

Developmental Policy of al-Malik al-Ādil al-Ayyubi in the al-Havf Region of Egypt: A Study of Land Reclamation Systems and Water Resource Development (596–615 AH / 1200–1218 CE)

“Mısır’ın El-Havf Bölgesinde Malik el-Adil el-Eyyubi’nin Kalkınma Politikası: Toprak Islah Sistemleri ve Su Kaynaklarının Geliştirilmesi Üzerine Bir Çalışma (596–615 AH / 1200–1218 CE)

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Eyyubi tarihçiliğindeki önemli bir boşluğu doldurmayı hedefleyerek devletin geleneksel askeri anlatılarından ziyade kalkınma politikalarına odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, 1200-1218 yılları arasında Haçlı çatışmalarının yoğun olduğu bir dönemde, Sultan el-Melik el-Adil’in Mısır’ın el-Havf bölgesindeki doğal kaynakları ve sosyo-ekonomik istikrarı nasıl yönettiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, arazi ıslah sistemlerinin ve su kaynakları yönetiminin, gıda güvenliğini ve siyasi meşruiyeti sağlamada stratejik araçlar olarak entegrasyonunu analiz etmektir. Niteliksel tarihsel-analitik bir metodoloji benimseyen çalışma, Doğu Nil Deltası’nın kalkınma ortamını yeniden kurgulamak için Ortaçağ el yazmalarını, Divânü’l-Harâc kayıtları gibi idari belgeleri ve coğrafi metinleri incelemektedir. Bulgular, Eyyubi devletinin, kanal temizliği ve bentlerin güçlendirilmesi gibi teknik altyapı çalışmalarını, köylü istikrarını desteklemek için "mali esneklik" gibi idari yeniliklerle birleştiren sofistike bir "esnek merkeziyetçilik" modeli uyguladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu politikalar, el-Havf bölgesini stratejik bir tahıl rezervine ve askeri kampanyalar için hayati bir lojistik merkeze dönüştürmüştür. Araştırma, bu tarihsel modelin, kaynak yönetimi ve ulusal güvenlik arasındaki bağa dair derin içgörüler sunduğunu ve gıda güvenliği ile su sürdürülebilirliği konusundaki güncel Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Amaçları (SDG 2 ve SDG 6) ile uyumlu olduğunu sonucuna varmaktadır. Çalışmanın özgün değeri, Ortaçağ tarımsal genişlemesini tepkisel bir kriz yönetiminden ziyade proaktif bir güvenlik stratejisi olarak çerçevelemesinde yatar. Gelecekteki araştırmalar için, idari yönetimin evrimini daha iyi anlamak amacıyla farklı Ortaçağ İslam eyaletlerindeki kalkınma politikaları üzerine karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar yapılması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Eyyubi Kalkınması, Arazi Islahı, Su Yönetimi, Gıda Güvenliği, El-Havf Bölgesi

Öne Çıkanlar

- Bu çalışma, Sultan el-Melik el-Adil’in el-Havf bölgesindeki tarımsal kalkınma ve su yönetimi politikalarının, Eyyubi devletinin askeri güvenliği ve siyasi istikrarının temel stratejik dayanağı olduğu tezini savunmaktadır.
- Arazi ıslah sistemlerinin ve sulama ağlarının rehabilitasyonunun, yalnızca teknik bir faaliyet değil, Haçlı tehdidine karşı gıda arzını garanti altına alan proaktif bir devlet stratejisi olduğu tespit edilmiştir.
- Devletin, köylülerin sürekliliğini sağlamak ve kırsal yapının çökmesini önlemek amacıyla vergi sisteminde uyguladığı "mali esneklik" ve idari denetim mekanizmaları analiz edilmiştir.
- El-Havf bölgesinin, stratejik konumu ve üretim kapasitesiyle Eyyubi ordusu için hayati bir lojistik merkez ve tahıl ambarı işlevi gördüğü ortaya konulmuştur.
- Eyyubi dönemindeki su yönetimi ve sürdürülebilir tarım uygulamalarının, günümüzün gıda güvenliği ve doğal kaynak yönetimi sorunlarına (SDG 2 ve SDG 6) tarihsel bir perspektif sunduğu belirlenmiştir.

