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“...So that the Descendants of the Descendants [of the Muslims] May Profit by It”: ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the Muslim Army and the Decision not to Divide the Lands of Alexandria

In a letter to the caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ announced the conquest of Alexandria (641) in the following manner: “I have conquered a city in which there are four thousand luxuries with four thousand baths and forty thousand Jews.”¹ In the eyes of rulers and commanders, this was a remarkable achievement, but that was not how the soldiers saw it: they were not very happy with the terms of ending the fighting. ‘Amr’s soldiers demanded to be given “a fair share of the booty,” i.e. for the spoils and lands to be distributed among them. They cited the precedent set by Muhammad in Khaybar in support of their claims. In Khaybar, Muhammad had divided the booty into five equal parts, taking one-fifth to himself and distributing the rest among the Muslim community.² Considering the soldiers’ discontent, ‘Amr consulted ‘Umar to ask how he should respond. ‘Umar advised him against heeding the soldiers’ wishes and instructed him to leave the land in the hands of the local population.³

The decision not to distribute land had a significant effect on several social groups: the Muslim army, the caliph in Medina, the nascent Muslim community and the conquered population. The case symbolizes a noteworthy stage in the evolution of the mentality of early Islam – the shift from *maghāzī* (raids) to *futūḥ* (conquests). According to the traditional early Islamic view, the conquerors’ strategy shifted under ‘Umar, from tribal raids to state conquest, from short-term interests to long-term considerations. ‘Umar understood that the scale had changed, so that he needed to plan ahead for years to come rather than for the next few months, and, more importantly, that he now needed to consider the needs of hundreds of thousands of people. To facilitate this, a bureaucratic state apparatus needed to be put in place along with state institutions and even hierarchies. Under ‘Umar, a series

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1 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 68 [81], transl. Hilloowala. In another version, a messenger is sent to Medina instead of a written letter, see Ya‘qūbī, 786 [2377], transl. Gordon, Robinson, Rowson, and Fishbein.

2 This custom had pre-Islamic roots, see Løkkegaard (2012).

3 Balādhuri, 422 [265–266], transl. Ḥitti; Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 81 [68], transl. Hilloowala.

of actions along these lines were taken: new roles and offices such as the *dīwān al-jund* (the army and salaries chamber) emerged, new cities were established, land was surveyed, and a tax system was instituted. This period was the formative stage of the Muslim empire.⁴ But the most significant change of all was a major shift in the conception of the roles of the army; it was important for the soldiers and their leaders to understand they were not raiding to satisfy their own immediate needs, but for the sake of the common good in a still-to-come-and distant future.

The connection between lands and state-building in early Islam has received growing attention in recent years.⁵ Using documentary, material, and literary sources, scholars of the field have recently attempted to reconstruct this connection. The question of land tenure, who owns and attend the lands may in fact tell us some things about the process of state-building in early Islam and the nature of its development: did the conquerors take the land for themselves? What happened to the inhabitants of the lands and the local elites who owned it? How did the conquerors perceive themselves: as new regional and local aristocrats, or as rulers of a vast empire? The aim of this contribution is to examine the way early Muslim historians saw, understood, and told the story of the conquest of Alexandria and the following decision of the first caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb not to divide its lands among his soldiers. It focuses on the social and political forces that partake in and were influenced by this decision. The focus of this contribution is the expectations, motives, and actions of two main groups: the caliphal court and the soldiers of the conquering army. It argues that although the specific details of this case are not completely clear, we can still see the main line of events as reliable, i.e. that there was a decision not to divide the lands. The questions, then, are why the Muslims opted for this, what did the process of decision-making look like, and what does it tell us about the socio-political development of the Muslim empire.

In order to understand the construction of state institutions, the challenges and the various interests encountered by ‘Umar,⁶ I will focus on one single decision, the above-mentioned instruction not to distribute land among the soldiers who had fought to conquer it. This particular case study will allow us to read into the needs and interests of ‘Umar as the leader of vast territories and diverse populations. Analyzing the steps and compromises involved has the power to reveal how nomadic Arab tribes shifted to a new mindset, one now required for the government of an extensive and sedentary empire. It will also shed light on the various ways in which

⁴ Donner (1981) 3–5.

