

II. PROBLEMS OF RENT CAPITALISM

"RENT-CAPITALISM" IN THE LIGHT OF THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ISLAMIC IRAN

BERT G. FRAGNER

I.

Usually the representatives of Islamic studies - like those of Orientalism in general - consider philology an important precondition for their scientific activities. Well equipped with philological tools and methods, they have been for generations deeply engaged in studies in the fields of theology, literature, history and culture in its most general meaning. Many scholars gained their competence in more than one of these fields, often without clear temporal and thematic limitations of their interests. Even today the so-called "üç-lisanlı" often is regarded as the ideal representative of his art: he is distinguished by his profound philological knowledge of the three most important languages of the Islamic world and by his competence in the realities of these fields within the widest and deepest possible dimensions.

In these circumstances, the contributions of the Orientalists to scientific research on the Near, Middle and Far East have until recently shown quite specific features. They have produced a number of outstanding results, and their philologically based studies and research might not have been easily achieved within other scientific disciplines even when these also deal with Oriental affairs.

But the limitations of methodological traditions might also be of the reasons why Orientalists have often neglected important questions of Eastern affairs which were more or less broadly discussed within other disciplines. Students of Islam, in general, are no exception to this rule. By way of illustration, I should like to examine their way of dealing with, or, more precisely, of neglecting, the thematic complex of what is called rent-capitalism.

Bobek's conception of rent-capitalism was originally based on a "geographic point of view". Nevertheless, he presented his conception as a very ancient socio-economic formation with a genuine historical dimension. This could have been a sufficient reason for Orientalists specialized in Islamic history to pay attention to rent-capitalism in their works. But this, curiously enough, has scarcely happened so far. It cannot be denied that several Islamic historians have been recently dealing with questions of social and economic structures in the Islamic world. It is impossible to mention even only a selection of names, works and topics within the frame of this paper. We have to assume that many sources for the socio-economic history of the Near East are now accessible to the public. Similarly, there are countless studies in social and economic institutions and also repeated attempts to describe and evaluate socio-economic systems within Islamic history. I shall rely on some results of such studies in Islamic history in order to explore the extent to which rent-capitalist elements are actually traceable and evident throughout the Islamic period of Near and Middle Eastern history, or, at least, to which extent such elements could be expected to become more obvious by future research.

II.

As characteristic features of a rent-capitalist structure of society and economy Bobek stresses, among other points, "the tight connexion between rulership and cities", "The exploitation of rural and trade producers by skimming off excessive shares of the produce" (the so-called "rents") the commercialization of "rent-titles", almost no productive investments by the owners and - as a result of all these factors - the stagnation in the development of material means of production and the stationary character of societies subdued to this system. Institutions and forms of other, more ancient, economic structures sometimes may overlap with rent-capitalist structures. The most obvious illustration of rent-capitalism, according to Bobek, is to be observed in the relations of ownership in the agricultural field where "the rent-capitalist's absolute ideal seems

to be the entanglement of as many peasants as possible in permanent debts, so that their annual payments would never be able to compensate the already legendary original debt". The peasants' production is usually partitioned in separate factors: soil, water, seeds, tools and/or livestock and human labor; the ownership of any one of these factors corresponds to one share of the crop, e.e. the "rent". Bobek repeatedly stresses the parasitic nature of the rent-capitalist exploiters and attributes the same parasitic nature to the city which he regards as the center and residence of the dominating authority, in contrast with the surrounding countryside.

