

The Invention and Development of Islamic Feudalism: A Historical Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the sophisticated discussion of the Islamic feudalism concept, as well as compare land tenure mechanisms of the 7th to 15th centuries Islamic societies. This paper critically discusses the legitimacy of the concept of medieval Islamic socio-economic structures being described as a feudal by comparing it with classical European feudalism and traces the development of the iqta system that developed during the Abbasid era as a system of revenue assignment and looks at some of the regional variations of the iqta system, including the Seljuk, Ayyubid, Mamluk and the Ottoman timar systems. Analysis indicates that although the Islamic land tenure systems achieved links between military service and land revenues that paralleled European feudalism, there were structural poles that characterized the differences between the systems. Some of the major differences are that: Islamic law is practiced by independent judicial bodies; the separation of land rights and the collection of revenue; the separation of the religious and the military dominion over land; the non-hereditary or limited hereditary transfer of the grants; the preservation of the stronger state authority even in the periods of political decentralization. It shows that the Mamluk mechanisms of military slavery and the Ottoman timar system were involved in the Islamic institutional innovations that had no European analogs. In this article will provide the modern scholarship lays more stress on the insights of these systems in their respective Islamic legal, religious and political systems as opposed to the Eurocentric analytical categories.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic feudalism is an old debate among the scholars and historians have been struggling to find a way to balance the medieval Islamic socio economic structures, and the feudal model created to explain medieval European society. This historical review focuses on the history of land-tenure,

military service and social hierarchy in the Islamic societies of the 7th -15th centuries, and critiques the historiographical discussion of whether feudalism is applicable to Islamic societies [1]. To grasp such systems, one needs to pay close attention to the regional differences, the changes which took place over time and the underlying differences

between Islamic and European systems of institutions. When it comes to history, we are dealing with Islamic Feudalism. It makes us consider the concept of feudalism held by people in Western Europe. It is usually compared by people to what had happened in Europe with land and vassals. The Islamic politics and society were actually distinct. These were founded on the Iqta system. This was a system of operating that was designed to address the large military and bureaucratic demands of the caliphates. Islamic Feudalism is fascinating since it is not comparable with the model. The Iqta system was a subset of Islamic Feudalism. It assisted the caliphate to manage its empire [2], [3]. The Islamic regime was dissimilar to the land ownership manner. Europeans possessed land that had been within their family long enough and it was typically in one place. This was not the case with the Islamic system. The Islamic system was similar to a hub which would determine the ways through which the money could be used on the land. The process of the development of this system began in the century when Abbasid Caliphate was ruling. It started when the military ceased receiving payment in the form of cash and started receiving payment in the form of land. The land was the source of revenue of the Islamic system. The system made money out of the land [4]. This was a problem to the central treasury as it was no longer receiving the same amount of money in the form of taxes. Neither was it benefiting much in wars. Then the state began to appoint some officials the task to collect taxes of land instead of paying them a salary. Under Seljuk Empire this system was effective. Some changes to Iqta system were made by the vizier Nizam al-Mulk. He did this in such a way that the military is always prepared to fight. The Seljuk Empire consisted of small units that did not necessarily collaborate. This was the importance due to the Iqta system of Seljuk Empire and army. They had a very practical and flexible system. This is how they administered the problems of ruling large masses of remote territories. First the people in authority could give out these gifts and the

receiver of one gift could also pass the very gift to another individual. Sultan was still in command and could recall them whenever he desired. On, with the Buyid dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate, things began to vary. The system started to give preference to the transfer of these grants to the children of the already existing people holding the grants. This change was contributed by the Delhi Sultanate and the Buyid dynasty. The system of Buyid dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate remained, in place. This had made certain leaders and army generals powerful. They ensured that the power of the central government was not much. The Buyid dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate system was complicated. It was grounded on laws and religion. The primary intention of the Buyid dynasty and the body of the Delhi Sultanate was to maintain the state system and the army as one. In that respect, it is fundamentally different with the manorialism of the Latin West and where emphasis is placed on the limitations of the uncritical extrapolation of the concepts of the European feudalism to the history of Islam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion about Islamic societies being like feudal systems is very strong. Historians who study the East, also known as historians, frequently used feudal terms to describe the institutions of Islamic societies, for example, the iqta system, without fully talking about the differences between the two systems. The document says that this was one part of a trend among historians from colonial times to use European history as a model to understand the history of non-European people, like the medieval Islamic societies. Medieval Islamic societies and their history are complex [5], [6]. Should be studied on their own terms, not just by comparing them to European history or medieval Islamic societies. Subsequent historians, such as Claude Cahen, Ann Lambton and Patricia Crone, took greater care. Cahen showed that even in periods of decentralization, the iqta system had elements that distinguished it from European feudalism most importantly,