⁵ See, for example, Sijpesteijn (2009), Legendre (2018), Campopiano (2018), Frantz-Murphy (2007), and Kennedy (2014).

⁶ It should be noted here that I see ‘Umar as the head of the leading elite of the newly born political entity. As such, when using his name I refer to him and the political center around him. As I argue below, even the decisions and actions that ascribed to him came after struggles and consultations within the caliphal court. I opted to use his name, as encompassing a much complex sociopolitical structure, for the sake of convenience.

different groups experienced this change, the implications of this shift on the ground, and the manner of its implementation. This is not to say, of course, that the Muslim empire functioned as a unified and centralized empire by ‘Umar’s time; such historical changes and processes take time and are achieved gradually,⁷ and here I would like to emphasize one of the historical events that helped to achieve these later developments. Scholars debate the centralization of power and the systemized nature of the institutions and apparatuses set by the ruling elite in Medina. It is usually suggested that it is not before the Umayyad period, and mainly under the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), that the Muslims empire became centralized. They point to processes such as Arabization of the administration and coinage minting.⁸ Focusing on other manifestations of power and centralization, however, supports a different account. Political power and implementation of new policies has led Petra Sijpesteijn to the conclusion that: “The system that the Muslims installed in Egypt was remarkably lean and centralized.”⁹ This contribution will argue that the process of centralization in later periods did not occur *ex nihilo*, and we can see its beginnings already in the times of the early conquests, when the caliphal court was able to implement its policies.

When addressing the events, the process, and the unfolding of early Islam, one encounters several problems, one of them being sources: in the absence of relevant archaeological and documented historical sources, most of the available sources are Muslim chronicles. These texts rely heavily on oral history and were probably first put into writing at least two hundred years *post factum*. Scholars have indicated that the narratives described are problematic since they reflect later (ninth century and onwards) ideologies, concepts, and interests.¹⁰ While this may be true, this article draws on various chronicles that were written in different times and at different places. As such, they most probably reflect different interests and should not be considered as belonging to a single monolithic corpus in which all texts serve the same ends. Maged Mikhail has asserted that the sources on the conquest of Egypt contain various competing political narratives, side by side.¹¹ This implies that there was a motive for writers and transmitters to omit or play down events that would call their favored narratives into question. In fact, the early Muslim historians were honest about the fact that contradicting accounts and stories relating to the same events appear. The case of not dividing the land is cited by early Muslim historians as evidence for contradictory views and narratives. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam cites the same story as part of two contradictory narratives: first in the section that claims Egypt was con-

⁷ For a survey of the question of the centralization of Muslim empire, see Legendre (2016) 4–7.

⁸ See the different opinions of Johns (2003) and Hoyland (2006) on that matter. Also consult Foss’ (2009) two-parts article.

⁹ Sijpesteijn (2013) 85.

¹⁰ See discussions in Crone/Cook (1977) 3, 89, and 139; Robinson (2003); Donner (1998) 1–25; Noth (1994); Hoyland (2015) 1–7; Shoshan (2012) 1–12.

¹¹ Mikhail (2014) 29–34.