It was this particular point that stimulated first criticism and modifications of the rent-capitalist theory (as an example: Eugen Wirth). Gunter Leng put the whole concept in question, using criteria of Historical Materialism. Leng blamed Bobek for having overstressed secondary aspects of economic organization and having, above all, denied the importance of the basic relations of production. Yet Bobek's intention was precisely to relate the concept of capitalism in the first place with formal aspects of economic activities. Instead, Leng follows suggestions of B. Brentjes, a Marxist historian of the Middle East; contrary to many other Marxist models, he proposes to recognize only one world-wide, pre-capitalist social formation, which he calls "feudalism" - regardless of the rather unfortunate use of the term. According to Brentjes, this "feudalism" is based on the "chasing after the agrarian surplus product". This chasing is based on the "predominant rural relations of production, particularly on the situation of the peasants who, through non-economic compulsion, were deprived of their personal freedom or their ownership of soil". This mode of consideration would exempt the materialist historian from feeling obliged permanently to label historical, social and economic circumstances. The fruitlessness of such labeling can be easily detected in a large number of otherwise valuable works written by Soviet orientalists during the last decades. The obvious disadvantage of Leng's proposal resides in his general label "feudalism" which hardly offers any possibility of conclusions concerning

eventually particular social relations and conditions.

The concept of rent-capitalism proved to be stimulating and productive, especially in the field of geographical studies on the Near and Middle East. Bobek has obviously created a very practical instrument which is extremely useful for explanations and descriptions of recent socio-economic affairs in many countries and areas. The complete rejection of Bobek's idea of rent-capitalism would imply the renunciation of all these advantages that have been realized through the application of this concept on concrete problems.

In this question, one may find help in some ideas of those Orientalists especially interested in history and social science. I should like to refer particularly to the French scholars Claude Cahen and Maxime Rodinson. In their works on questions of social structures in the Islamic world they have repeatedly pointed out the evident fact that there may always exist various economic forms within different social formations. In some of his writings, Cahen stressed the existence and importance of what he calls "the capitalist sector" in the economic life of medieval Islamic societies. Rodinson has developed this idea further and even worked out theoretical dimensions the significance of which is no more confined to the Islamic world. Rodinson considers the problem in a "world wide perspective". He assumes that before the outspread of capitalism (in the sense of Marx) there existed "infinitely various modes of production having exploiting structures. Within these modes of production a community may exploit another..., or, individuals may be exploited by single members of the superimposed "class" or society; or they may be exploited by this society collectively". The stages of development of such social formations, which cannot be easily classified, are valid only within a regional framework. Any statement of common aspects of these formations beyond the regional frame would necessarily be based on vague generalizations. The significance of such formations is characterized by the interlacing and overlapping of different modes of production. To describe these

formations precisely, Rodinson proposes to include not only the possible domination of a particular mode of production, but also secondary economic and even cultural aspects. These secondary aspects, "even if they were not fundamental, may be highly important and modify the structure or single aspects of the whole society". Such a secondary economic aspect could be the existence of a capitalist sector in a pre-capitalist society.

If we explore the existence and character of such eventual "capitalist sectors" within the history of the central Islamic lands, the concept of rent-capitalism immediately gains practical importance. In this paper I shall try to present some indications of the existence of rent-capitalist elements present in the sources accessible to me. Thanks to the diligence of generations of scholars, mainly Orientalists, we already dispose of a rather large number of historical sources dealing with the social and economic problems of the Islamic world. Yet, the available sources are still much fewer than those we have for the history of most European countries. The information we can extract from these sources enable us only occasionally to work out general aspects and judgements. Moreover, I shall here confine myself to the history of Islamic Iran, without refraining, however, from making some general statements beyond this scope.

III.

The practice of crop-sharing, prevailing in agriculture in most Islamic countries up to recent times, gave to Bobek an essential evidence of what he considers to be rent-capitalist exploitation. Our sources give us enough evidence for the division of the crop according to a fixed proportion to the titles of ownership, even during the early Islamic centuries. Curiously enough, the juridic regulations of that time referring to crop-sharing scarcely differ from those prevailing up till the twentieth century. The crop-sharing contract mostly in use between landlord and peasant has the form of the so-called *muzara'a*. This contract fixes the partition of

the crop (usually five parts) and is to be regarded as one of the classical agrarian regulations of early Islam. Simultaneously there existed special regulations for irrigated, intensively cultivated land (musaqat) and other contracts for newly cultivated territories etc. The practice of muzara'a is well-known to geographers, anthropologists and sociologists as being until recently a main feature of agriculture in Oriental societies. Yet, although the usage of muzara'a was quite common in some Islamic regions (Egypt, Iran etc.) as early as more than thousands years ago and that a similar system of relationship between landlord and peasant exists until today, that does not necessarily imply that present conditions have prevailed continuously during all these centuries.

