system was not the creation of ‘rights’ where none existed before, nor simply a matter of their transfer from the state to individuals. Rather it involved the consolidation of these shared claims into one sphere and their appropriation by individuals. It represents the establishment of exclusive control of the land by individuals as the prevailing system of property relations in place of shared control.

Ottoman administration of land tenure in Egypt embodied the principle of shared rights.\(^6\) The sultan (i.e., the state) was by law ‘owner’ of most agricultural land. State authority over the land was in fact limited to taxation and enforced maintenance of the irrigation works through use of the corvée. Second, to carry out taxation and administration in the countryside, the state had turned to a variety of intermediaries who were made responsible for one or more villages, and who received a portion of the revenues from them and from privately held sections of land in them in return for their services. Finally, peasants held traditional rights to till the land and remain on it.

In Lower Egypt and parts of Middle Egypt peasants held their land sections for life, and passed them on to their heirs, as long as taxes were paid (hence the term *athar* or *athariyya*, loosely: ‘that which remains’). The annual Nile flood caused more extreme variations in the area of cultivable land in Upper Egypt and the remainder of Middle Egypt, and so land here was annually surveyed and redivided within the village community (*ard misāḥa*, ‘survey land’). Thus individual security of tenure was guaranteed the holder of *athar* land, and village clans must have maintained a similar continuous claim to their due portion of *misāḥa* land. Neither the state nor intermediaries interfered in the production process except indirectly, through tax demands and irrigation works.

J. C. Scott has noted that peasants value greatest and defend most tenaciously these two conditions: security of tenure and control of decisionmaking in the production process. The peasant community’s direct control of land and production is its means of maintaining security in face of unpredictable forces — such as weather, or a market economy — and of guaranteeing to itself a culturally defined, minimum, acceptable subsistence. Interference with these traditional rights, or rigid tax/rent demands which threaten to push peasants below the acceptable subsistence level, are more resented and more likely resisted than systems of exploitation which are more flexible but which siphon off a greater amount of their surplus.\(^7\) Ottoman law, significantly, provided for lowered taxes in years of drought or disastrous floods, and also guaranteed the terms of traditional peasant tenure.\(^8\)

Ottoman regulations likewise provided for checks on the intermediaries, to prevent them from tyrannizing the peasantry, from usurping state prerogatives in control of the land, and from pocketing more than their legal share of reve-
nues. Salaried officials were originally employed to oversee cultivation and the collection of taxes. During the seventeenth century tax farms, *iltizâms*, appeared.9 They were acquired for a year or more through an auction held by the Treasury. With the iltizâm, its holder, the *multazim*, received a tax-free section of land, *ûsya*, which he had cultivated for his own profit by wage or corvée labor, or which he rented out. His personal profit, *fâ‘id*, from ûsya land and excess taxes collected could come to four or five times the taxes remitted, indicating the profitability of iltizâms.10

Law must be backed by force to be effective, however, and in a situation such as this where the state is weak, its formal regulations provide little indication of actual practices. Each party to the shared rights to the land of Ottoman Egypt, as elsewhere, could assert or defend them only according to its command of means of coercion – its political power. As Ottoman authority in the provinces weakened, its land laws became increasingly irrelevant, while intermediaries gained increasing control of the land at the state’s expense. By the early eighteenth century they had acquired landholding rights in Egypt that established them as landlords in every sense of the term. These included: (1) lifetime possession of the iltizâm, as long as taxes were paid; (2) inheritance of it by descendants, wives, or white slaves; (3) the ability to convert land into *waqf*, thereby guaranteeing the family’s continued possession of it; (4) the ability to mortgage the land, (5) to pawn it, or (6) to sell it outright.11

These criteria are precisely those used in previous studies of nineteenth-century Egypt to show a movement toward private ownership.12 Paradigms that see private ownership as appearing in Egypt during the nineteenth century at the earliest should thus be discarded.

The intermediaries’ usurpation of state authority over the land was marked by a proliferation of legal fictions used to get around the formal, legally inalienable status of the land. Mortgage and pawning were conducted under the euphemism of “transfer,” *isqât*; sales were called “indefinite transfer,” *isqât ilâ al-âbad*.13 Similar fictions were employed in transactions involving *waqf* land.14 The resort to legal fictions should not be surprising since they were used in various times and places, for example, to circumvent Qur’anic prohibitions of risk-taking and interest,15 and were also used to circumvent restrictions on land-ownership in parts of contemporary Europe.16 Developments that caused land to be treated as an alienable commodity led to the use of these fictions, but the continuation of old legal terminology for land tenure on the surface has obscured this transformation.

The reestablishment of a strong state in nineteenth-century Egypt arrested the development toward private ownership in part. Yet, paradoxically, it facilitated this movement over the long term. The state concentrated control of the land as never before in a single sphere, in its own hands. Second, it violated the traditional terms of peasant tenure by interfering in production and transferring tenures as it saw fit. Finally, the weakening of the state after 1840 allowed a new generation of intermediaries and privileged landholders it had created to influence land tenure policies to their own benefit.

If land tenure issues can be appreciated in terms of competition or struggle
among various actors over the land and its product, then developments in the
nineteenth century appear as but a continuation of trends in the eighteenth cen-
tury. The legislation of private ownership of land came toward the end of this
long-term struggle for control of the land. It legitimized the new order this
struggle had wrought, firmly establishing the positions of those who had gained
in the process: the large landowners in particular, but also a stratum of wealthy
peasants. Finally, it represents a late stage in the transition from shared to ex-
clusive rights to the land.

The circumstances that led to this transformation will require extensive in-
vestigation in the future. Here is presented evidence that this process was, in
fact, in train, as well as the factors that appear to have influenced it and its out-
come. Local and regional economic trends are considered, as well as changes
in the nature of the state and its ability to regulate land tenure. The changing
relationships among peasants, intermediaries/landlords, and the state, and be-
tween them and the land are also followed.

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN BEFORE 1800

The lands of the eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman rule, while separated
politically and culturally from Europe, appear to have been linked to it as part
of a larger region subject to similar broad economic and demographic trends.
The Ottoman Empire felt the effects of the sixteenth-century ‘‘price revolu-
tion’’ and experienced a rise in population then at approximately the same time
as did Europe. Population in Europe, at least, began to increase again in the
eighteenth century.17 This and the beginnings of industrial revolution led to a
nearly century-long rise in the absolute price of agricultural commodities which
is visible in both Europe and the Middle East. The price of land increased in
turn, and speculative trading in it – even where legally prohibited – appeared in
both regions.18 New elements shouldered their way in among the landholding
classes, and local landholding and/or commercial aristocracies often were able
to increase their political strength vis-à-vis their monarch and peasantry.

The changing composition of landowning classes is marked in Europe by
communers acquiring noble estates – sometimes openly – even where it was
prohibited by law, and in the Ottoman Empire by the entry of merchants into
landholding.19 Landed aristocracies (or their equivalents) were enticed by ris-
ing prices and enabled by weakened state authority to increase their control
over their holdings. The established sociopolitical orders, connected closely
with property relations, were being undermined, and at the same time state au-
thority over land tenure was being whittled away. Both developments laid the
bases for institutional change at a later date.

In the sixteenth century, rising prices in the Mediterranean region had led to
increased exports of foodstuffs and raw materials from the Ottoman Empire.
Venetian ships loaded grain in Egypt’s ports at midcentury. Thereafter the Em-
pire’s population seems to have caught up with production, and the export of
grain to the West was prohibited. The Greek archipelago then became a center
for contraband grain trade which flourished in the eighteenth century.20 Egyp-
tian wheat, rice, and beans found their way to the West according to shifting market demand and the relative ability of the Porte to enforce its trade regulations.

Industrial crops—wool, silk, cotton, flax, leather, oils, and dyestuffs—acquired a new importance in the eighteenth century owing to Europe’s industrial expansion. In addition, both regional and European demand for the Levant’s fine cottons and silks, and for its spun cotton and wool, led to increased textile production in certain areas. All of this resulted in expanded cash crop production, especially in cotton, producing yet another effect: a trend toward greater regional specialization. The planting of mulberry trees in the Lebanon and Macedonia and expansion of cotton cultivation in Macedonia, Anatolia, and Palestine were accompanied by the development of food and vegetable dye production in other areas. The Biqa‘ and Hawrân became important grain-producing regions fought over by the amirs of the Lebanon and the wâlis of Sidon and Damascus. Egyptian foodstuffs supplied Syria, Macedonia, and Istanbul, as well as being marketed in Egypt and the West. Egypt also produced indigo and safflower dyes for internal and export markets. Crop specialization in Egypt is somewhat problematic, as more than one crop per year could be raised in many areas. Different districts did tend to specialize, however, in cotton, flax, dyestuffs, oilseeds, sugar cane, or food crops.