quered by force, and then in the section depicting Egypt's conquest by treaty.¹² We can thus surmise that the story – if not its interpretation – was most probably consensus in later periods, albeit with different interpretations. Moreover, the fact that the chronicles were written later and reflect later principles and anachronistic perceptions does not necessarily cast doubt on the data they contain, which may still be genuine and valuable and reflect real issues faced by early Muslim society.¹³ Moreover, they were very candid about confrontations. The story the chronicles tell us is far from being an ideal story of clean historical process, but rather shows us how much this process was complex and debatable, within the caliph's close circles, and also the need to convince the soldiers themselves. Medieval Muslim scholars elaborated and discussed the conquests and military expeditions in considerable depth. The emphasis placed by early Muslim historians on the question of how lands were attained is at least partly explained by the interest of later generations in questions of taxation. This has led Gladys Frantz-Murphy to the conclusion that “all traditions that date the definition of the legal status of conquered land to the time of their initial conquest are suspect.”¹⁴ However, land discussions were not limited to historical genres and subsequent debates. The sources contain various stories and narratives that cannot be explained solely by such later motives.¹⁵ There was a real need to decide how land was owned and by whom, to determine how to deal with local inhabitants, and to decide how land should be taxed. The case study analyzed here therefore seems to reflect genuine historical concerns.¹⁶ Another problem one faces is that multiple narratives yield a great number of diverging accounts of events. This, in turn, gives rise to another possible methodological problem: are we dealing with a *topos* here? As we shall later see, there are enough variations in the responses to the decision not to divide the land in the cases from Syria, the Sawād region, and Egypt to suggest that this is not a *topos*. Lastly, the status of the conquered lands was disputed between different ranks in the Muslim community, and this seemed to justify classification of the lands into different categories.¹⁷ How are we to analyze our case study, then? While Kennedy accepts its historical authenticity, Marie Legendre argued very recently that it was a later addition put in the literary sources in order to glorify 'Umar's name.¹⁸ She based this argument on similar claim made by Tayeb el-Hibri in regard to 'Umar's religious actions, and by pointing to neglected accounts in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's work that tell us of Arab tribes settling in the Egyptian hinterland.¹⁹ These accounts, however, are not yet sufficient to exclude altogether

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 71 [84] and 75 [88], transl. Hilloowala.

¹³ Noth (1994) 46–47; Morony (1984) 14.

¹⁴ Frantz-Murphy (2007) 111.

¹⁵ Kennedy (1986) 355; Donner (1998) 1–25.

¹⁶ Kennedy (2014) 160–161.

¹⁷ Duri (2011) 97–98.

¹⁸ Kennedy (2014) 160; Legendre (2018) 399.

¹⁹ el-Hibri (2010) 78; Legendre (2018) 399.

er the main line of the story, as they still do not contradict the bigger pattern of the conquerors settling in the land. Indeed, the papyrus evidence suggests that a large-scale Muslim landownership before the Umayyad period did not occur, and that instead they settled in urban areas.²⁰ In this context, and in the absence of any other evidence, we may conclude that there was, in fact, a policy to avoid dividing land and distributing it to soldiers. This gives at least some credibility to our case study. I will analyze this case here not for its specific details and use of rhetoric, but rather to extract the themes and concerns raised by the sources. The matter in dispute was who should own the land. Should it belong to the conquering soldiers, the Arab-Muslim elite, the entire Muslim community, or the local population? While some soldiers and companions wanted to own the lands, 'Umar (supported by 'Alī) decided to leave them in the hands of the local population. 'Umar is said to have faced this dilemma directly in the field after the conquests of Alexandria and the Sawād region. Since no concrete precedent prevailed in Muslim history, he brought the matter to his companions and sought their counsel.²¹ In all three cases, we are told that the caliph opted to leave most of the land in the hands of the local population.²² Indeed, the papyri suggest that there were no Muslim landowners before the 8th century.²³ In this context, and in the absence of any other evidence, we may conclude that there was, in fact, a policy to avoid dividing land and distributing it to soldiers. This gives credibility to our case study. 'Umar's actions and words reveal his interest in extracting tax revenues from the conquered lands. In one account, his reply to 'Amr is recorded as follows:

The people disagreed with 'Amr about their shares. Most of the people wanted a share of Alexandria. 'Amr said, 'I cannot decide on their shares until I write to the Commander of the Faithful.' He wrote to him telling him of its conquest and its situation, and he told him that the Muslims sought a share of it. 'Umar wrote to him: 'Do not divide Alexandria, leave it alone and the *kharaj* will be a *fay*' (state land) for the Muslims and a force for them in the Jihad of their enemy.'²⁴

This account presents 'Umar as an agent of change. He has already adopted the mentality of an empire ruler (rather than of a tribal chief) with his preference for long-term tax revenues over immediate gains. The account points to the development of a taxation system as a replacement for booty raiding. Booty raiding describes one-off actions in which raiders take everything they can get their hands on and distribute it among themselves. Taxation, on the other hand, is a mechanism in which the

²⁰ Sijpesteijn (2009) 123–125.