the muqta was a revenue collector for a centralized state and did not possess the same rights as a European feudal lord. Lambton suggested that the word "feudalism" should only be used in reference to Europe since Islamic states did not have the personal vassalage, hierarchical conditional tenures and patchwork sovereignty typical of European feudalism. The iqta system changed over time. The Seljuks formalized its association with military service and superficially resembled European fiefs. Under the Mamluks, military slavery was used to reproduce elites and removing the element of heredity [7], [8]. The Ottoman timar system arguably most closely resembled European feudalism but was still framed within a more centralized government and a separate Islamic legal system. Recent scholarship by David Ayalon and Halil Inalcik has emphasized how Islamic law, waqf (endowments) and qadi courts established parallel modes of authority that meant military landholders could not exercise the jurisdictional power and autonomy of European feudal lords. Today, scholars are moving beyond the "feudal or not" question and are considering Islamic socioeconomic structures on their own terms, highlighting geographical diversity, legal-normative structures and peasant, merchant and religious scholar experiences within these systems [9]–[11].

3. METHODS

This is a qualitative historical study with literature review and comparison. This study primarily relies on secondary historical works including peer-reviewed monographs, journal articles and historiographical essays by leading medievalist and Islamic historians such as Claude Cahen, Ann Lambton, David Ayalon, Halil Inalcik and Patricia Crone. The comparative study presents a comparative analysis of Islamic land-holding structures (such as iqta, timar and mansabdari) against the institutional basis of European feudalism as described by classic medievalists such as Marc Bloch [12]–[14]. This comparison is multi-faceted: the legal status of land grants,

military service, inheritance, political power and the role of the religious establishment. This study employs a thematic chronological approach from the early Islamic caliphates (7th–8th centuries) to the Ottoman period (15th–16th centuries) and takes into account regional variations in the Middle East, Central Asia, Egypt and India. A reflexive historiographical strategy is also used to analyse the historiographical discourse on Islamic feudalism, from the colonial Orientalist writers to contemporary historians. This reflexive approach acknowledges the perils of writing Islamic history through Western lenses and much prefers to read Islamic socioeconomic institutions in their own terms [15], [16].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Feudalism Debate in Islamic Historiography

Feudalism as an analytical category of Islamic societies had become mostly used in the colonial era when European intellectuals aimed at explaining the history of the Islamic world using conceptual tools that they were familiar with. Classical European feudalism according to Marc Bloch and other medievalists revolved around hierarchical land tenure, vassalage bond, a divided political power and conditional military service. The issue of the possibility of similar systems in Islamic countries has spawned a lot of academic debate. Early Orientalist writers often used feudal terminology to describe Islamic institutions, especially iqta system, with a lack of proper appreciation of underlying structural differences. This method indicated more general trends in colonial Scholarly writing to explain non-European societies by European historical patterns [17], [18]. Nevertheless, later generations of historians such as Claude Cahen, Ann Lambton and Patricia Crone created more systematic analyses that pointed out not only real parallels but also but emphasized important differences between Islamic and European systems. Some of the questions that the debate revolves around are: Did the Islamic societies evolve systems of

conditional grants of land in relation to military service on the basis of European fiefs? How was political power and how did it interrelate with control of land? What is the difference between Islamic legal principles and religious institutions and Christian Europe? These questions involve analyzing certain historical processes in various parts of the world and the periods of Islamic history [19].