While only a small part of Egypt’s external trade was conducted directly with the West, price movements in Cairo during this century clearly show that the country was feeling the effects of the overall increase in trade and the rise in agricultural commodity prices, suggesting that the factors behind the price rise may have been generalized, and not simply a matter of Europe’s influence. The price of beans, wheat, rice, cattle, and camels rose two and a half times during the century. Mutton increased three times. Butter, oils, cheese, sugar, and honey rose twofold. Industrial commodities also show price increases: the price of raw cotton increased nearly fivefold, while the price of flax and spun cotton doubled. The export price of safflower dye increased nearly three-fold.

In Egypt as elsewhere, rising prices enhanced the value placed on land, a major factor in its transformation into private property.

In the sixteenth century the Ottomans had begun to convert Balkan and Anatolian timâr lands into iltizâms which court circles and urban “commercial-usury capital” acquired. At the same time these elements began to illegally purchase timârs. Weakening state control and economic opportunities also led those timârlâs who could, to convert their holdings, illegally, into iltizâms. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the appearance of life-term tax farms, malîkânes, following the development of a speculative market in landholdings. These centuries also saw the appearance of the Balkan çiftlik, privately owned commercial estates devoid of any obligations to the state. The çiftlik holder owned the land outright, and often the tools, animals, and seeds his tenants used. Here, the process of usurpation of state control was complete, and the terms of peasant tenure had also been altered. Çiftlik spread rapidly throughout the Balkans in the late eighteenth century, associated closely with “the diffusion of the cultivation of new colonial products: cotton and maize.”
The production and trade of such cash crops were the economic basis of the rise of powerful provincial notables, the a'yān.27

In the Lebanon, the expansion of sericulture was organized by Maronite and Druze shaykhs and the Maronite monastic orders. As in the Balkans, the concentration of land in fewer hands and the increased exploitation of tenants are associated with the spread of market-oriented agriculture. In both regions the conversion of holdings into waqf—property set aside for the ostensible support of pious works—played an important role in the alienation and concentration of land.28

The rise of Shaykh Zāhir al-‘Umar in Palestine is associated with the spread of cotton cultivation. As multazims, Zāhir and other shaykhs were able to monopolize cotton by serving as middlemen between peasants and French merchants. His successor as local strongman, the Wāli of Sidon Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzār, sought to acquire as much land as possible in the form of malikāne. His monopolization of all production and trade anticipates the methods of Muhammad Ali.29

Ottoman officials were aware of the fiscal and political dangers of developments in landholding, though not always able to stop them. Attempts to reform the land regime which appear “modern” in inspiration were actually efforts to reestablish a greater degree of state control over the land. In the seventeenth century, reform-minded Ottomans criticized the malikhāne system, and it was decreed abolished under Ahmad III in 1714/1715.30 Military reverses weakened his position and led to the decree’s reversal three years later. He later attempted yet another reform, turning malikāne lands back into short-term itzīzāms and placing some under the administration of salaried state officials. Also, “for the first time in over a century extensive cadastral surveys were made. . . .”31

Efforts to curb the power of local notables and reestablish state control over the land were revived under Sultans Mustafa III and Abdulhamid I.32 Administrative and military reforms were always accompanied by fiscal reforms affecting landholding: the well-known reforms of Selim III and Mahmud II followed this pattern. To study Ottoman landholding in this period is to study a multifaceted struggle for the land itself, both between the political center and the provinces, and among the actors in each locale.

THE SITUATION IN EGYPT

While the agrarian history of Egypt in this period has yet to receive detailed examination, it is possible to reconstruct a partial picture of it from the evidence already available. The two, more-or-less constant political-economic factors favoring change in late Ottoman Egypt were the secular rise in agricultural prices and the weakness of state authority. But if conditions favor change, it is still human action and interaction which determines its course and outcome.

Under the conditions of the eighteenth century, intermediaries and peasants responded in a variety of ways affecting landholding and land use. Parallel to
changes elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, multazims in Egypt succeeded in transforming their iltizâms into a form of private property in land. Early in the eighteenth century, their new rights of disposition were expressed in the term “malikâne,” indicating that lifetime tenure had become common. Conversion of the land into waqf, and bequest, mortgage, pawning, or sale of it – through the device of isqât – were within the multazim’s power. The earliest register devoted to isqât in Egypt dates from 1728, indicating that by this time this legal fiction was commonly used in transactions involving landholdings.

Cairo’s merchants appear among the holders and purchasers of iltizâms in these registers, and speculative transactions appear to have often occurred within an absentee landholding class there. A merchant appears in court records as a holder of three villages in Daqahlîyya province as early as 1673, and the Sharâ’îbî merchant dynasty in particular increased their landholdings throughout the eighteenth century. T. Walz’s study of the gallâbâ merchants, those engaged in the Sudan trade, shows that some lesser merchants also acquired iltizâms. Others rented sections of iltizâm or waqf lands, or held mortgages of fallah land. Egypt’s wealthier ulama were also active in acquiring iltizâms, primarily in their home districts, in addition to their administration of waqf lands.

The wealthy merchants’ involvement in land was part of a general trend of investment in urban and rural properties and tax farms. The wealthiest ulama are hardly distinguishable from the large merchants in these financial dealings. Such investments made sense. The relative stagnation of coffee and textile prices undermined the most profitable commerce in the hands of indigenous merchants, while agricultural commodity prices rose. It is presently impossible to ascertain the extent of merchant involvement in landholding. A. A. Abd al-Rahim’s figures show merchants comprising only slightly more than one percent of the total number of multazims on the eve of the French invasion, as opposed to none a century and a half earlier. But the size of their holdings is unfortunately not indicated, nor is the number and extent of the mortgages that they undoubtedly held.

The evidence is also inconclusive concerning the accumulation of iltizâms. Many holdings appear to have been small and scattered: between 1658–1660 and 1797 the total number of multazims increased by more than 250 percent, although the extent of fractionalization of their holdings varied from one area to the next. On the other hand, some multazims were converting fallah land into ’usya land, a process reminiscent of the engrossment of demesne holdings in contemporary eastern Europe, under similar conditions.

The conversion of holdings into waqf is another example of the growth of de facto private property in land through the use of legal fictions. Waqf lands paid only a “protection tax” in this period to safeguard their status. Legally, they could not be divided or sold, nor were they commonly subject to confiscation. “Family,” or ahli, waqfs, furthermore, remained in the possession of the makers’ descendants. They received the bequest’s income until the extinction of the line, and only then did the revenues from an ahli waqf revert to the designated charitable work. Thus conversion of land into ahli waqf guaranteed the
family’s continued possession of it, along with important tax exemptions, and many multazims were able to convert their ûsyà holdings into waqf. Here, too, the growth of a market in land resulted in the exchange of waqf lands — despite the law — by what amounted to sale. Waqf lands were exploited in a way similar to ûsyà lands: the nàzîr, administrator, either leased them to a village shaykh or had them cultivated by means of wage labor.44

Jabarti reports that waqf lands surveyed in 1813 came to 600,000 faddans in Upper Egypt and the Cairo vicinity. Thus the amount of land converted to waqf in these areas alone came to some 20 percent of all of Egypt’s cultivated land, a measure of the extent to which land was taken out of the state’s control in this period. If Jabarti’s remarks are any guide, the concentration of waqf lands in the hands of wealthy nàzîrs and notables was indeed common. He mentions one Shams al-Dîn b. Hamûdà, a shaykh of the village of Bîr mà, Minûfiyya, who told him that his family held 1,000 faddans of waqf land for which no tax was paid, in addition to other lands for which he paid a nominal amount.46

Despite the consolidation of property rights and a tendency toward concentration of the land, multazims and nàzîrs do not appear to have been directly engaged in agricultural production nor did they attempt to alter the relations of production. Under the right conditions, investment to raise the productivity of land would have been a plausible response to the era’s price trends. But the adequately large income that many iltizàms appear to have offered, and the possibility of losing an iltizàm with a change of rulers in Cairo, probably discouraged investment. As occurred in the Balkans, the evidence so far indicates that increased exploitation rather than an increase in surplus production was the most common result of these rentiers’ activities.47

At the village level a variety of responses to the conditions of this century can also be observed. These encompass not only competition for control of the land, but also activities in the sphere of production which indicate a potential for agricultural development. At the present state of our knowledge it will have to suffice to present three situations illustrating these responses.