²¹ Shaban (1971) 46–48.

²² Other lands were kept in the hands of the Muslim state, in accordance to special categories applied. See Balādhuri, 357 [227], Ibn Sallām, 83, and also Dennett (1950) 22–23 and Duri (2011) 97–98.

²³ Sijpesteijn (2013) gives an overview of these documents in n. 395 on p. 105, and also discusses the issue on p. 115–116. See also the discussion on landownership in Egypt in Bruning (2015).

²⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 69 [82], transl. Hilloowala.

state determines the amounts levied and then collects this revenue and distributes it according to fixed criteria and its needs. Unlike raiding, it provides the state with a reliable long-term income, allowing it to develop and to supply multiple needs. The definition of the land as *fay* meant that it remained in the hands of the local population, who now paid their taxes to the new polity.

However, this decision entailed yet another consequence: collecting taxes required a large apparatus to be built up so that land surveys and censuses could be carried out and tax-collectors and administrators could perform their work. 'Umar's decision to shift from booty raiding to taxation is evidence of a new mindset in the evolving Muslim state, one of thinking ahead and of constructing the apparatus of statehood. 'Umar's long-term perspective is again attested to in the reason he gives for preserving the land as a source of revenue: "so that the descendants of the descendants [of the Muslims] may profit by it."²⁵ In addition, 'Umar wanted to keep the local inhabitants in place to forestall possible discontent. This also assured better cultivation of the land by those familiar with the land and its crops. In other words, 'Umar chose income in perpetuity for the good of the whole Muslim community. The revenues from the provinces helped to support and finance institutions that changed the Muslim army from raiding tribes to an organized and professional force composed of full-time soldiers.

'Umar's decision to keep land in the hands of the local population was linked to changes in the way the army was perceived and the roles soldiers were to hold. The caliphal court moved to establish a more professional army fitting to the new status of a ruling empire. This was achieved in a series of actions and decisions aimed at adjusting the Muslim army to new circumstances.

To form an army more fitting to the new status of the Muslims, the state established the *dīwān* in 'Umar's time. This ensured that soldiers had an income to sustain them so they could afford to serve as full-time, professional soldiers. Moreover, through the ban on holding lands, the caliphal court tried to cement the soldiers' dependence on their state stipends and to block alternative, competing sources of income.²⁶ For the same reason, the cultivation of land by soldiers was also banned.²⁷ Owning land, and needing to tend to it, would distract them from their military obligations and campaigns. Indeed, 'Umar cites his preference that the soldiers would be dependent on state stipends rather than on landowning as a direct reason for leaving conquered lands in the hands of the locals in one case (in the Sawād): "As for the land and camels, leave them in the hands of those men who work them, so that they may be included in the stipends [pensions] of the Muslims. If thou dividest them among those present, nothing will be left for those who come after them."²⁸ This action was meant to achieve a shift in practice, as the Muslim sol-

²⁵ Balādhurī, 343 [218], transl. Hitti.

²⁶ Kennedy (2013) 59.

²⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 165 [161], transl. Hilloowala.

²⁸ Baladhuri, 422 [266], transl. Hitti.

diers were now dependent on the income from the empire's treasury, rather than on their own lands and livestock.²⁹

Instead of giving the soldiers land of their own and dispersing them, they were housed in newly founded garrison cities (*amṣār*). These cities were crucial to the rule of the provinces: they allowed the Muslims to maintain a military presence in the provinces and to oversee their administrative activity.³⁰ What is more, they also ensured soldiers were present as units in one centralized location, and this made it easier both to control the army and to mobilize it in case of need. This latter reason led 'Umar to prefer Fuṣṭāṭ over Alexandria as a place to settle the army. It is said that 'Amr first wanted to occupy Alexandria and to use it as his hub in Egypt. 'Umar rejected the plan, allegedly because he wanted no source of water to stand between the new settlement and Medina. This point was also stressed in the case of the earlier foundations of Baṣra and Kūfa. While it is possible that this reflected a genuine concern of the caliph, since the Muslims had not yet developed maritime expertise, it is also possible that this is a topos from a later period. Kubiak, however, points to the probability of this story. Whether true or not, the fact remains that all three cities were built with no bodies of water separating them from Medina. Fuṣṭāṭ's geographical location at the crossroads between Lower and Upper Egypt made it a perfect place to establish a garrison city from which the newly shaped army could quickly reach most of the country in case of need.