First of all I am going to describe a formal institutional pre-condition for the distribution of muzara'a in early Islam. The Islamic law originally classified two types of land, according to the owner's right to dispose of the soil. The first category, "mulk", was applied exclusively to territories that were, theoretically, properties "inherited" by Muslims since pre-Islamic times. So, their titles of ownership were recognized by Islam. Consequently, it was impossible to obtain land of this category in the conquered regions because they belonged to the community of all Muslims. The usufructuaries of this type of land - i.e. land belonging to the conquered territories - could hardly claim on any titles of unconditioned landownership, i.e. including the rights of inheritance or selling. The two categories were distinguished by clearly different forms of taxation. The usufructuary of conquered and registered "state-land" had to pay a land-tax - the so-called kharadj - of rather high percentage to the fiscal authorities; sometimes, exceptionally, as high as 40 or 50 percent. This land-tax can be interpreted as a tenure-rent payable to the state. In contrast, owners of mulk-territory had to pay instead of land-taxes, the canonic alms-tax (zakat) only, which was fixed to ten percent of the crop in the case of cultivated land ('ushr). The first essential modification of this regulation still in early Islamic times took place when certain military and political personalities were given

special titles of dominion over kharadj-territories. This was possibly meant as a kind of salary for their services to the state. Thus, some areas, formerly regarded as kharadj-land, were actually changed into a new type of land, the so-called "qati 'a" (pl.: qata'i'). The owner of a qati'a was not anymore expected to pay kharadj for his land, but was, fiscally, equalled with the proprietors of mulk-areas. This regulation formed the first step to a rapid and far-reaching similarity between qati'a and mulk. The fast expansion of qati'a areas led to a rise of a new social layer of powerful landowners. Simultaneously, the socio-economic agrarian structure of the territories in question was entirely changed within a short time. The former usufructuaries of kharadj-areas were, as a consequence of the integration of their land into a qati'a, in fact, expropriated. Juridically, this expropriation was realized by means of muzara'a or other forms of crop-sharing contracts. Such contracts allowed the owner of a qati'a to convert his title of authority, which included his quasi-ownership of the soil, into remarkable profits. In practice, the principle of inheritance prevailed within the qati'a-lands after, a rather short period. The way the lords of qati'a - areas consolidated their dominating and profiting position may, in many respects, have resembled Bobek's description of the practices of rent-capitalist landowners. Obviously, the expansion of the qati'a-system caused a similar large-scaled expansion of muzara'a, which, as already mentioned, deemed a typically rent-capitalist way of peasant's exploitation in the Islamic world. The strict application of muzara'a left for the peasant only the fifth part of his annual produce, whereas the amount he would have paid as kharadj would have rarely been more than fifty percent. Before the rise of the qati'a-system crop-sharing practices were, if ever, in the first instance applied to mulk-areas, the extent of which was always less than that of kharadj-territories. The probably very ancient origins and traditions of muzara'a and other crop-sharing practices - though of possibly high interest to the cultural historian - are of no significance in this connection.

IV.

By the 10th century, the distribution of qati'a-lands had already passed its culminating point. As far as the social and economic consequences of the fati'a-system are concerned one may only venture some speculations and hypothetic conclusions. In this connection research should be centered on the question, whether and to which extent the successive owners of qati'as gave up their original political and military functions, which had formed the primary reasons for their acquisition of those qati'as- and turned to other professions (e.g. commerce etc.).