In Giza and much of the central Delta the Mamluk beys were able to maintain the greatest authority, indicated by the presence of “Mamluk houses” — residences for their local representatives — in the villages.48 These regions produced a variety of crops for the market — cotton, flax, oilseeds, dyestuffs, and various food crops.49 Here, social stratification was visible at the time of the French occupation, the result of control of local political and economic resources. Local police and administrative offices were monopolized by the wealthier village families and tended to be hereditary, starting with the position of village shaykh. He usually represented the most powerful clan in the village and was the supreme police and judicial authority in the village.50

In villages where the multazim rented out his ûsyà land, it was leased by one of the village shaykhs at a price reflecting the market in land. This varied according to its quality and proximity to a market town: the ûsyà lands near Bulaq went at the highest rate. If the multazim had the ûsyà cultivated for his own account through wage labor or corvée, the shaykhs and khûlíîs were responsible for assigning the land and were paid for their services. The khûlí, an official
drawn from the village, was also charged with checking the survey and assessment of village lands performed by the multazim's officials— a position of considerable power and potential wealth. The economic position of the wealthy families was also strengthened through important tax exemptions. The shaykhs, kūlis, and shūhids (local, professional witnesses for tax purposes) were exempt from barrānī taxes on portions of their land. These were extraordinary taxes in kind which the multazims levied in different villages according to their ability to impose them and the villagers' ability to pay. Butter, sheep, cheese, grain, honey, chickens, and other farm products were taken, all of whose prices were increasing in absolute terms and drastically so in terms of the continually debased coinage. Barrānī accounts appear in the tax registers from the seventeenth century on, but along with other taxes they increased greatly during the eighteenth.

The financial and political power of these families also enabled them to acquire additional lands which were kept off the tax registers with the connivance of other local officials. This was facilitated by the land system in the villages of Lower Egypt, since transactions also took place at this level, though legally only concerning usufructuary rights. In these districts, then, a wealthy peasant stratum in alliance with the ruling elite used its political and economic resources to acquire additional lands and tax exemptions, and were also in a position to rent land from absentee holders, either to produce more for the market or to profit from the rising price of land by subleasing.

A quite different phenomenon was the appearance of what could be termed militant peasantry in certain areas. As a political-economic phenomenon, these peasants were protecting and sometimes extending their control over areas of market-oriented agriculture and commerce, as well as using their strength to resist the increasing burden of taxes and fees levied by the multazims and the provincial administration. As a sociological phenomenon, this development is associated with the sedentarization of certain bedouin tribes. Once they have become cultivators, bedouin are nearly indistinguishable from peasants— some even adopted the fallahin's brown woolen dress. Still, they retained a tribal identity and solidarity vis-à-vis outsiders. "Bedouin influence" seems to have been the common factor in those areas which maintained a quasi-independence from the beys.

In parts of lower Sharqiyya and Daqahlīyya a sort of bedouin-fallah symbiosis occurred. North of Bilbays, bedouin were described as the "caste prèponderante . . . sans être le plus nombreuse. . . ." They camped adjacent to fallah villages, engaging in stockbreeding and cultivation as well as in escorting caravans along the route to Syria and the Hijaz. French observers described this region as rich in various field crops, orchards, and especially date groves. The peninsula of Manzala rivaled Damietta as a rice-growing region. The mutual interests of the bedouin and fallah here led to military alliances. "Village wars" were jointly conducted against neighboring districts, and the frequent mention of peasants carrying arms to the fields and of fortified towns and villages attest to this strife. Despite such conflict these reports are silent about any resultant "devastation." Village wars were fought for control of
water and land, no doubt provoked by the increasing value of land and herds and by occasional variations in the flood level.

An equally important dimension of this symbiosis was the ability to resist the bey’s exactions. Tax payments and other relations were a matter of negotiation between the bedouin shaykhs and the Mamluks. Unlike the central Delta region, there is no mention of “Mamluk houses” for lower Sharqiyya and Daqahliyya, indicating that the beys and their subordinates could establish no permanent presence there.

The presence of a militant peasantry in Middle Egypt also appears to be related to the increasing importance of cash crops, but here the settled bedouin, “arabes cultivateurs,” subjugated the fallahin and usurped their land. From about the middle of the century one tribe had established itself and taken up cultivation on the right bank of the Nile in the regions of Atfih, Ashmunin, and Manfalût. At the time of Jomard’s observations (1799–1801) they were expanding their control of land across the river. Already they held most of the islands of Middle Egypt and a strip of land a quarter league wide on the left bank. The land seized was planted in tobacco, indigo, sugar cane, date palms, and forage crops, as well as melons, grains, and legumes. The first group of crops was the most important, grown for local and regional markets. Sugar, indigo, and wool were the principal industries of the villages, and these as well as dates were sold to Cairo merchants. Large tracts of forage crops were also planted, as summer cultivation required a supply of cattle to turn the waterwheels, and the military power and communications of these villages depended upon large herds of horses and camels.

In these and other bedouin villages of Middle and Upper Egypt the shaykhs acquired a preponderant political and economic role. It is primarily in these regions that small amounts of village shaykhs’ masmiḥ land appeared, land held by them free of any tax, said to be “vols faits par des Arabes qui sont établis par force dans divers villages,” and passed on to their heirs. This observation lays bare the way in which privileged landholding rights could be created at the village level through the exercise of local political power. The displacement of fallahin by bedouin in these districts is one of the most obvious forms that the struggle or competition for land between cultivators took. It was no less real, however, where wealthy peasants, here or in the Delta, acquired land through receiving pawns or mortgages, or through purchase of usufructuary rights—again, aided by their command of local political and economic resources.

In the militant peasant districts of Middle Egypt, “Mamluk houses” were also unknown, and at the time of the French occupation taxes were collected from them with difficulty or not at all. Here and in lower Sharqiyya the extent of the bey’s authority versus the villagers’ independence must have been fluid, depending on the military strength either side could marshal at any time. Title to the land in these areas remained in the hands of multazims and taxes were paid, although these peasants may well have escaped the full weight of the period’s increasing taxation, which would have enabled them to benefit more from the secular price rise.

In Damietta’s rice-growing region, Girard’s reports indicate that peasant
farmers were responding positively to the market opportunities of the time. Peasants leased land from the multazims for either a cash rent per faddan or a portion of the harvest, the farmer being responsible for all costs. As rice farming required considerable working capital for waterwheels, animals and drivers to turn them, canal maintenance, and planting, thinning, and harvesting, the farmer next turned to Damietta's rice merchants for a loan at interest. After the harvest these merchants purchased the crop, had it milled, and placed it on the market. The farmer employed a permanent work force as well as seasonal migrant labor, all of whom were paid wages. Girard noted that by such arrangements, 'the exploitation of the rice farms resembles more or less that of our farms of Europe.' This is the clearest example of peasant entrepreneurship and development toward a capitalist organization of the relations of production in agriculture.

To summarize, peasants behaved under the conditions of the times in a variety of ways which reflected their material interests. Peasants acquired and/or protected their holdings through the exercise of local power, including at times armed force. Security of tenure may not have seemed threatened to Damietta's rice farmers, since predictable flood waters and the steady demand for rice must have ensured satisfaction of rental and credit arrangements, and must have made their automatic renewal relatively easy. This, at any rate, is indicated by their willingness to go heavily into debt at the beginning of each season. In each case, peasants retained or enforced security of tenure, and sufficient freedom of action in production to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the rising prices of commodities and land.