The decision not to occupy conquered cities, but rather to establish new ones, also had to do with cultural fears and with the desire to keep the army unified. Since they were in the minority in the conquered territories, the Muslims were worried that mixing with other cultures and religions might cause them to lose their own. 'Umar is said to have stated this directly. After sending reinforcements to 'Amr, he is reported to have said: "I have sent four leaders to you and on the basis of what I knew about them I told you that they are equal to one thousand, unless they have been changed by what changed the others." 'Umar is clearly worried here that the conquered lands and the new experiences the Muslims are having are ruining and corrupting the soldiers. This suggests that cultural and religious fears were also part of the set of considerations and concerns over the army's function that the Muslims took into account in reaching the decision to settle soldiers in garrison cities.³¹ In this way, they were able to separate soldiers from the locals, perhaps acting under a policy of segregation and disintegration.

Yet another important action was the structural reorganization of the army into a new kind of units. Some tribes were numerous while others only had a few members, and this had led to irregularly sized units emerging. In this light, 'Umar decided to divide tribes into military and administrative units of uniform size, *da'wa*. This divi-

²⁹ Kennedy (2002) 161.

³⁰ Kubiak (1982) 89–92.

³¹ See on this question Kennedy (2013) 7.

sion allowed for more convenient administrative control over money transfers, tax collection, and land division. In addition, it enhanced the power to transport and use units as part of the military effort entailed in extensive conquests. This reorganization cannot have been easily achieved. It is another example for the changes wrought in the army by 'Umar and their complexities: we can only imagine the difficulties encountered by administrators and army commanders intent on changing the old social order. We must assume that past animosities and grudges had to be taken into account and strenuous efforts made to match compatible tribes. And indeed, specialists in genealogy were involved in the process of military reform.³² It is quite clear that this step was not taken without due care, requiring as it did a thorough evaluation by the executive. The fact that the caliphal court brought about these changes in the army despite the scale of the challenge shows how important this step was considered to be.

'Umar's actions and wishes did not completely coincide with those of the soldiers. The activities of the soldiers are often overlooked in modern scholarship, and their actions have yet to receive sufficient representation in it. Perhaps the fact that no violent mutiny broke out made it easier to overlook this group of people. Here, we shall see how they perceived the change, and what their expectations during the conquests were.

Booty was a major incentive for soldiers to join military campaigns.³³ In several cases, soldiers cite it directly as the reason for their participation in battles. In one case, they even complain about a commander who refrained from battle, accusing him of denying them their due spoils. In the battles that preceded the conquest of Alexandria, soldiers became accustomed to collecting booty and, after sending a certain share of it back to Medina, of dividing it among themselves.³⁴

In Alexandria, too, soldiers are said to have urged 'Amr into battle while he negotiated peace with the people of Alexandria: "We will not give them anything of the arbitration nor the *jizya* until God conquers for us, so that all the land would become ours as plunder and booty, as the fortress and what was in it became ours."³⁵ Here, 'Amr is put in a precarious position. And here, too, he serves as 'Umar's agent, rebuffing the soldiers' demands by citing the wish of the Commander of the Faithful. In this case, however, he also mentions the flooding of the Nile as a reason not to fight, arguing that it would make a military effort impossible.³⁶ Since we can assume that the soldiers were aware of the floods, it is not inconceivable that 'Amr was using a strategy of mediation to appease them.

Muslim soldiers were not passive in response to the new policy by the caliph. In Syria, soldiers discontented with the distribution of booty by their military leader,

³² Ṭabarī, vol. XIII, 76 [2495], transl. Juynball.