4.2 Initial Islamic Land Systems and the Origins of State Revenue

The foundational principles of land tenure and taxation that has an impact on the future practices of this system were developed by the first Islamic state under the Prophet Muhammad and the Rashidun Caliphs (632-661 CE). The Quran and hadith literature offered instructions on the rights to property, taxation and subordination between the religious and political power and established a legal framework that was not similar to both Byzantine and Sasanian traditions. In the first conquests, the Muslim armies met with different land tenure systems on the former Byzantine territory and the former Sasanian territory. Instead of deploying one uniform system, early caliphs used to modify the existing structures with the introduction of Islamic categories of the law. The conquered lands were categorized under the Islamic law, some were transferred into the state (sawafi) ownership, others were left to their owners under the payment of the land tax (kharaj), and lands occupied by the Arab tribes could be assigned as an iqta grant or as tribal property [3], [5]. The kharaj tax system, which is based on Sasanian Persian prototypes and inherited, became one of the main sources of the early Islamic state finance. Kharaj land was technically still property of the Muslim community or state and tillers were given use rights in lieu of fixed or proportional tax payments. Such a system was fundamentally different as compared to the European system in which a conditioned right to land ownership could be granted. The separation of the ownership and taxation

rights would be essential in the future. During the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE), the growth was further and the organization of administration was more advanced. The system of the diwan system planned the state revenues and military payments, and the soldiers were paid with the state revenues in the form of regular salaries (ata) instead of land. This regular pay system created in the military enabled the caliphate to retain centralized authority and avoided the rise of a landed military aristocracy like the feudalism in the Europe. This centralization, however, would not be very easy to sustain as the empire grew and administrative issues increased [6]–[8].

4.3 The Development of the Iqta System.

The iqta system that would be central in the discussion of feudalism in Islam, was developed over time during the Abbasid regime (750-1258 CE) to deal with fiscal and administrative demands. The iqta was translated literally as a fragment of a cut off, and was a grant of the revenue of certain lands or districts to an individual, usually a military leader or a government official. To realize the iqta, it is important to distinguish between various types that developed with time and differed in regions. The formative types of iqta during the early Abbasids were mainly assignments of revenues and not the grant of ownership of land. A person who was awarded iqta (the muqta) was given the privilege of collecting taxes in a given territory and keeping all the collected taxes or paying part of it to the state. These grants were not transferable and were usually temporary and revocable and did not provide ownership of the land [15]. The muqta was not able to sell, bequeath or permanently make changes to the property, unlike in the European feudal tenure where the lords would have rights to hereditarily, and the vassals would have conditional rights to property. In the 9th to 10th centuries, with the decline of Abbasid central power, iqta grants became more widespread and muqtas more autonomous. The iqta system was extended

very widely by the Buyid dynasty (934-1062 CE) which occupied much of the Abbasid heartland but did not formally accept caliphal authority. Buyid military rulers were awarded massive iqta with huge administrative and judicial authority of their domains. These grants were entering into practice on the lines of feudal tenures, although there were still significant differences in the legal theory and practice. Such studies conducted by Claude Cahen proved that although the era of decentralization was happening, the iqta system still did not lose the features that made it different in compare with European feudalism. The bond between the grantor and muqta was not founded upon the personal vassalage ties or formal obedience but upon an administrative appointment in a hypothetically unified state apparatus. The muqta was an official gathering the state revenues as opposed to an intermediary lord with heritable property rights. The Islamic law failed to identify the sophisticated layers of conditional ownership that were the key elements of European feudal jurisprudence [1], [6], [10].

4.4 Regional Variations: The Seljuk and Ayyubid Systems

The Seljuk Land tenure systems were significantly altered when the Turks conquered a large portion of the Middle East in the eleventh century. Originally nomadic warriors from Central Asia, the Seljuks built a strong sultanate that ruled over lands from Anatolia to Central Asia and dominated the Abbasid Caliphate. Their military organization and land grant practices introduced new elements that further approximated feudal structures while maintaining distinctive Islamic characteristics. Under the Seljuks, the iqta system became explicitly linked to military service obligations. Military commanders and cavalrymen received iqta grants with the expectation that they would maintain themselves, their retinues and their military equipment from the revenues. As a result, land income and military service became