At any rate, during the 10th century the qati'a-system was gradually replaced by another one. This happened, presumably, as a result of increasing difficulties in the distribution of new qati'as: The number of already existing qati'as had presumably become so large that there was not enough land for additional bestowal. It seems that the necessary payments of highly-ranking bureaucrats and military officers were less and less covered by means of this system. According to the new procedure, the fiscal administration resorted to stopping the cash payment of salaries as well as the bestowal of any qati'as. Instead, they granted concessions or assignments of taxes: Salaried persons were now given the right of collecting the fixed tax-revenue of a certain territory. Contemporary administrative law regarded this practice as a modification of the traditional qati'a-system. In fact, this change created preconditions for a new kind of landownership which was practiced scarcely in the Islamic territories until then; this new type of landlordship was the so-called "iqta"-system.

Owners of such an iqta' had legal claims only concerning the precisely defined tax-revenue and, therefore, took over the functions of tax-collectors. The validity of an iqta' was usually confined to a certain territory and a certain tax-revenue. The iqta' was limited in time and, from the juridical point of view, it excluded any title of inheritance. During the 11th and 12th centur-

ies, the iqta'-system formed the basis for the most widespread type of landownership, especially within the state of the Great-Seljuqs, i.e. the major part of the Eastern Caliphate. In particular, the usufructuaries of large and vast iqta'at in Iran were powerful military leaders, most of whom were then chieftains of Turkish tribes and troops originating from Central Asia. Notwithstanding the juridic regulations, they soon attempted to further their rights of land-control into titles of unconditioned landownership. It goes without saying that in this regard they could easily rely on the loyalty and support of their military or tribal adherents. As long as the central power was strong enough, these attempts were of limited success. Whenever the central state weakened, such large iqta'at usually proved to be starting points for the formation of new states, that were rather small at first. The tight connection of fiscal administration and military force in the iqta'-system obviously encouraged the increase of political power of the iqta'-holders. Our sources offer vague indications that the peasantry may have known a relative material prosperity which was, however, threatened by the general political instability.

One may cautiously conclude that the iqta'-system did not encourage rent-capitalist practices in order to skim off the surplus of agrarian production in the same way as with the formerly widespread qati'a- and mulk-territories. In contrast to these, the large iqta' in particular offered its holder all preconditions to encounter the agrarian producer with certain elements of state-power, i.e., with a trained bureaucracy and military power. In many respects, the internal administration of such an iqta' reflected the structure of the whole state. The surplus of production, e.e. the rent, was exacted in the form of taxes; salaries within the iqta' were given by means of assigning sub-iqta'at" of comparatively smaller dimensions. Attempts to improve de-facto-rights of property on an iqta' were usually supported by the increase in political power on the side of the iqta'- system and muzara'a or other forms of crop-sharing. Facing the power machinery of the iqta' holder, the peasants were usually organized in village-communities. Their

elected speakers were responsible for the payment of taxes.

Some scholars tried to interpret the development of the iqta'-system as a result of the immigration of Central Asian horse-nomads - most of them Turks - into the Central Islamic regions. This theory is difficult to accept: During its earliest phase, the iqta'-system had obviously been created to cover the salary of bureaucrats, who were not of foreign origin. The model of this procedure was an administrative practice which had already existed in pre-Islamic times. Later, the application of this system to the new class of mostly Turkish military leaders led to the development mentioned above. One should not forget, that not all institutions juridically called iqta' encouraged the political advancement of their holders. There were also very limited salaries paid in the form of tax-assignments; so they were considered juridically as iqta'at, even when their values were minimal.

With regard to politics the iqta'-system proved to be a rather destabilizing factor. Since any right of property - especially the right of inheritance - was to be supported mainly by increasing political and military power, the control of middle and large-size iqta'at underwent strong fluctuations.

V.

A more developed stage of the iqta'-system had its culminating point in Iran between the mid-fourteenth and the end of the sixteenth centuries. The political framework for this was formed by the fall of the Mongol, Il-Khanid state in Iran (about 1336). The subsequent power vacuum encouraged the rise of several rather instable, regional states. Their internal structure was to some extent based on the large, iqta'-like dominions of more or less tribal character. The Mongol rule in Iran, who had reigned more than a century did not at first recognize the Islamic law, but followed foreign, i.e. Mongol, traditions. As a result of this the iqta' underwent a new development with regard to administrative law: The formal regula-

tions were no more closely bound to Islamic norms, but became largely adapted to the political and economic realities. Furthermore, the new regulations remained in application even after the general return to Islamic customs.