³³ For a legal discussion on how booty should have been divided among soldiers, see Abū Yūsuf, 58.

³⁴ Ṭabarī, vol. XII, 30 [2451], transl. Friedman.

³⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 52 [69–70], transl. Hilloowala.

³⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 52 [69–70], transl. Hilloowala.

Abū 'Ubayda, asked the renowned military leader Khālīd ibn al-Walīd to intercede in the affair. He agreed to act as their representative and to present their request to Abū 'Ubayda. However, the latter refused to revoke the decision.³⁷ This indicates that soldiers had opportunities to express their resentment. They were able to band together and had ways of expressing their feelings to senior commanders. Although they did not succeed in changing the outcome in this case, we are not told of any violent mutiny they engaged in.

In the Sawād, some soldiers pushed for the division of the lands, but the majority of the warriors rejected it, and even assisted in the efforts of Muslim officials to implement the new custom.³⁸ Although we are not informed of the reasons for their support, we may deduce that they regarded it to be in their favor. This shows that "soldiers" is by no means a monolithic category (or body of people); even within the Muslim army, people reacted to changing realities in different ways. Moreover, it may also suggest that soldiers were not deprived of historical agency: they assessed the situation, and they acted upon what they thought served them better. In this case, they seemed to prefer the possibility of future earnings as serving soldiers in the Muslim army over the prospect of receiving land. The *dīwān* system, once it was in place, guaranteed the soldiers a fixed income, and this may explain why they did not protest angrily against 'Umar's decision: they probably understood it as an act which benefitted them.

The fact that they did not receive land did not, however, prevent some soldiers from looking for additional sources of income. We are told that 'Amr ordered that the dwellings provided for the Muslim conquerors by the locals as part of the covenant's provisions would be used only for a short period of time. Muslims were not allowed to own dwellings or rent them out for money, suggesting that 'Amr acted against existing practice.³⁹ Furthermore, shortly after the conquest of Alexandria, 'Umar banned the cultivation of land by Muslims. This appears to indicate that soldiers had sufficient money – from previous conquests or stipends – to purchase land in Egypt. In one case, 'Amr even threatened to execute a soldier who disobeyed this order, but eventually 'Umar agreed to pardon him after he apologized.⁴⁰

'Umar's new approach towards the army, soldiers, and landowning did not go uncontested. As has become clear, soldiers and military leaders were not always keen on adopting the new policy, but 'Umar also encountered resistance in the close circle of councilors around him.⁴¹ Interestingly, the early Muslim historian Balādhurī (d. 892) mentions that 'Umar's decision was made after taking the advice

37 Wāqidi, 368–370, transl. Sulaymān al-Kindī.

38 Ṭabarī, vol. XIII, 48, transl. Juynball.

39 Balādhurī, 349 [229], transl. Ḥitti.

40 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 165 [161], transl. Hilloowala.

41 Friedmann discussed this matter based on the accounts given by Ṭabarī, in: Ṭabarī, vol. XII, xx–xxi, transl. Friedmann.

of ‘Alī over that of other companions.⁴² This indicates that there were tensions even within the caliphal court and among the *ṣaḥāba*. Among those opposed to ‘Umar in this matter, we find notable early companions such as the first *mu’adhdhin* Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ. It seems that in at least some cases, consent was bought. A case in point may be that of yet another companion and military chief, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām. It is reported that al-Zubayr led a force of 12,000 men in the military effort to conquer Egypt (‘Amr reportedly entered Egypt with about 3,500 or 4,000 soldiers). Indeed, he was the only man who eventually received land in Egypt following the conquest of Alexandria, and he is said to have retired there peacefully. One tradition even asserts that al-Zubayr was given estates in Egypt to “keep him quiet.”⁴³ This was probably done since he was a very powerful individual who could have mustered strong opposition to the caliph – as he later did, indeed, when he fought against the fourth caliph, ‘Alī. This method of negotiation, i. e. giving powerful figures a share of land or booty, was also adopted by ‘Umar in another case in the Sawād, where he asked the tribe of Bajila to restore lands they had received after the battle of Qādisiyyah (636), promising compensation. While most of them agreed to the terms, one woman was unwilling to give up the share of the booty she was entitled to by inheritance. Eventually, ‘Umar paid her a large sum of gold for her land.⁴⁴