more closely linked, much like feudal duties in Europe. The renowned Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk organized these customs in his political treatise, the *Siyasatnama*, which was composed circa 1091 CE. Nonetheless, Seljuk iqta continued to differ significantly from European fiefs. Grants typically remained non-hereditary and revocable at the sultan's discretion. The emphasis remained on revenue assignment rather than land ownership and muqtas lacked the juridical independence of European feudal lords. Property transactions and personal status issues were still governed by Islamic law, which was administered by qadis (judges) who were not affiliated with the military. In contrast to European feudal bishops and abbots, the religious establishment (ulama) preserved authority apart from military landholders. Saladin established the Ayyubid dynasty (1171–1260 CE), which created their own iqta system in Egypt, Syria, and portions of Arabia. Turkish and Kurdish military leaders, who made up the core of the Crusader armies, were given Ayyubid iqtas. A professional cavalry force was funded by these grants, and each muqta was in charge of keeping a certain number of mounted fighters. The Ayyubids were able to field efficient armies while retaining administrative control because the system struck a balance between decentralized revenue collection and centralized political authority. Ayyubid land grants operated within a different political logic than European feudalism, despite producing a military elite reliant on agricultural income, according to research by R. Stephen Humphreys and other academics. The Ayyubid sultan retained stronger theoretical and practical authority over muqtas than European kings typically exercised over their vassals. The absence of primogeniture traditions and the practice of dividing estates among heirs prevented the emergence of stable hereditary lineages comparable to European noble houses [20].

4.5 Mamluk System: Military Slavery and Land Tenure

The Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria (1250-1517 CE) was perhaps the most unique system of Islam military-tenure of land. The Mamluks were slave warriors usually of Turks or Circassian descent who were acquired as young slaves, converted to the Muslim faith, provided with military training and later freed to work as high-ranking cavalry. This was an institution that blended slavery, military service and land revenue in a manner that had not been seen anywhere in European feudalism. The Mamluk soldiers were given grants of iqtaz to take care of themselves and their retinues. The strongest amirs (commanders) were in charge of large iqtas that brought large revenues, whereas ordinary troopers had smaller assignments. This was a strictly non-hereditary system; Mamluk commanders were not allowed to bequeath their military position or iqta to their sons who usually took up civilian careers. Military elites were reproduced by the multiple generations of slave purchases and military training which did not allow forming hereditary military nobility. The earliest studies of Mamluk system were made by David Ayalon which brought into the limelight the fact that military slavery formed a distinct military system that was similar to feudalism in terms of relationship between military service and land revenue and different in terms of social structure and political theory. The sources of slave labor and the non-hereditary quality of the position of the Mamluks did not allow the emergence of the genealogical legitimacy and the hereditary power of feudalism in Europe. Authority based on military strength and political intrigues as opposed to lineage and legal succession. The Mamluk iqta system was the subject of a number of reforms throughout the lifespan of the sultan. It was reorganised by the cadastral survey which took place in the early 14th century under Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad which tried to ensure that muqtas did not seize permanent possession of its assignments. These reforms showed that there remained always a tension between the

nominal revocability of iqtas and the tendency of strong military leaders to establish de facto permanent authority over their domains. Other scholars such as Carl Petry have focused on the impact of Mamluk land tenure systems on the rural society and agricultural production. The extraction of revenues instead of land improvement or development in the long run that was the main concern of the muqtas was often exploitative in nature. The Islamic law however gave certain security to those who cultivated land and waqf (religious endowment) which occupied major parts of agricultural land worked under other principles of law which in some cases favored the peasant communities.

4.6 The Ottoman Timar System

The timar system became the most complete form of the most Islamic approximation of feudalism created by the Ottoman Empire which is regarded as such by many historians. The timar system, which was organized in the 15th -16th centuries and originated in the 14th century gave an annual tax payment in the form of land revenues to sipahi cavalymen in return to serve in the military. The system served great provincial cavalry force, which gave the military base to Ottoman expansion and territorial domination. A timar was an annual revenue donation that produced 3,000-20,000 akce which was enough to maintain one sipahi horseman and his equipment. Big grants known as zeamet and hass were given to several horsemen and passed to more senior military leaders. The sipahi who possessed a timar was not the owner of the land he was only the bearer of right to charge some taxes on the peasants who used it. The sipahi in return was expected to turn up on military operations with all necessary equipment and with the larger grants further equipped mounted troops. An authoritative study of the Ottoman land system by Halil Inalcik proved that it had similarities and differences with European feudalism. Similar to the European fiefs, timars formed a group of armored landowners whose cavalry service was vital in the state force. This system was hypothetically