Since about 1350 this advanced form of the traditional iqta' was called soyurghal. From that time onwards, the term iqta' was used exclusively as an obsolete denomination for the now obsolete form of that institution. With regard to legal history, the soyurghal included several elements, originating in Mongol, Uighur or even Chinese traditions. Previously an iqta' holder could claim his right of dominion over his territory only by means of his real power. This right became juridically a substantial part of the investiture of a soyurghal, as clearly shown by documents concerning the granting of soyurghals. These mostly include unrestricted titles of jurisdiction, administrative and fiscal authority, and, above all, the principle of inheritance. Beyond that, other forms of payment continued to exist, all of them operating as tax-assignments.

The state administration at that time generally followed a conception slightly modified from the original Islamic idea of land-categories: The major part of arable territory was classified as so-called "divani-land", i.e. completely dependent on the state's very elaborate rules of taxation. This type of land was generally in accordance with what was formerly called kharadj-land. All kinds of tax-concessions could be given out of the virtual tax-revenues of any divani-territory. These concessions may vary from large sized soyurghals to very simple tax-assignments, such as paying of minor salaries, covering only fractions of tax-revenues. The peasants in these dovamo-territories underwent forms of exploitation which hardly accord with what is usually understood as rent-capitalism. But rent-capitalist practices continued to exist within other agrarian territories which were part of the second category, "mulk"(i.e., unconditioned property). The percentage of mulk-estates had declined remarkably during the fourteenth century. The owners of such mulk-estates were victims of an increasing juridical uncert-

ainty. They were continuously threatened by acts of royal confiscation. As already mentioned, throughout the Mongol period administrative and fiscal law was in many respects different to what had been regarded as Islamic laws. Consequently, many proprietors of mulk-land lost their original status which had formerly been much more secure.

Another land-category, the so-called crown-areas ("khass") should be seen as a special case of mulk. These territories were usually separated from divani-areas by royal decree and turned into private property for the ruler and his family. As already mentioned, khass-land was frequently enlarged also by confiscation of mulk-territories, resulting either from the ruler's arbitrary action, or from compulsory sale and similar measures. The ground-rent within crown-territories was not collected by fiscal agents but by special officials obedient to the ruler. The rent was not due to the fiscal authorities but exclusively to the King's private treasury. Thus, within these territories the rent was fixed and collected by other measures than taxation.

The fourth land category was the territories resulting from pious endowments (vaqf, pl.: auqaf). The establishment and administration of such areas was always based on strict Islamic laws and regulations. Since early times, the vaqf-system may have resembled a kind of stronghold of rent-capitalist exploitation, performed by a somewhat anonymous institution.

Until the end of the sixteenth century the divani-type of arable land prevailed clearly throughout Iran. The extension of the three other categories was comparatively inferior. In some aspects, this may not totally apply to the Timurid period; yet, this is not important for our present discussion. Within the frame of divani-land the relationship between peasant and landlord (i.e. the state, the owners of soyurghals and beneficiaries of other kinds of tax-assignments) can not adequately be explained by means of Bobek's rent-capitalist criteria. An exception for this rule is possibly the

practice of tax-farming, i.e., the leasing for a lump sum of definite tax-revenues to wealthy persons with sufficient capital. But there is much evidence that tax-farming was a very limited practice down to the seventeenth century. The juridical regulations of the other three categories of land (i.e. *mulk*, *khas* and *vaqf*) gave much more encouragement to rent-capitalist practices. As a whole, however, in Iran and during the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Times, the existence of rent-capitalism in the agrarian sector was rather restricted. This fact is corroborated by our sources. The relationship between landlord and peasant was overwhelmingly based on elements of dominion and authority, and strikingly characterized by bureaucratic and military features.