POLITICS AND LAND TENURE:
FROM ALI BEY TO MUHAMMAD ALI

Both the Ottomans and their local rivals for power in Egypt confronted landholding and commercial interests, and attempted to enlist their support through a mixture of coercion and cooption. But to the extent that these interests were thereby strengthened, the rulers were correspondingly weakened through loss of revenues and at times the loss of control of the countryside. To the extent that the rulers suppressed them, however, they undermined their own political and financial bases of support. It was a dilemma that Egypt's rulers would also face in the nineteenth century.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a struggle for Egypt's revenues on two levels. Intermediaries were largely successful in acquiring rights to the land, reducing the fiscal and administrative control of the state. Second, the contest between the wāli of Cairo and local political forces would determine who controlled and exploited the urban and rural tax structures.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a number of strong wālis were able to adjust state taxes to inflation, to extend them to land that had been concealed from the registers, and to reduce diversions of imperial revenues by middlemen, all of which raised state revenues for a time. In the period of Mamluk ascendancy, when strong rulers were able to establish themselves in
Cairo, the tendency was also to attempt to tighten control over and take a larger share of the lands’ revenues.

With Ali Bey al-Kabir (ruled 1760-1772, with interruptions) came the first of a number of attempts at political and economic centralization. Control of customs and land-tax collection was the economic basis of his power. He intervened in the customs houses, ousting the Jewish agents and turning them over to Syrian merchant allies. As for land taxes, the treasury now received them as a result of direct negotiations between the Wāli and the Seyh ul-Beled [of Cairo, de facto ruler of Egypt] of the time rather than by the [former] system of imposition and collection. [Assessment] and collection of the taxes from the cultivators was controlled and executed entirely by the Seyh ul-Beled and his Mamlūks, who delivered to the Imperial Treasury the amounts agreed on in the negotiations.

Ali Bey and his successors also increased the number and weight of extraordinary taxes levied in the towns and rural areas.

As efforts to establish greater central control affected land tenure, they took the form of replacing multazims of the opposition party with one’s own followers. Ali Bey had his rivals banished or killed, and distributed their landholdings among his followers, an unprecedented interference in the land regime. The tightening of control over the intermediaries – while still working through them – was a strategy also followed in the short-lived attempts of Hasan Pasha (1786) and Yusuf Pasha (1801) to reassert Imperial control over the province, as it was in Napoleon’s reorganization. Muhammad Ali followed a similar route in his first years as wāli until the fruition of these short-term policies and new economic circumstances allowed and induced him to take more drastic measures.

The pace of his reform of the land regime, part of an overall drive for centralization, varied according to the balance of political forces in the country, as it had under his predecessors. But short-term economic and political conditions also pushed policy in the direction of centralization. More than two decades of war in Europe proved a windfall for the rulers of this food-exporting country. Thus Murad Bey had profited from the war of the First Coalition, and Muhammad Ali was in a similar position when war broke out anew. Egyptian grain began to flow to Malta in 1808, the volume increasing two years later when the export price of wheat rose from 26 to 80 piasters per ardebb in less than twelve months under the Pasha’s new monopoly. Wheat prices in Cairo at the time ranged from 12 to 18 piasters. In 1811 the export price reached 100 piasters and remained high until 1813. In 1816–1817, due to European crop failures, the export price of wheat rose again, during a short export boom, from 60 to 120 piasters per ardebb. Second, the war in Arabia required a transport fleet and maintenance of a large force of mercenaries, adding urgency to the search for new revenues.

The boom in grain sales no doubt enabled Muhammad Ali to pursue his preparations for the Hijaz expedition more quickly, and helped finance the concluding phases of his struggle with the Mamluk amirs. In addition to the Mamluks’ dealings with the English, their control of the grain of Upper Egypt must have drawn him into putting an early end to them. The Citadel massacre followed the
Mamluks’ repeated violation of agreements to pay tribute—in wheat.\textsuperscript{72} Thus the trade boom strengthened the Pasha’s hand, and along with the costs of military preparations accelerated his program of centralization. But major changes in the land regime were likely to be attempted in any event. That they were on the way is indicated by the gradual tightening of control over the land which began in 1806, and by the importance that control of the land had taken in the struggles of the previous century.

As the area of Egypt under his control expanded, Muhammad Ali followed a policy toward land tenure which—on the surface—may appear contradictory, owing to the double-edged strategy of coercion and cooption. On the one hand, he allowed the iltizām system to remain during his first ten years in power, granting iltizāms anew to his family and followers. On the other, he pursued a policy aimed at undermining the authority of the multazims over the fallahin, collecting some taxes directly from the latter, and encouraging them to voice their grievances against the multazims.\textsuperscript{73} The appearance of randomness in the land policy belies the political strategy employed. The aim was control of all the country’s resources, but in order to accomplish this, it was necessary to piece together a ruling elite of family, officers, bureaucrats, and merchants, many of whom were placed in charge of tax farms and tracts of land under varying arrangements, including in some cases an obligation to restore uncultivated land to productivity. Consolidation of power also involved coming to terms with other political forces too powerful or indispensable to suppress entirely—certain ulama, the village shaykhs, and certain bedouin shaykhs. Piecemeal moves to extend his authority reflect Muhammad Ali’s understanding that any wholesale changes would have encountered too much resistance. Instead, he proceeded against the weaker targets first, temporizing when strong opposition was met, in order to keep a united opposition from forming.

In 1806, half the multazims’ fā’id was claimed. By 1807, māsūmih lands were being taxed. Toward the end of the same year, Jabarti reports that lands held by the ulama and those under their protection were put under the regular tax. In 1808, receiving reports that many multazims were unable to pay the sums demanded, Muhammad Ali had their villages reassigned to his family and followers. Many of these were in underpopulated Buhayra province. To correct the labor shortage, town dwellers bearing nisbas from that province’s villages were forcibly relocated there.\textsuperscript{74}

In 1809, the Pasha ordered the compiling of a register for the taxation of waqf and ūsya lands and attempted to apply it first in Buhayra. Along with new market taxes, this measure brought a protest from some of the ulama. On more than one occasion deputations were assured that the new taxes would not be imposed, but the persistence of the delegations indicates that some in fact may have been collected. Land taxes were thus selectively and unequally applied in this period, a legacy from the previous century and a reflection of political realities. Jabarti records a meeting of ulama, officers, and notables convened the following year to consider means of improving the country’s revenues. The shaykhs were enraged at the suggestion that their lands be taxed at a rate equal with that of the others. Yet shortly thereafter, registers were drawn up to in-
clude all land for taxation, including ūṣya, waqf, and land held by the village shaykhs untaxed until then.75

After 1810 the reorganization of the land regime and agriculture entered a more intensive phase. Even before this time, multazims had faced extreme pressure to meet their tax obligations on time, even if it meant paying out of their pockets or borrowing at interest. If a multazim was unable to meet his obligations he had to surrender the land without being freed of his debt. In 1812, with the conquest of Upper Egypt, nearly all lands there were seized by the state and taxed directly. Waqf lands attached to mosques were taxed at half rate. These taxes were taken in kind, and wheat was already being accepted in place of cash payments in other parts of the country. Wheat not taken in taxation was subject to a state monopoly. Rice was monopolized from 1812. The rice-producing lands were put under the supervision of salaried officials who took the place of merchants in advancing capital to the peasants and purchasing their harvests.76

The cadastral survey of Lower Egypt, 1813–1814, was the culmination of this phase of centralization. All cultivated and uncultivated land was surveyed. Land was recorded in the names of its holders, or cultivators, or those indicated as tenants at the time – that is, the names of all with a claim to the land were registered.77 The surveyors used a standard faddan reportedly smaller than most customary ones which ranged in size from 200 to 400 square qasabas (a linear measure originally taken from a sugar cane); the new faddan equaled 333 1/3 qasabas. Land was classified according to its fertility and a corresponding scale of taxation set.78 At the cadaster’s completion, most intermediary landholders were to be dispossessed for a promised pension.

The organization of a pyramidal administration was completed along with the cadaster and the land confiscations. All officials above the village level were salaried. They were charged with public security, maintenance of the irrigation system, and supervision of cultivation – including the allocation of seeds, implements, and animals as needed – as well as collection of taxes, and the purchase of crops subject to state monopolies.79 Taxes were unified but not necessarily reduced, and the old intermediate structure, already partly bypassed, was eliminated.