conditional and revocable but in reality timars tended to become hereditary in families. Nevertheless, the Ottoman sultan had a greater practical power than most European rulers, and regularly undertook surveys to reassign timars and the system existed within a complex legal-administrative structure that curtailed sipahi independence. The Ottoman system had clearly defined the Islamic law of ownership of various types of lands. Most of the timar grants were based on miri lands (state-owned lands), and the lands that were based on milk (private property) and waqf (endowment) had dissimilar legal regimes. On a timar, peasants were granted hereditary rights to cultivate the land (tapu) that they could not easily be deprived of and this gave a measure of security of tenure. Timar holders did not have the full lordship over people and property of the feudal realms of Europe because this legal pluralism and the persistent functioning of the Islamic courts in qadi jurisdiction denied such holders. The timar system had peaked in the 16th century when it sponsored about 80,000,90,000 sipahi cavalymen. Nevertheless, alterations in the army such as the growing significance of guns and professional infantry forces (janissaries) and inflation in the wake of the introduction of the New World silver slowly corroded the system. As early as the 17th century, the Ottoman state was progressively transforming timars into tax farms (iltizam) and was shifting to a new revenue system, which indicates the readiness of the system to adapt to the altered military and economic conditions.

4.7 Comparative Analysis: Islamic Systems and European Feudalism

The topic of Islamic societies gaining feudalism needs to be approached with the critical comparative analysis of the institutional system, legal provisions and social interactions. There are some major spheres that elicit the similarities and very essential differences. Both European feudalism and Islamic iqta/timar systems established the ties between land revenues

and military services in terms of land tenure. Nevertheless, there was a vast difference in the legal character of these relationships. European feudalism had elaborate conditional property ownership whereby the vassals had rights to the real property in their feudal, despite the oath of service to their lords. Islamic systems tended to have a stronger separation of the rights to ownership and revenue and the state or the Muslim community is theoretically in charge of ownership but with the collection rights. The two systems differed in the form of the political authority. European feudalism was characterised by a high degree of sovereign division, where feudal lords in their localities had the governmental authority such as administering justice, imposing taxes and military authority. Feudal politics relied on the idea of the private jurisdiction. Even though the Islamic societies had spells of decentralization, they had more held together theoretical and in many instances practical demands on the unitary state authority. The independent judges under Islamic law also curtailed the jurisdictional autonomy of iqta holders and the religious establishment offered a new point of power and social structure. The aspect of religion and law formed significant differences. The Catholic Church in medieval Europe was also a feudal institution, with bishops and abbots having feudal obligations, and with fiefs which were held by the Catholic Church. The feudal lordship and religious authority were frequently amalgamated. Within Islamic societies, the ulama (religious scholars) never became much tied with those who held military land and religious authority was based on the knowledge of the Islamic law and not the landed property. Waqf institutions established spaces that were not directly under the authority of the state or the military and the Islamic law gave guidelines in property and personal relations, without referring to political authorities. There was a difference in heredity and social reproduction. European feudalism established powerful ideas of hereditary succession, whereby fiefs usually were given

to the eldest male descendant (primogeniture) and the nobility were inherited by blood. Although such principles were occasionally disrupted, genealogical legitimacy continued to be the most important in feudal social organisation. Islamic military-tenure systems of land frequently prohibited hereditary succession, especially in the Mamluk system where the military elites were reproduced generation after generation by recruiting slaves. The rules of inheritance in Islamic law even in the areas where grants had become hereditary in fact meant that the grant had to be divided between two or more heirs and no large hereditary domains were consolidated. Her work, the influential *Feudalism*, is of the view that the very term feudalism must be applied solely in the context of the European system and that Islamic military patronage systems, although seemingly superficially similar, were based on entirely different principles. She pointed out the personal relationships of vassalage, the hierarchies of conditional tenure, and the disintegration of sovereignty which was the main feature of European feudalism did not have real analogs in Islamic society. Other academics such as Claude Cahen have been less hesitant to employ feudalism or quasi-feudalism and have been keen to define the unique features of the Islamic systems.