In the urban settlements too, there existed probably similar mixed socio-economic conditions throughout this period. But we have to admit that socio-economic life in medieval Iranian cities has not yet been studied thoroughly enough. As far as we know, the urban artisan corporations (*sinf*, pl.: *asnaf*; often, misleadingly, translated as guilds) and their functionaries served, above all, as mediators to taxation. Despite of certain aspects of socio-economic interrelationship within the bazars, we lack sufficient information concerning questions of property and disposal of production means in the Islamic cities. Therefore, I would rather not discuss here the importance of rent-capitalism in the field of production due to urban trade. It goes without saying that eventual "capitalist sectors" in the economic life of these times (e.g., commercial or usurious capitals, etc.) were naturally concentrated in the cities. We may assume that, at that time, urban life was marked by a dense mixture of various economic forms. Further research is, however, necessary to answer the question to which extent rent-capitalism was really typical in this connection. For the time being, this could be accepted in Bobek's and Wirth's conceptions, though always combined with other elements, such as bureaucracy and political or military dominion.

VI.

The instable forerunners of the Safavid state were made out of Turcoman tribal federations; in eastern Iran, the Safavids succeeded to the descendants of Timur. In the beginning, the basis of Safavid power was formed as well by the military potential of mostly Turcoman nomadic tribes in Anatolia and northwestern Iran, the so-called Qizilbash. However, their ideological ties with the ruling dynasty consisted, primarily, of religious elements, in contrast to the former federations of the Qqara-Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu, who were exclusively based on tribal loyalty. Whereas these Turcoman states had been rather ephemeral, the Safavid state was able to survive more than two centuries.

At first, the system of payment by means of tax-concessions was continued. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence that along with the increasing consolidation and centralization of the state, the seigneurial rights of the holders of large-sized soyurghals were gradually restricted. There was a tendency to replace the institution of the soyurghal, including the far-reaching privileges and prerogatives of its owners, by means of another one. This new institution somehow resembled the traditional iqta', especially with regard to the question of inheritance, and was called tiyul. Within the second half of the sixteenth century, the former large-sized soyurghals were entirely replaced by tiyuls. The holders of the large tiyuls (frequently of the size of whole provinces) were usually the chiefs of the Qizilbash tribes, along with other high-ranking state functionaries. At that time these tribal chiefs still held the military power of the Safavid state. The term soyurghal remained restricted to prebends of religious people and was finally even confuses with endowment territory.

During the rule of 'Abbas I (1587-1629) this structure was entirely changed: A standing army with exclusive loyalty to the Shah was created. This was done in order to eliminate the destabilizing effect which was still exercised by the militarily and politically

unrestricted Qizilbash-leaders. The salaries of this new army were to be carried out in cash only. Therefore, tax-concessions for this purpose were abandoned. Consequently, even whole provinces were withdrawn from the exchequer's authority and subordinated to a newly created crown administration. This development reached its highest point in the forties of the seventeenth century. At this time, the crown-provinces covered more than 50 percent of the whole territory. The relationship between crown-land peasants and their landlord - more precisely, the Shah himself and the representatives of the crown-administration - was marked by the far-reaching absence of traditional tax-regulations. The peasants were actually tenants, bound by more or less muzara'-like contracts. The economic structure of this royal demesne-sector bore therefore much more rent-capitalist elements, in Bobek's sense, than the remaining divani-territory out of which tiyuls and other tax-concessions continued to be granted. Various reports of European travellers of that time convey the impression that the average conditions of material life were worse in the territories of royal demesne than they were within the divani-provinces (which were then administratively called 'mamalik). Within the crown-provinces (which productivity in general seems to have been regressive. After 1650, however, several crown-provinces were reshaped as provinces of the mamalik-type. We possess much evidence to the outspread of famines and many cases of peasants deserting their soil in the late Safavid period, especially from crown-estates and areas of pious endowments (vaqf).