During 1814 the multazims were allowed to collect the harvest on their ūṣya lands, although they found that the peasants had heard of the confiscations and now resisted the corvée. The bureau charged with reviewing ahli waqfs required their holders to present their deeds with supporting statements. Those with titles verified after the Ottoman reconquest of 1801 were to be taxed at half rate. Waqfs assigned to charitable works were incorporated into village lands and taxed accordingly.80 The rigorous procedure of verification no doubt was designed to bring the maximum amount of land under government control.

It appears that many of Muhammad Ali’s mercenaries and their wives had acquired iltiziams by 1815. Their confiscation that year, and an attempt to introduce European-style drill, caused several units in Cairo to mutiny and to riot. As one result, many of these multazims were allowed to retain their ūṣya lands, but without any of the old rights to corvée labor to farm them.81 These and
other multazims were promised a pension in compensation for their lost lands, but it was smaller than expected and slow in coming. Úsya lands were to be tax free, yet Amin Sami’s account of the 1817/1818 budget shows these being taxed at the full rate. Finally, in the case of all lands retained by the old intermediaries, they found that their holdings had shrunk due to the new, smaller feddan employed in the survey.82

Helen Rivlin has noted the similarity of Muhammad Ali’s reorganization to previous plans for reform. “The revolution in Egyptian land tenure, envisioned in part by Selim III, Napoleon, and Menou,” she writes, “had been executed by Muhammad Ali. . . .”83 In fact, this was more a resurrection of the Ottoman land system originally established in Egypt. That system had also been designed to maximize the flow of revenue to the capital. It had also consisted of an administrative structure of salaried officials who collected taxes and oversaw irrigation and cultivation.84 Ottoman attempts to reverse the process of loosening central control in various provinces during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had aimed at curtailing if not abolishing tax farming, to return to something like the original system. But the Ottomans lacked the strength to carry this reform through. Instead they were forced to seek the support of the same elements who had usurped state authority over the land, in their efforts to suppress the Mamluk beys. Only vestiges of the original Ottoman land system survived in Egypt by the late eighteenth century, but the scribes who collaborated with the French undoubtedly drew inspiration from that system in helping the French devise their “new” system.

Muhammad Ali’s administrative centralization was revolutionary in that it completely altered the structure of political power in Egypt. The notion that in its methods it was something fundamentally new or European-inspired, however, should be discarded. It was but a phase in the recurring pattern of a central authority’s struggle with local rivals for control of the land revenues of the country.

1816–1837: CENTRALIZATION AND EXPANSION

Agrarian policy under Muhammad Ali was part of a program of economic expansion in all spheres. At the same time, financial straits resulting from campaigns, diplomatic crises, and fluctuations in international markets added to the pressure on the agricultural sector, always the chief source of revenues.

The relationship of state commerce and industry to agriculture cannot be overemphasized. Muhammad Ali’s tightening of control over the land followed and complimented his control of commerce. He acquired control of Cairo’s customs in 1805, and the Mediterranean ports’ customs in 1807, with the addition of these cities to his domain. The development of the state as a commercial enterprise is symbolized by the career of Boghos Yusufian of Izmir, a member of one of the era’s far-flung Armenian merchant families. In Muhammad Ali’s service he rose from merchant and farmer of Alexandria’s customs to “minister” of commerce and foreign affairs by the mid 1820s, in step with the development of Egyptian state administration.85
The Pasha himself brought to Egypt a considerable knowledge of the eastern Mediterranean’s commerce and politics. As one who combined the roles of soldier and merchant in Cavalla, Macedonia, he was typical of his times. Once in control of Egypt, he set about organizing state and parastatal commerce as opportunity permitted. Egypt’s Mediterranean fleet was from the beginning a merchant fleet, the acquisition of large warships dating from the Greek revolt of 1821. By patronizing a group of Armenian, Greek, Syrian, Maghribi, and local merchants, Muhammad Ali received important financial services, and tied into a network of commercial and diplomatic intelligence. Before “modern” state banking and diplomatic structures appeared, then, their functions were being performed by such associates. The flow of information permitted the Pasha to manipulate exports and export prices to his advantage, and to devise policies— including agrarian policies—in light of international conditions.

Nonmilitary industrial projects were undertaken with just such knowledge of past and contemporary economic trends. State efforts to develop Egypt’s textile industries led to the introduction of sericulture and the expansion of cotton and indigo production. This entailed the deepening of old canals and the digging of new ones for summer irrigation, even before the discovery of “Jumel” long-fiber cotton. According to Mustafa Fahmy’s figures, of the total cotton-processing capacity installed (not accounting for replacement), 49 percent of the cards, 22 percent of the mule jennies, and 57 percent of Egypt’s looms were set up in 1817–1821. Five of nine bleaching works and the only two printing works were also established before 1821, the first year of Jumel production. All of this indicates an early intent to modernize and expand cotton textile production.

Food crops and other traditional crops such as flax and oil seeds remained important for internal consumption, industry, and export. In addition, large new tracts of olives and vines were planted, opium culture was revived, and merino sheep were imported to supply a new woolen industry. Skilled foreigners were employed to establish or improve the production of silk, indigo, and opium. Land was granted tax free, as rizqa bi-lā māl, to those who would plant either acacia trees or horticultural gardens along the new Mahmudiyya Canal. Acacias produced a hardwood used in construction. Tax exemptions on date palms were similarly intended to encourage their cultivation. Experiments were also made in acclimatizing coffee, cochineal, and teak, but were disappointing.

A variety of sources contain estimates and official accounts of the area of land under cultivation, or taxed, in this period. Most reliable accounts for the period 1800–1850 indicate that the total cultivated area was between 3 and 4 million faddans (see table 1). All evidence points to increasing areas of land cultivated during this period. Three projects which extended the area of cultivation were completed by 1820: the Mahmudiyya Canal, running from the Rosetta branch of the Nile to Alexandria, the repair of the sea dike near Alexandria, and the reclamation of the Wadi Tumaylat for sericulture, which alone involved the construction of 1,000 sāqiyaš (waterwheels).

How did the agrarian and land tenure systems evolve in this period? Once the
TABLE I  Accounts of Egypt’s cultivated and taxed land, 1880–1952

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lower Egypt</th>
<th>Upper Egypt</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>“Cultivated”</th>
<th>“Cultivable”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,970</td>
<td>4,038</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813 (1)</td>
<td>2,373</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,905</td>
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<tr>
<td>1813 (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813 (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,055</td>
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<tr>
<td>1815/1816</td>
<td>1,904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817/1818</td>
<td>1,970</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>3,003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820/1821</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>3,219</td>
<td>3,219</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>1,748</td>
<td>3,648</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
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<td>1830</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,856</td>
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<td>1840</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1843</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1844</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,590</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>3,525</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,160</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Sources:
- 1822: Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil*, II, 298–302. The increase for Upper Egypt is due at least in part to the extension of the land tax to areas where previously only trees and water lifting devices were taxed.
cadaster of 1813–1814 had been completed, and with a pattern of extensive state involvement in commerce and industry taking shape, pivotal changes in the agrarian regime were a short and complimentary step. In 1816, state monopolies were extended: the fallahin were forbidden to sell their harvests of hemp, sesame, indigo, cotton, wheat, beans, and barley to anyone but government agents. These were taken to government warehouses in each village, bought at a fixed price, and credited to each peasant’s account after deductions of taxes. The rice monopoly continued along the lines previously set.

That year the state also entered directly into production—planting and cultivation—as evidenced by an order to the mudirs to see to the doubling of the area devoted to hemp, chick-peas, sesame, and cotton, although the order was unevenly enforced. Scribes were charged with keeping track of crops on the stalk, and were to follow them through each stage of cultivation—not because the fallahin needed instruction but to thwart the thievery which was their response to the new controls. This system was continued through the late 1830s, although the internal trade in grain was freed in 1830.

Land tenure in this period took several forms, with different motives and consequences. State policy was influenced by a desire to increase production, to take from it the maximum surplus possible, but also to insure the loyalty of bureaucratic and military cadres. It was not Muhammad Ali’s policy to reward his followers’ services with land: “. . . j’en ai trouvé le moyen en leur prodiguant l’argent et les présents, mais en les empêchant de devenir propriétaires et de se créer eux-mêmes une influence personelle sur la population.”