4.8 Rural Society and Agricultural Production

The concept of the Islamic land tenure systems has to be understood with reference to its impact on the rural people and the agricultural production. In the Islamic territories most of the inhabitants were peasant farmers whose lives were determined by the tax payments of soldiers with the lands, by the needs of the state revenues and by the Islamic law governing the rural community. The status of the peasants and their rights were quite different in different regions and times. Generally, peasant cultivation rights were acknowledged by the Islamic law and the eviction without any particular reason was not allowed, which allowed the theoretical safeguards against the most

extreme exploitation methods. Nevertheless, these safeguards were frequently overridden by the practical strength of the iqta or timar holders, especially during the time of feeble central control. The exactions may be hefty on revenue demand and peasants are normally paying the state taxes as well as other exactions to the power holders in the area. Revenue extraction was the major concern of the muqta or sipahi, but not agricultural improvement or management of the estate. In contrast to the agricultural infrastructure investments or land clearance encouraged by some European feudal lords, Islamic military landowners were not resident landlords who directly oversaw agricultural production. The collection of revenue was commonly assigned to the agents or tax farmers, and this added further extraction. In some cases, this system would cause short term revenue maximization in the place of long term productivity. Nonetheless, the waqf institutions offered a different example. The waqf properties which the founder used as religious gifts to mosques, schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions did their work with other principles. Although in effect waqf revenues were ultimately used to fund religious and charitable institutions, the management of waqf lands could be more long-term productive and stable.¹ Waqf properties also were granted legal safeguards that deterred their confiscation or reassignment, becoming islands of stability in tenure system arrangements that are otherwise fluid. The rural communities had different types of collective rights and social organizations that mediated between the peasants and the power holders. Collective bargaining was often practiced with tax collectors by Village headmen, and communities occasionally owned common property or share. The Islamic law acknowledged the existence of communal property and structure of settling disputes at rural level. Such community organizations provided peasants with a certain degree of collective bargaining and despite the difference between its performance under various conditions.

4.9 Urban Society and Commercial Relations

The Islamic societies were able to establish advanced urban economies and trade systems which functioned together and occasionally in conflict with military-agricultural land tenure systems. Cities had turned into centers of craft production, trans-regional trade and religious-intellectual life, generating other bases of prosperity, strength and social status than military landholding. The interdependence between the urban commercial classes and the military elites who owned iqta or timars was ambiguous and was diverse regionally. In other instances, the military powerholders used their agricultural incomes to invest in city trading ventures, and merchants were eager to obtain iqta or marry military families. Nonetheless, the two spheres used to have different identities and interests. Artisans and merchants formed guilds and professional associations, which controlled their occupations and advocated their interests to the political power. The Islamic law offered detailed structures on commercial dealings, property and dispute management systems that existed mostly without references to military land tenure systems. The qadi courts settled commercial disputes on the basis of the principles of the Islamic law and the institution of the muhtasib (market inspector) controlled the economic life in the cities. These commercial-legal institutions established zones of urban economic action which had not been directly subject to military domination. Waqf institutions were vital in the urban society and their main function was to aid the mosques, madrasas (schools), hospitals, and caravanserais among other facilities. The different types of properties such as commercial buildings, agricultural estates, and endowed cash were all used to fund urban waqfs. The developed waqf sector provided other career opportunities in the form of religious and educational institutions and wealth redistribution in the form of charity. It was a religious-charitable economy that worked on other principles than military landholding or commercial enterprise. The

type of rich urban economies of the Islamic societies made them different against the medieval Europe where urbanization was not as advanced and the level of commerce was not as wide. The Muslim merchant caste that were safeguarded by Islamic commercial law and engaged in the networks that had measured across Spain to southeast Asia became the most visible and richer than the European merchants in the feudal era. This economic pluralism implied that military domination of the agriculture land, though significant, did not monopolize wealth and power in a mono-poly as it was in the European feudalism.

4.10 Influence of Mongols and Subsequent Development

During the invasion of 13th century Islamic world by Mongols, a significant portion of it was ruined and gave certain new aspects to tenure systems. This was the first government to enforce their systems of Chinese influences on Iran and nomadic with the distribution of pastures and humans to the military officers. However, subsequent Mongol ruler dynasties who converted to Muslims, such as the Ilkhanate in Iran, later changed and followed the existing Islamic land tenure practices. Under the Ilkhaate (1256-1335 CE), a different form of iqta emerged called the soyurghal that was comprised of a mixture between the Mongol administrative culture and the Islamic traditions. These grants were less localized and more often hereditary than earlier iqta, and were in fact bordering on land tenure. The property relations changed significantly and the number of strong-landed magnates increased during the time of the Mongols. Nevertheless, such developments within the Islamic legal systems and the conversion of the Mongol rulers to Islam was even necessary to provide the continuity of the influences of the Islamic law and institutions. The Warring states of Turkic and Mongol succession in Central Asia and India developed their own land tenure systems of the military. Mughal Empire in India (1526-1857) developed the mansabdari system