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Ethical Statement

This study does not require ethical committee approval, and the data used were obtained from literature reviews/published sources. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the preparation of this study and that all studies used are cited in the references.
Ahlem Youcef

Use of Artificial Intelligence

No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. All content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.
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Abstract

This study addresses a significant gap in Ayyubid historiography by shifting focus from traditional military narratives to the developmental policies of the state. The research investigates how al-Malik al-ʿĀdil managed natural resources and socio-economic instability in the al-Hawf region of Egypt during the intense Crusader conflicts between 1200 and 1218 CE. The primary objective is to analyze the integration of land reclamation systems and water resource management as strategic tools for ensuring food security and political legitimacy. Employing a qualitative historical-analytical methodology, the study examines primary medieval manuscripts, administrative documents like *Dīwān al-Kharāj*, and geographical texts to reconstruct the developmental landscape of the eastern Nile Delta. The findings reveal that the Ayyubid state implemented a sophisticated "flexible centralization" model, combining technical infrastructure maintenance (such as clearing silt from canals and reinforcing dikes) with administrative innovations like "fiscal flexibility" to support peasant stability. These policies transformed al-Hawf into a strategic grain reserve and a vital logistical hub for military campaigns. The research concludes that this historical model offers profound insights into the nexus of resource management and national security, aligning with contemporary Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2 and SDG 6). The study's original contribution lies in framing medieval agricultural expansion as a proactive security strategy rather than reactive crisis management. Future research should conduct comparative studies on developmental policies across different medieval Islamic provinces to further understand administrative evolution.

Keywords

Ayyubid Development, Land Reclamation, Water Management, Food Security, Al-Hawf Region.

Highlights

- This study argues that agricultural development and water management policies in al-Hawf were the strategic pillars of Ayyubid military security and political stability.
- It identifies that land reclamation and irrigation rehabilitation were proactive state strategies to guarantee food supplies against Crusader threats, rather than mere technical tasks.
- The research analyzes the "fiscal flexibility" and administrative oversight mechanisms implemented in the tax system to ensure peasant continuity and prevent rural collapse.
- It demonstrates how the al-Hawf region functioned as a vital logistical hub and strategic granary for the Ayyubid military due to its production capacity.
- The study establishes that Ayyubid water management practices provide a historical perspective for addressing modern food security and natural resource challenges (SDG 2 & SDG 6).

Introduction

Developmental policy is considered one of the fundamental pillars in the construction and stability of states, particularly in medieval societies where political and military stability was closely linked to the authority's ability to manage natural resources—foremost among them land and water. During the reign of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (596–615 AH / 1200–1218 CE), the Ayyubid state represented an advanced model in employing agricultural development as a strategic tool to ensure food security, strengthen state revenues, and support military capability within a regional context marked by intense conflict with the Crusader powers.

The eastern al-Hawf region in Egypt occupies a special position within this framework due to its distinctive geographical and hydrological characteristics, which made it one of the vital agricultural regions in the Nile Delta and a key component in the Ayyubid state's food and military supply network. Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil's attention to this region was not merely a result of its natural resource abundance but rather reflected a conscious awareness of its strategic importance in maintaining economic and social balance and securing the food supplies necessary for internal stability and military support.

The significance of this topic lies in shedding light on a dimension that has rarely received in-depth study in Ayyubid history: the developmental aspect of its policies, beyond the traditional focus on military and political history. It also contributes to highlighting the central role of water resource management and land reclamation in state building, revealing the complex interconnection between development, security, and strategy in Ayyubid political thought.

This article aims to analyze the developmental policy of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil in the al-Hawf region by examining land reclamation systems and mechanisms for developing water resources, and by clarifying their impact on the economic, social, and strategic stability of the state. It also seeks to highlight the position of al-Hawf within the Ayyubid developmental system as a practical model for the integration of agriculture, administration, and food security. Accordingly, the study raises the following research question:

To what extent did the policies of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil in land reclamation and water resource development in al-Hawf contribute to the economic and security stability of the Ayyubid state?

This main question gives rise to several sub-questions, including: How did the Ayyubid state manage water resources in the region? What was the nature of its relationship with peasants within the framework of the reclamation project? And what was the impact of these policies on ensuring food security and supporting military capability?

Method

This study adopts a multidimensional historical-analytical approach that integrates inductive and comparative methods in order to examine the relationship between environmental management and political authority. It relies on a critical reading of primary administrative and narrative sources, including Ibn Mammati and al-Maqrizi, while cross-referencing fiscal records from the *Dīwān al-Kharāj* to ensure data reliability and reduce interpretative bias.

1. al-Hawf Region – Geographical and Hydrological Importance in the Developmental Policy of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil.