Yet a certain amount of land was alienated. The contradictory aspect of land grants to individuals in a period of increased central control of the land again highlights the compromises necessary to offset opposition to the new order and to attach indispensable elements to it. And the state could confidently grant limited amounts of land as long as it was capable of dictating the terms of land tenure. This, of course, in no way contradicts the thesis that many grants in this period were also aimed at encouraging agricultural investment, experimentation, and land reclamation.

Grants of rizqa bi-lā māl were offered from 1827. Much of the area along the Mahmudiyya Canal had lost population, and cultivation there had declined during the previous century. The capital required to set up waterwheels and plant trees means that these grants must have gone to wealthier individuals.

Uncultivated land, surveyed in the cadasters but not included in the tax registers (hence the term ib‘ādiyya, “set apart”) was granted under two different sets of circumstances. One type was granted to individuals who would bring them into production. They were given a deed entitling them to lifetime tenure, although the land was to revert to the state upon their death. The first such grant occurred in 1826; they appear to have been granted both as tax exempt for life and tax exempt for the first few years. They were undertaken by officials, officers, and foreigners, the latter forfeiting any capitulatory privileges. By 1837, these lands came to 103,175 faddans, and by 1848, to 164,960 faddans, nearly exclusively in Middle Egypt. In the registers inspected by Ali Barakat, nearly all recipients of these grants occupied high administrative or military po-
A small amount of cultivated, *ma‘mūr*, land was also granted: 8,703 feddans between 1827 and 1848.

Bedouin pastoralists were also granted lands classified as *ib‘ādiyya*, as an inducement to settling, on condition that they cultivate them. But these tribes often found it more convenient to sublet to tenants. Decrees in 1837, 1846, and later prohibited this practice. Bedouin *ib‘ādiyya* grants involved no title deed, but only the Pasha’s promise not to tax the bedouin directly, nor to subject them to corvée or conscription. By such arrangements these grants appear to have been a kind of treaty: in return for their special status, bedouin served as auxiliaries in the army. Their revolt and migration were provoked by Abbas’s and Said’s efforts to tax their lands in the 1850s.

Personal estates held by members of the ruling family came to be called *jiflik* (*çiftlik*). Their extent in this period is unknown, but it was probably limited due to the alienation of revenues involved. Contemporary sources mention estates held by Muhammad Ali, for example, at Shubra, Ibrahim’s estate on Rûda Island, and others. These early estates do not appear in the registers of *jiflik*, all dating from 1838, which Barakat examined (discussed in the following section). In the case of the early personal estates and the new *jiflik* granted from 1838, the principle of land given a member of the ruling family is the same. But the later grants were part of a strategy of continuing state control of agriculture in the wake of the Treaty of Balta Liman the same year. The different circumstances and intent of the new *jiflik* account for the separate registers.

While Muhammad Ali’s reorganization had established a salaried bureaucracy in the countryside, state administration at the village level continued to be carried out by prominent villagers much as it had under the old regime. Village shaykhs were appointed from among the wealthier families as before. Not a few such families must have held the office under the beys. Under Muhammad Ali, the village shaykhs received grants of tax-free land, *masmūḥ*, in lieu of salaries. Grants of *masmūḥ* were made in Upper Egypt as early as 1813. The cadaster of Lower Egypt was not completed until 1814, and whether *masmūḥ* lands were granted there at the time is uncertain. Jabarti first mentions *masmūḥ* in reference to the cadaster of 1820–1821.

Two types of *masmūḥ* were granted, *masmūḥ al-mashāyikh* and *masmūḥ al-mastaba*. The former was intended as compensation for official duties explained below. The latter, sometimes assigned to the same individual, was to support the costs of visitors’ and officials’ lodging and board. Most shaykhs received four to five faddans of land as *masmūḥ* out of every 105 faddans of ma‘mūr land belonging to the village. The most prominent shaykhs, or *muqaddims*, received 10 faddans out of every 100 faddans of ma‘mūr in the village.

Differing local conditions and the different periodicity and modes of fiscal and administrative reorganization, however, preclude an assumption of complete uniformity in this system’s application. The quality of the *masmūḥ* lands the shaykhs received, and/or their activities in improving them, caused these lands to be assessed at the highest rates in the villages when Said taxed them in 1857.

In addition to their acquisition of these lands, the shaykhs, their families and
protégés continued to be in a position to amass wealth and accumulate additional land, despite the more stringent supervision of land registration and exploitation than before. With the increased involvement of the state in production, the shaykhs’ power increased. They were made responsible for assessing and collecting taxes (as in the past), for reassigning athar land on a fallah’s death or conscription, for apportioning corvée duty, and for assigning the cultivation of cash crops among the fallahin once the quota to be grown had been fixed. The shaykhs’ abuse of their role in reassigning lands is said to have led Said to transfer this function to the provincial governments in 1854. It was these families, the wealthy peasantry, whose members were recruited when the lower provincial offices were opened to native Egyptians in the 1830s. Hamont reports that one such official who rose in the provincial administration of Tanta held some 500 to 600 faddans of ibādiyya land in 1839. It was found that 300 faddans of this land had been “stolen” from one of Abbas Pasha’s jiflik several years earlier. Whether a victim of political intrigue, a real villain, or both, this fallah’s career indicates the scale of wealth that a few of the rural elite could reach.

In 1837, noting that there were many landless fallahin in the villages who worked as day laborers, Duhamel observed that “... il n’est pas rare de trouver des Sceiks, qui possèdent... mille et plus de feddans,...” of athar land. This was an exaggeration in terms of the typical amount of land held, but further testifies to the existence of a distinct stratum of wealthy peasants which, despite the changes in the land regime, was able to maintain and even improve its position.

How did the condition of the peasantry change in this period? To say that under the Mamluk beys the peasants were sheltered from direct contact with the state, implying that this made life easier for them, is to misunderstand the nature of the old and new regimes. Both exploited the peasantry. Under both a peasant family’s ability to withstand the burdens imposed and/or to shift them onto others’ shoulders was a matter of relative strength. The weak, poor, and unprotected fared the worst in face of the state and the rural elite in both periods. One rough indicator of overall conditions in this period is an upturn in population. “Civil order,” in the opinion of a recent writer, accounts for lowered mortality. On the other hand, the gains made by wealthy peasants could only have come at their poorer neighbors’ expense. In addition, peasants were expropriated in the creation of large estates in the 1840s, and reduced there to wage laborers and tenants.

The new regime did affect the fallah’s life more directly in many ways, with the introduction of conscription, the organization of corvée labor for distant projects, the relocation of population on reclaimed land, and the control of agriculture and village industries. Taxation increased and was more effectively enforced. But these new demands did not go without resistance. The later years of Jabarti’s chronicle contain references to black marketing and strenuous efforts to suppress it. Resistance to increasing demands on the populace took the form of indifferent work or sabotage in factories and on the farms, and self-mutilization, endemic stealing, or outright revolt.
Revolt occurs less from absolutely intolerable conditions than from conditions perceived to be intolerable – that is, one’s condition and response to it are matters of subjective appraisal. Adequately fed peasants who have recently improved their lot or have something to gain are more likely to revolt than those who are completely ground down. The great peasant revolts of Upper Egypt and the one in Sharqiyya occurred in areas which had enjoyed a quasi-autonomy a generation earlier. These revolts followed the more thorough cadaster of 1820-1821 and an increase in rural taxation, and were set off by the beginning of conscription.

THE GROWTH AND ENTRENCHMENT OF PRIVILEGED LANDHOLDINGS FROM 1838

The landholding system as it developed between the first cadaster and the late 1830s was not uniform in regard to the principle of ownership, but rather it reflected the priorities of the state: to increase production, both to fuel the economy and provide revenues, and to provide for and conciliate certain elements indispensable to maintaining the state. The bulk of village lands were taxed and administered directly through the bureaucracy in cooperation with prominent village families. Exempt from taxation were the masmūḥ lands in the hands of the shaykhs, bedouin ib‘ādiyya grants, rizqa bi-lā māl and ib‘ādiyya grants belonging to officers, officials, and other wealthy individuals, and the personal estates of royal family members and a few high officers and officials.

As long as the state created by Muhammad Ali remained strong it could resist any pressure to remove these lands from its ultimate control. Once created, however, the new bureaucratic machinery was potentially at the disposal of landed interests, should they gain control over it.