Bilāl and al-Zubayr seem to have had good reason for objecting to the new policy: Bilāl had already owned land in Syria given to him by Abū Bakr, and al-Zubayr was given land after the battle of Khaybar.⁴⁵ Thus, it is clear that notable companions expected to receive more land and achieve greater wealth. In this case, it was undeniably in the interest of the elite to preserve the previous custom, and the fact that the new system of controlling the land was finally implemented shows that the caliph and his supporters were able to withstand the opposition in the court, suggesting high levels of political power and diplomatic expertise consistent with the centralization of power. In another case, in 637, after the conquest of Jalūlā’ in the Sawād, ‘Umar summoned a *shūrā* to deal with the land question there. He accepted ‘Alī’s view and ordered Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās to leave the lands for future Muslim generations, i. e. to prefer the long-term tax revenues. The narration is cited by Balādhuri: “‘Umar took the advice of the Prophet’s companions, and ‘Alī said, ‘Leave them that they may become a source of revenue and aid for the Moslems.’ Accordingly, ‘Umar sent ‘Uthmān ibn-Ḥunaif al-Anṣārī who assessed on each man 48, 24, or 12 [*dirhams*].”⁴⁶

We are not informed regarding the identity of the participants of the consulting committee. Nonetheless, ‘Umar’s siding with ‘Alī suggests that the decision was not

⁴² Balādhuri, 423 [266], transl. Ḥitti.

⁴³ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 76 [88], transl. Hilloowala.

⁴⁴ Balādhuri, 424 [267], transl. Ḥitti; a similar case appears in Dā’ūdī, 60 – 61. Interestingly, ‘Umar is said to complain about having to “buy off” the soldiers instead of doing what he thought to be right.

⁴⁵ Balādhuri, 424, transl. Ḥitti; Waqidi, 395, transl. Sulaymān al-Kindi.

⁴⁶ Balādhuri, 423 [265 – 266], transl. Ḥitti.

unanimous and was reached only after some discussion. This seems to fit with the notion that 'Umar served as a representative of a group within the companions, and also that the companions had different approaches to the way they should handle and govern the newly conquered lands. This narrative also confirms the shift in mindset of the Muslims to one based on a long-term perspective: 'Ali's suggestion to preserve the lands as a source of revenue is based on an understanding of their potential to generate future revenue. This shows that notable individuals within the caliphal court understood the new context and circumstances and adapted rather quickly to both, dealing well with their new status as an evolving empire. The Muslims were able to secure future revenue and establish a new social order in conquered territories.

Conclusions

Although the exact story and its details are not clear, we can surmise that the caliphal policy not to divide the land exposes prevailing tensions between different groups and individuals regarding the change in their own and the land's status. It places the spotlight on 'Umar and members of the ruling elite in Medina as agents of change implementing new ideas and practices in the army. This change did not come without opposition within this group, as some notable companions objected to the new policy, perhaps due to the fact that they possessed estates and land and feared for their own status and wealth. 'Umar and his side, however, were able to overcome their resistance with the support of other important companions, such as 'Ali. Although they did not actively endorse the change, the soldiers also opted not to publicly oppose the caliph and either subsisted as best they could with their stipends or sought out additional sources of income. The governors' role was to mediate between the caliph and the soldiers, and it is hard to imagine the implementation of this new policy without their support. The case study discussed in this article presents the caliph as a strong, authoritative figure with an involvement in the affairs of the provinces. While this depiction could be a later addition, its authenticity at least in relation to the land question is corroborated by a lack of evidence for Muslim land-owning in the seventh century, which does indeed appear to have been the result of a deliberate policy decision by the new rulers of the lands. The caliphal court led by 'Umar introduced various institutions and elements of state apparatus to the Muslims. These acts, when put together, suggests that already in this early stage the caliphal court has had long-term policies and the power and authority to implement them.

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