1.1. The geographical location and boundaries of al-Hawf and their impact on its developmental formation.

The eastern al-Hawf region is considered one of the pivotal agricultural provinces in the geography of Islamic Egypt, and its strategic importance reached its peak during the Ayyubid period, particularly under the reign of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (596–615 AH / 1200–1218 CE). The region derived its weight from its distinctive geographical position on the eastern side of the Nile Delta, forming an “intermediate zone” linking the political center in Cairo with the maritime and military outlet of Damietta. Al-Hawf was not merely a rural administrative unit; rather, it evolved into a vital component of the state’s military and food supply network, making it a fundamental pillar in confronting Crusader threats that targeted the eastern Delta front (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 210, n.d., p. 365)

From a historical-geographical perspective, the al-Hawf region—administratively intertwined with what was known as the Eastern Province (Aʿmāl al-Sharqiyya)—extended over a wide area that included major urban centers such as Bilbays and Faqous. Its boundaries were characterized by direct connection to a network of canals branching from the “Khalīj Amīr al-Muʿminīn” and the Damietta branch of the Nile, allowing more regular irrigation compared to regions distant from the main Nile branches (Al-Hamawi, 1977, p. 215; Ibn Abd al-Zahir, 1996, p. 95). This expanse created a unique environmental diversity, combining highly fertile floodplains with marginal lands that required artificial irrigation techniques and continuous reclamation, which in turn granted the region flexibility in agricultural production and the ability to adapt to fluctuations in the Nile’s water levels (Bianquis, 1998, p. 104).

This orientation reveals an early developmental vision on the part of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, who realized that developing al-Hawf meant securing the central axis upon which the sustainability of the country’s agricultural and supply resources depended. The criterion was no longer merely the size of the land, but its responsiveness to advanced irrigation systems. This was reflected in his policies of granting the iqtāʿāt of this region to senior military commanders (arbāb al-suyūf) to ensure continued reclamation and protection, and to provide rapid responses to the needs of urban markets and the armies stationed on the frontiers (Lev, 1999, p. 132)

Thus, al-Hawf moved from being a natural geographical space to a developmental sphere where considerations of national security, economic abundance, and administrative sovereignty intersected within a comprehensive vision aimed at strengthening the sustainability of Ayyubid state resources (Abdul Raziq, 2005, p. 73)

1.2 Al-Hawf within the Ayyubid Administrative and Fiscal Organization:

The eastern al-Hawf region occupied an advanced position within the administrative and fiscal structure of the Ayyubid state, as clearly reflected in the records of the Dīwān al-Kharāj, which devoted significant attention to the region in terms of statistical surveys and financial assessment. The region was classified among the high-yield agricultural provinces (kharāj lands), which led the central administration under al-Malik al-ʿĀdil to adopt precise mechanisms for recording agricultural data. These mechanisms included the accurate surveying of cultivated areas, the classification of crops into winter and summer seasons, the estimation of annual production rates, and the regulation of fiscal returns associated with each unit of land. This administrative precision reveals the state’s awareness of al-Hawf’s strategic importance as a sovereign resource that could not be left to arbitrary

estimation, especially as the Ayyubid treasury increasingly relied on land tax revenues to finance military efforts (Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 143=147)

A comparison between narrative chronicles such as al-Maqrizi and fiscal-administrative records like those of Ibn Mammati reveals a high level of consistency in describing the organization of land taxation and irrigation management in al-Hawf, which strengthens the reliability of the available data and reflects the institutional maturity of the Ayyubid administration.

This attention was not limited to revenue collection alone; rather, it formed part of a broader developmental vision for resource management. The Qawānīn al-Dawāwīn indicate that the Ayyubid administration did not seek to maximize taxation at the expense of peasant productivity. Instead, a policy of “fiscal flexibility” prevailed, particularly during years of low Nile flooding (al-sharāqī), when the state would reduce burdens or postpone tax collection (installment systems or tax remissions) to prevent the collapse of the rural structure and the migration of peasants from the land (Lapidus, 1988, p. 321)

. This administrative awareness reflects an early economic understanding of the direct relationship between the stability of the “small producer” and the sustainability of the state treasury, which helped prevent severe social crises in this vital region (Al-Shadhili, 2012, p. 104; Ashtor, 1976, p. 321)

Furthermore, the administrative organization of al-Hawf reveals a model of “flexible centralization,” whereby the region remained under the direct supervision of the Dīwān al-Kharāj in Cairo while granting broad authority to local governors and officials to oversee the maintenance of “royal dikes” and irrigation canals. This balance enabled administrative effectiveness in responding to unexpected disruptions (Lev, 1999, p. 138) Consequently, al-Hawf was transformed in the vision of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil from a mere “financial unit” into a pillar of the state’s economic and social security system and a guarantee of the steady flow of grain toward major urban markets, particularly Cairo (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 306; Bianquis, 1998, p. 118).