The changes in Egypt’s land regime during Muhammad Ali’s final decade reflect the weakening of the state due to the defeat in Syria (1840) and the imposition of free trade according to the provisions of the Treaty of Balta Liman (1838). The state had also been weakened by a fiscal crisis. The increasing demands of capital investment, a growing military establishment and constant wars, along with a far from perfect bureaucracy, epidemics, and a capricious Nile, had caused many villages to fall into tax arrears by this time. Agriculture and the land tax accounted for the lion’s share of revenue and had to be maintained. At first, a short-lived attempt was made to merge the responsibilities of villages in arrears with those still able to meet their obligations. Finally in 1840, a decree was issued which in essence resurrected the iltizām system of old, in the form of ‘uhda grants: high officers, officials, and family members were required to take over responsibility for the bankrupt villages, paying the arrears, and collecting and forwarding each year’s taxes thereafter. They were charged with providing working capital as needed by the fallahin, with supervising cultivation and harvesting, and were to act as local arbiters, replacing the middle level of state bureaucracy in these capacities. The creation of the ‘uhdas accomplished a forced contribution from the wealthy with the payment of the arrears, and was designed to insure future rev-
Enues, while at the same time cutting administrative costs. Peasants on the 'uhdas were also thereby relieved of the accumulation of tax arrears. The recipients of these grants, the muta'ahhids, received a section of land in each 'uhda to cultivate for their own profit.\textsuperscript{118}

Following the Treaty of Balta Liman and the defeat in Syria, an acceleration of jiflik grants also took place, and these are said to have included the best cotton lands in the country.\textsuperscript{119} Muhammad Ali himself acquired most of these, 239,426 of a total of 334,216 faddans granted between 1838 and 1846. Nearly all the new jifliks created were in Lower Egypt.\textsuperscript{120} Administration of the new jifliks was patterned after the bureaucratic regime previously established over the entire country, and all peasants on these estates were reduced to tenancy or wage labor.\textsuperscript{121}

Both the 'uhdas and new jifliks enabled Muhammad Ali to circumvent the intent of Balta Liman tariffs, which would henceforth prevent use of the customs to control the import-export trade, or the use of trade monopolies to manipulate commodity prices. Now that these options were closed, the Pasha retreated into the sphere of production in order to maintain the monopoly of commodities in a new form. As evidence of this he acquired by far the largest amount of his new jifliks in 1841–1845, only one jiflik grant in this period going to someone else.\textsuperscript{122}

Peasants on 'uhdas also were expropriated. The muta'ahhids were required to take over athar lands which destitute peasants lacked the means to cultivate, with the stipulation that as their condition improved these peasants would regain direct responsibility for their lands step by step.\textsuperscript{123} It appears in fact that little effort was made to improve the fallahin's lot. The pressure on muta'ahhids to meet tax payments worked against this in any event, and many fallahin on these estates found themselves reduced to tenancy. Barakat found that of the 'uhdas held by the royal family in 1846–1847, only 99,301 of a total of 228,461 faddans were recorded as remaining in peasant hands.\textsuperscript{124}

The apparent lack of resistance to these changes in their status may reflect the truly desperate straits of peasants on 'uhda and jiflik lands, in which relief from tax arrears and a continued guaranteed livelihood as tenants and laborers would seem to them an improvement. But this rather tranquil picture may also reflect the inadequacy of our sources in showing the peasants' response.

In addition to the obvious fiscal motivations, the pattern of land grants in the 1840s may also reflect court factionalism, which became more pronounced, and a desire to attach the political elite more firmly to the Pasha, in light of this division. New jiflik grants are recorded for the Pasha's two daughters, a nephew, sons Said and Halim, and grandson Abbas, but none for Ibrahim.\textsuperscript{125} While the aim of encouraging investment was never absent from policy,\textsuperscript{126} the extension of ib'âdiyya holders' rights may also have been a political concession to them. These lands had been made inheritable in 1836; in 1842, full rights of disposition over them were granted.\textsuperscript{127}

Aside from ib'âdiyya lands and the new jifliks, further forfeiture of control of the land was avoided. No rights of disposal were given the muta'ahhids. The law of 1846 codified some of the fallahin's traditional rights over their land – including its transfer – and may have been intended in part as a counterpoise to
the muta‘ahhid’s power. By reaffirming the fallah’s right to return to athar land he had abandoned it appears designed to lure back fugitives, and it dovetails with the intent that destitute peasants were to take back land taken over by the muta‘ahhids as soon as they were able.\textsuperscript{128}

This blend of old and new arrangements indicates that while the administration of land tenure was adjusted to meet new exigencies, the aims of policy remained essentially as before: maximization of production and revenue with tight state control over the land. Although the genesis of the land regime of the next generation— with its large estates— is apparent here, such was not the intent. If the state had been able to maintain its policies and to regain sufficient authority over the landholders it had created, then landholding in Egypt after mid-century would have evolved differently from the way in which it actually did.

**UNRESOLVED CONTRADICTIONS**

The further legislation of formal landownership rights in nineteenth-century Egypt resulted not only from the tendency of larger landholders to take and ask for more, but also from rulers’ efforts to resolve a basic contradiction in the very process of state formation. It was the same dilemma faced earlier by Ottoman reformers and their local rivals in Cairo. Maximization of revenue was the sine qua non of building and maintaining a strong state, whether one considers Ottoman policy or the efforts of local strongmen attempting to build successor states. This requirement lies behind the variety of fiscal reform schemes the period witnessed, and it tended to push policy in the direction of administrative centralization, the elimination of tax-farming middlemen, and tighter, more direct control of the land. The same principle applied to commerce, as expressed in state policy in regard to appaltos and tax farms of the customs. Thus administrative and fiscal reform went hand in hand with “military reform,” the creation of forces capable of dominating the countryside and of eliminating independent focuses of power.

On the other hand, the process of reviving a state or of building one anew also required the collaboration of indispensable elements in the society: village shaykhs, merchants, bureaucrats, officers, and so on, many if not all of whom held lands and/or tax-farming offices. To the extent that the state had to rely on their support it could not afford to confiscate or tighten control over their landholdings, mercantile activities, or offices— at least not without significant concessions and exemptions. But to the extent that revenues were needed, the ruler was drawn in this direction, into direct confrontation with landed interests in particular.

Egypt’s rulers sought to resolve this dilemma in two ways. One was to establish military dominance in the countryside, and then to allow supporters and collaborators to establish themselves, or remain, as landlords. But this strategy simply reproduced the contradiction in a new form, postponing its resolution. Thus under Ali Bey and his successors, and in Muhammad Ali’s early years, such a policy was accompanied by increased tax pressure on the landholders.
Similarly, we read of the seemingly erratic behavior of rulers who alternately "favored" a merchant group and subjected them to degrees of extortion.\textsuperscript{129}

The second way out was military expansion. It is not proposed here that this is the only factor behind expansion. But successful conquest might help fill the state's coffers in the short run through booty, and in the long run through control of trade routes and the exploitation of imperial possessions, the latter relieving -- at least temporarily -- the pressure to raise greater revenues at home. The role of different rulers' merchant allies in Egypt's expansion thus deserves attention. They knew the regions worth conquering and exploiting, they possessed the expertise with which to milk them, and they had an interest in relieving pressure on themselves at home and in trading in conquered territories under state patronage.\textsuperscript{130} Expansion also involved -- and could pay for -- an expanded military, which would enhance the ruler's ability to apply coercion at home.

Conquest, however, was a risky affair. The returns were potentially great, but only if conquered territory could be held and administered without major cost.