which gave military commanders ranks that assigned them a portion of revenue (jagirs) on specific lands. It resembled the previous Islamic Iqtas, and the later Ottoman timar, except adjusted to the Indian circumstances, and applied with the Indian administrative traditions which had already existed. The gradual disappearance of classical land tenure systems in the military occurred on the Islamic lands since the 16th century but with significant geographical differences. The reasons behind this fall can be grouped into a number of factors: the changes in the military forces made the cavalry less important, the introduction of superior monetary economies made cash payment of soldiers easier, tax farming became a more efficient form of revenue, and the European business and military needs. Land tenure systems were further transformed in the 18th and 19th centuries, which was made possible by the European colonial expansion and modernizing reforms.

4.11 Historiographical Debates and Contemporary Scholarship

Recent research on land tenure systems in Islamic countries is a sign of more advanced approaches to the comparative history and an increased awareness of the issues of imposing European concepts on the non-European societies. The issue is no longer merely: are Islamic societies feudal or not, but how to conceive the particular features of the Islamic socioeconomic structures in their terms and at the same time be open to meaningful cross-cultural comparisons. Other historians propose the rejection of feudalism as an analytical category in the history of Islamic countries stating that it is a Eurocentric imposition that hides more than it reveals. This point of view suggests the necessity of defining Islamic societies on the basis of these categories formed on the basis of Islamic civilization itself, such as ideas of Islamic law and political theory, and social structure. It is problematic that any single label is used because Islamic societies were diverse, and they existed across enormous territories and centuries. Other researchers

also argue that cautiously qualified comparative application of feudal language may be valuable when it brings to the fore real structural parallels whilst delimiting key distinctions. This method may define some periods or areas as having some quasi feudal features or being a developing feudal form but appreciating some basic differences. The comparative framework can shed light on how various societies overcame similar issues of military order, tax collection and political power. Recent scholarship gives greater prominence to a number of themes: the significance of regional and temporal difference in the Islamic civilization; the interaction between normative Islamic law and practice; the role played by different social actors such as peasants, merchants, and religious scholars in the formation of socioeconomic relations; and the necessity to focus on the Islamic societies as complete entities of their own development and not as partial versions of European development. The study of material culture and environmental history has contributed to the study of the impact that land tenure system had in agricultural production, resource control and technology. Economic historians have discussed the interaction between land grants to military and commercial networks, monetary systems and fiscal institutions. Through social historians, the experiences of subordinate groups of people such as peasants, slaves and women in these systems have been retrieved. These varying strategies help to give more of a full picture as compared to previous discussions that were limited in scope on any formal comparisons between institutions and European feudalism.

5. CONCLUSION

History of land tenure and military structure in the Islamic societies in the 7th through 15th centuries manifested intricate structures that bore some surface resemblance to European feudalism but deviated in some native aspects. The iqta system and its different local forms established networks between land revenue and military service and produced landholding classes of a

political and economic power that was large. These systems however worked under unique Islamic legal, religious and political systems that rendered them different as compared to the feudal European structures. Some of these differences are: the conceptual distinction between ownership of land and the right to revenue; the application of the Islamic law by independent courts; the division of religious and military land and the dislocation of the hereditary lineage; and the sustenance of greater state power even in times of political disintegration. Those distinctions were not formal or theoretical only, they had practical implications to social relations, political processes, and economic progress. Instead of merely posing the question as to whether Islamic societies were feudal, historians can better explore how the Islamic civilizations organized military, resources, social hierarchy, and how they distributed

centralized power and local autonomy. These questions may be examined in terms of comparison with other societies with observing the local specificity of the Islamic historical development. The multiplicity of the Islamic civilization, including the Umayyad Syria and the Ottoman Anatolia, the Mamluk Egypt and the Mughal India also teaches to avoid the simplistic generalizations. These historical debates have a long history outside of scholarly discourse. The knowledge of the way the Islamic societies were structured in the past helps in the modern day debate about Islamic law, political power and the socioeconomic structure of the Islamic society. It also points out the pitfalls of applying the wrong categories of analysis and the importance of letting societies define themselves and being open to effective cross-cultural comparison.

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