During the seventeenth century the crown used to interfere also in non-agrarian economic affairs, much more than this had been common earlier. In such cases the crown used to apply methods recalling Bobek's criteria for rent-capitalism. There had already been a long tradition that rulers invested considerable amounts out of their private money in commercial enterprise (e.g., the "urtaq"-system in the Timurid period). Since 'Abbas I the crown more and more used to monopolize entire branches of trade, as for example, the production of silk at all its levels. In the last stage, the crown gave up the international silk-trade to European commercial companies, thus

completely neglecting the native merchants, with the exception of the Armenians. During the late seventeenth century, the wide expansion of tax-farming, which had been rather exceptional in earlier times, was an additional symptom for the increase of rent-capitalist aspects. In tax-farming, the exchequer farmed out entire tax-revenues to the highest bidding capitalists; in this case the fiscal authorities renounced their claims for a good part of their former regular income. In addition, tax-farming often enough was exercised in favor of the entire profit of the King's treasury only. Particularly during the last decades, tax-farming - the habit of farming out offices and state functions - developed; but this lease of offices did not reach its culmination in Iran before the nineteenth century.

VII.

The general infiltration of all economic sectors by "rent-capitalist" elements is often described, particularly by geographers, as being typical of recent societies and economies in the Near and Middle East. Altogether, it seems to me that rent-capitalism in Iran did not totally overdominate other forms of exploitation earlier than the middle of the 19th century. On the face of it, this development, which took place during the reign of Nasir ad-Din Shah (1849-1896), was accompanied with several additional factors: The traditional military structures, still based on tribal elements, were reduced and gradually replaced by a Europeanized standing army. At the same time, the traditional tax-assignments (the tiyuls) were formally abandoned. This did not happen earlier, but during the late 19th century. What had been tiyul-territory until that time, was now established as regular, unconditioned land-property, just in that form, as it is considered today to have been typical of the Middle East up to our time. Only then, the muzara'a system of crop-sharing became a general feature of the relationship between peasant and landlord in Iran, as it is described by Bobek as a typical element of rent-capitalism. As mentioned above, the muzara'a was a very ancient and traditional form of landownership, but its general



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expansion within almost the whole agrarian sector is obviously the result of a very recent development. This does not only apply to Iran. Indeed, the history of Turkey and other territories of the former Ottoman Empire, especially Egypt, offers evidence of a similar development, though within a different temporal frame and with regard to different institutional structures. Additional elements described by Bobek as typical of rent-capitalist societies are also noticeable on a broader scale in Iran only since the middle of the 19th century, e.g., the destruction of village-communities. As already seen, these village-communities exercised throughout centuries a mediating function between rural producers and the exchequer of the landlords, within the iqta'-, soyurghal- and tiyul-systems, in order to guarantee the payment of prescribed taxes. But with the change of these general conditions of property, those village-communities lost their functions and, finally, even their institutional character. A similar development is to be noticed with regard to the urban artisan corporations, the so-called "asnaf" (the "guilds"). As another especially rent-capitalist item, Bobek mentions increasing financial encumbrance and indebtedness of the peasantry with regard to their landlords. Evidence thereof and also of continuous famines and increasing commercial speculation on grain and other crops is much more available in the sources of the late 19th century than in the earlier ones.

About 1870, the areas traditionally reserved for the cultivation of grain were drastically restricted in order to intensify the cultivation of poppy. This was mainly supported and even executed by individuals belonging to the private circle of the Shah himself. To these people, the profits through international opium-trade were obviously more attractive than the population's supply with cereals and bread. This is to be seen in connection with the rapidly increasing indebtedness of the state, another phenomenon unknown until then. The following years were marked by several strong famines. They used to be artificially prolonged by speculation on excess profits and finally became more or less chronic. Direct correlation between the continuation of famines and the holding back

of grain from the markets by profit gamblers - frequently the landlords themselves - is explicitly documented in the sources.