Thus the Powers' intervention in 1840 to confine Muhammad Ali's forces to Egypt takes on an added dimension of importance. This event has been seen as confirming the region's movement along the road to economic dependence and underdevelopment. The substantial truth of this proposition, should not, however, be allowed to obscure the importance of sociopolitical processes within Egypt which reinforced this trend. Efforts to retain control of the land and obstruct free trade after 1840 indicate that Egypt's rulers had not given up the game. Administrative reform, education, exploration for minerals, and the irrigation works -- that is, the creation of a modern state -- continued under Abbas and Said. As before, such activities were intended to meet the requirements of contemporary conditions and were subject to the shifting strength of the rulers and different political factions. Both Abbas and Said sought to consolidate their positions, to increase the state's control of the land, and to raise revenues. Reminiscent of Muhammad Ali, Abbas confiscated from two-thirds to three-quarters of the 'uhdas for nonpayment of taxes, and attempted to tax bedouin ib'adiyya lands. He was also accused of attempting to recreate Muhammad Ali's monopolies.\textsuperscript{131}

Yet by the late 1840s the state had lost its ability to milk commerce through the customs, its army had been reduced, and future military expansion was ruled out except in the direction of Africa. Such constraints limited the independent maneuverability of Egypt's rulers and enhanced the relative power of indigenous political interests, as reflected in the obvious use of land grants for political patronage.\textsuperscript{132} These groups in turn sought to consolidate their positions as landholders, from members of the ruling family and high officials at the top to the rural elite which increasingly rose in the middle levels of the bureaucracy. The value attached to land increased, especially in the 1850s, the result of the irrigation works and rising export prices for cotton and grain.\textsuperscript{133} As one indication of the wealthy landholders' increased leverage on the state, the right of fallahin to return to athar land they had abandoned was reduced step by step in this decade. Furthermore, the fallahin's abandonment of land to the state for
sale to investors was facilitated. Both measures were a significant reversal of traditional state policy which hastened the concentration of land in fewer hands.

Among all groups able to influence state policy, there was a direct interest in free trade and a more liberal definition of landholders' rights. Indeed, as Baer writes, there was "a need . . . felt to facilitate land transactions," but not, as he states, simply "to encourage the development of agriculture." A century earlier, de facto rights of ownership had appeared in usage, the result of the increased value attached to land in a situation where the state was unable to maintain effective control over its disposition. Agricultural development intensified in the nineteenth century, but in a situation where the state's authority had considerably increased and where many of the larger landholders themselves were high state officials. Thus the arena where the struggle for land was played out shifted to the state, and its results were expressed in legislation.

New fiscal needs, large tracts of land alienated by earlier grants, and the continued concealment of athar land from the tax registers led Said to take the well-known measures of the 1850s, which had the effect of further defining and strengthening landholders' rights. He imposed a mild tax, the 'ushur, on jilflik, ib'adiyya, and on the remaining 'uhda lands, but at the price of granting full ownership rights to their holders. He succeeded in subjecting bedouin ib'adiyya lands to the much higher kharāj tax, which required a series of expeditions to coerce the tribes. Masmūh lands were subjected to the kharāj in 1857 and assimilated to village lands in 1858. But the shaykhs retained most of their local prerogatives, including the duty to assess lands for taxation – that is, they remained able to protect what they held and acquire more – while traditional rights of disposition over peasant lands were confirmed but not extended to absolute private ownership.

The legislation of 1854–1858 reflects the ascendancy, once again, of landed classes in Egypt, able to influence land-tenure policy in their own interests. These classes were to prove more powerful and enduring than their counterparts of the eighteenth century. They were able to prosper, the more powerful gaining formal ownership rights over large estates in exchange for extremely low rates of taxation. This, and Egypt's lack of control over customs rates, meant that the full weight of the state's increasing fiscal needs was born by the small peasantry. Despite the increased exploitation of the peasantry, state expenditures outstripped revenues. Said and Ismail were obliged to look outside of Egypt for financing, to the point of heavy borrowing and eventual bankruptcy.

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NOTES

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A recent challenge to the periodicity of the modernization thesis is Peter Gran's *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism* (Texas, 1979).

This is not to pose the question of whether "internal forces" had more effect than "external" influences in this period. The internal-external dichotomy is as false as the traditional-modern, since in reality processes in both realms were intertwined and cannot be separated.


The evolution of the role of Egypt's intermediaries is best described in Shaw, "Landholding and Land-Tax Revenues in Ottoman Egypt."

Ibid., pp. 83–86.

In particular, Baer, "The Development of Private Ownership of the Land."


Between the 1730s and the first decade of the nineteenth century, cereal prices went up by 283 percent in Denmark, 259 percent in Austria, 210 percent in Germany, and 163 percent in France" (Blum, *The End of the Old Order*, p. 242; on land prices and speculation: pp. 17–20, 170, 241–242). In Cairo, the average prices of wheat, rice, and beans in 1791–1798 were approximately two and a half times what they were during 1680–1690 (see n. 23 below).


Cohen, *Palestine in the 18th Century*, passim.


The existence of production for the market should not be taken as abandonment of subsistence-oriented agriculture. Peasants satisfied subsistence needs first. Some cash cropping and household industry may well have been necessary to maintain the family’s subsistence and to pay taxes.


Girard, “Mémoire sur l’agriculture, l’industrie, et le commerce de l’Égypte,” p. 368; Le
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73 Jabarti, Merveilles, VIII, 313.

74 Ibid., pp. 129–130, 132, 148–149, 176–178. Whether a significant number were relocated to Buhayra is unknown.


77 Ibid., IX, 92.

78 Yacoub Artin, La propriété foncière en Egypte (Cairo, 1883), pp. 311–312, 89; Jabarti, Merveilles, IX, 91.


80 Jabarti, Merveilles, IX, 87–93.


82 Jabarti, Merveilles, IX, 90–93, 122–123; Rivlin, Agricultural Policy, pp. 57, 121; Amin Sami, Tagwim al-Nil (4 vols.; Cairo, 1915–1936), II, 266–270.

83 Rivlin, Agricultural Policy, p. 59.


86 For example, Raymond describes how Cairo's beys engaged in commercial activities: Artisans et commerçants, II, 717–719. Cavalla itself was an entrepot to the rich region of cotton, rice, tobacco, and silk farming dominated by the commercial center of Salonica. During Muhammad Ali's thirty years there the area saw the rapid development of çiftlik cotton farming (Stoianovich, "Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy," pp. 402–404).


93 Jabarti, Merveilles, p. 185.


95 Douin, La mission de Baron de Boislecomte, p. 111.

Ibid., pp. 34–38.

Ibid., Propriété foncière, pp. 261–262.


See Baer, “The Village Shaykh,” passim.

Sami, Taqvim al-Nil, II, 245.

Jabarti, Merveilles, IX, 316. Others have implied that masmūh was granted in Lower Egypt during the first cadaster, but there is no evidence for this. The Royal Council’s register, Sijill al-Diwan al-Khidwi, written at some time after the grants in question were made and quoted by Barakat, contains a contradictory account. First, it mentions 440,127 faddans in Lower Egypt not taxed in 1815–1816, and 1,775,611 faddans in Upper Egypt not taxed in 1820–1821, “because it was būr [meaning either fallow or waste land] at that time.” Then, in summing up, it states, “The total of the land of Upper and Lower Egypt upon which no tax was assessed, then, was 2,215,738 faddans, including ib‘ādīyyas, the multazims’ ‘usya, masmūh al-mashaikh, . . . masmūh al-mastaba, . . . and būr . . .” (Barakat, Tafawwur al-Milkiyya, pp. 27–28).

Jabarti, Merveilles, IX, 316; Barakat, Tafawwur al-Milkiyya, p. 31.

Artin, Propriété foncière, p. 293.


Mengin, Histoire sommaire, pp. 100–102.


See Rivlin, Agricultural Policy, pp. 117–118.


Natural disasters were not decisive, however, as they occurred both earlier and later without producing crises of these proportions.

Artin, Propriété foncière, p. 129.

Ibid., pp. 129–130; Rivlin, Agricultural Policy, p. 64; Baer, Landownership, pp. 13–14.

Owen, Cotton, p. 62.

Barakat, Tafawwur al-Milkiyya, p. 94.

Rivlin, Agricultural Policy, pp. 68–69.

Barakat, Tafawwur al-Milkiyya, pp. 85–94. The Balta Liman tariffs were not actually put into effect in Egypt until after the retreat from Syria in the spring of 1841, and various delaying tactics.

Ibid., p. 106.


Ibid., pp. 85–94. The evidence for court factionalism has been uncovered by Dr. Afaf Marsot in the course of current research.

See Baer, Landownership, p. 17.


Ibid., p. 100; Baer, Landownership, p. 7.
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133 Export price of wheat:

1850 50 P. T./ardebb
1852 66 P. T./ardebb
1859 74 P. T./ardebb


Export price of cotton:

average, 1851–1855 9.85 dollars/qantar
average, 1856–1860 13.45 dollars/qantar