Another factor for the lack of grain was that during the seventies and the eighties of the last century, Russian military agents supplied their armies in the Central Asian campaigns with cereals mainly through advantageous purchases of Iranian grain: Every year at spring-time, about the Nauruz-festivities, when the peasants had an increased need for cash money, they sold their reserves of cereals and seed to the Russians. It was those and similar practices which led to an evergrowing indebtedness on the side of the peasants. Prices of bread and grain more than tripled within three decades after they had been rather stable for centuries. In addition, at that time the practice of pish-furush, marked as typically rent-capitalist by Ehlers (Marburg), became common on a wide scale: Wealthy persons, well provided with capital, following the mentioned Russian habits, used to buy the peasants' shares of the forthcoming crop at low costs. Thus, about the turn of the century, it had become quite common in provincial townships and centers to expect severe shortages of grain every year within the first weeks after the harvest. By then, people had already got used to the idea that last crops would be held back from the market in order to gain excess profit.

These and other arguments indicate that those particular socio-economic conditions, whose analysis led to the conception of rent-capitalism, were quite late in becoming general and comprehensive in Iran, i.e., not earlier than that particular period when the Iranian state, rather hesitatingly, attempted to adapt its own structures to the realities of international economy and policy. One should not forget, however, that this attempt happened within the same period when colonial, i.e. especially Russian and British, influence overflowed all spheres of Iranian public life. Similar statements can easily be made concerning other Middle East countries. Thus, the improvement and general expansion of aspects of the "rent-capitalist form of society" obviously took place simul-

taneously with the increasing expansion of colonial interests, and with the first "modern" changes of social orders and administrative systems in the Islamic world. It is quite understandable that nowadays, when, e.g., geographers consider the most recent aspects of modernization they would be inclined to judge upon conditions rooted in the 19th century as if they were genuine historical elements of more ancient origin. Yet, there are enough reasons to presume that, in the light of historical research, many so-called rent-capitalist aspects of recent Oriental societies may result from rather recent developments.

VIII.

The present investigation into selected fields of economic history of Islamic Iran has some severe shortcomings. First of all, conclusions concerning socio-economic aspects were mostly based on institutional and administrative circumstances. I have repeatedly neglected the important question regarding the concrete social relations that had formed the pre-conditions for certain institutions and juridic or administrative regulations. To a certain extent these deficiencies are to be explained by the present state of research and the limited accessibility of the sources. Furthermore, I have confined myself to certain aspects of agrarian production only. I scarcely touched such important fields as urban production and features of tribal or nomadic life. Therefore, it may well be possible that in some cases secondary aspects were overstressed. Nevertheless, the following conclusions seem to be justified: If ever the rent-capitalist concept is valid for defining an entire historical socio-economic formation - and this is not the place to venture a final answer - then it is obviously valid only for the relatively recent history of Iran and other Islamic regions. Yet, rent-capitalism fails in describing the general socio-economic character of more ancient historical periods. This does not mean, however, that we totally lack evidence for rent-capitalist practices in earlier epochs; still, these practices were confined to limited economic sectors. In this connection I pointed out the early Islamic

qati'a-system, certain fields of agrarian production like lands belonging to the categories of waqf, mulk or khass. For more precise statements concerning this matter, one has to wait for future research. For example, one should not forget what Rodinson and Cahen called "capitalist sectors" within premodern societies, a concept closely related to what Marx called the "antediluvial capital". Such concepts, I believe, should be thoroughly studied and analysed in order to investigate whether they bore any rent-capitalist aspects.

A major impulse for geographic research on urban dwelling and life in the Islamic world has been triggered by Bobek's ideas. Moreover, the theme "Islamic cities" or "cities in the Islamic world" has meanwhile become a major subject of interest also to the Orientalists.

I had suggested that various aspects which could be called rent-capitalist did not gain a general and comprehensive dimension in Oriental societies earlier than in the period in which European colonialism was rapidly expanding. This suggestion raises the question whether there were any causal connections between these two simultaneous events, i.e. colonial expansion and the general infiltration of non-European societies by rent-capitalism. But, this question goes beyond the thematic frame of this paper.

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