This approach aligns with al-Malik al-ʿĀdil’s policy of strengthening internal stability through sustainable agricultural development. He recognized that controlling major agricultural provinces—foremost among them al-Hawf—was fundamental to building a strong state capable of confronting both internal and external challenges. Thus, the administrative and fiscal organization of al-Hawf can be viewed as a practical model of the Ayyubid state’s economic vision at the height of its political and administrative maturity (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 306; Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 143).

1.3. Al-Hawf as a Strategic Grain Reserve and a Tool for Food Security

During the Ayyubid period, the al-Hawf region emerged as one of the most important agricultural centers producing cereals in Egypt. Its lands were renowned for the abundant production of wheat and barley, making it a fundamental pillar in securing the needs of major cities—particularly Cairo, which relied heavily on surrounding agricultural provinces for food supplies (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 305).

This role granted the region a special place in Ayyubid economic policy, which viewed it as a decisive element in the state’s food security system, especially in light of population growth in major urban centers (Ashtor, 1976, p. 214).

The regularity of agricultural production in al-Hawf helped limit price fluctuations, particularly during periods of low Nile flooding or declining production in other parts of the Delta. The availability of a stable grain stock enabled the state to intervene in the market, either by releasing additional supplies during price increases or by regulating distribution to prevent hoarding and speculation (Lapidus, 1988, p. 319). This role demonstrates how the region evolved from a mere production unit into an active instrument for maintaining economic balance within the state.

Administrative records indicate that the Ayyubid state adopted a precise system for recording grain output in al-Hawf and linking it to storage and distribution plans. This allowed rapid responses to sudden food crises: grain could be directed to urban markets to reduce inflation or allocated to supply Ayyubid armies during military campaigns, particularly in the context of conflict with the Crusader powers (Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 68; Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 152=154).

Such organization reflects a deep awareness of the central role of food in political and military stability.

The state did not rely solely on reactive policies but sought to build a strategic grain reserve in producing provinces—foremost among them al-Hawf—to address crises before they escalated. This reserve helped mitigate the effects of famine years and reduce social unrest, which often accompanied food shortages in major cities. Famine and rising prices were among the most significant causes of instability in medieval societies, making food control a political priority (Cahen, 2001, p. 223).

Describing al-Hawf as the “granary of Egypt” therefore reflects not merely agricultural abundance, but the transformation of the region into a strategic tool used by Ayyubid authority to regulate markets, contain crises, and maintain social peace. In this context, food was not purely an economic matter but a political instrument that reinforced the legitimacy of rule and strengthened public confidence in the state’s ability to manage essential affairs (Bianquis, 1998, p. 122).

Moreover, the link between grain production and army provisioning gave the region a clear military dimension. Long campaigns and prolonged sieges could not be conducted without a stable system for securing food supplies. Consequently, control over major grain-producing regions—especially al-Hawf—formed a cornerstone of Ayyubid military strategy (Lev, 1999, p. 141).

Thus, the role played by al-Hawf as a strategic grain reserve constituted one of the main pillars of al-Malik al-‘Ādil’s developmental policy, where economic, social, political, and military considerations converged within a comprehensive vision aimed at ensuring internal stability and the sustainability of the state.

1.4. Water Infrastructure and Irrigation Networks as the Foundation of Agricultural Development in al-Hawf

Agricultural activity in the al-Hawf region relied heavily on a complex water system composed of major canals branching from the Damietta branch of the Nile, secondary channels that penetrated the inner agricultural lands, and dikes and dams that regulated floodwater distribution and protected land from flooding or drought (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 318). This network formed the vital infrastructure upon which agricultural development in the region was built, making the stability of agricultural production dependent on the integrity and proper management of these installations (Butzer, 1976, p. 45).

This water infrastructure was not merely the result of natural conditions but the product of long-term human intervention. The state contributed through supervising canal excavation, strengthening dikes, and regulating water routes in accordance with the nature of agricultural land. This intervention demonstrates that the Ayyubid state recognized that water control was the fundamental condition for sustainable agricultural activity, especially in regions highly dependent on artificial irrigation such as al-Hawf (Cahen, 2001, p. 229).

Al-Maqrizi notes that the accumulation of silt in canal beds and the neglect of dike maintenance were among the main causes of agricultural decline in certain years, particularly when combined with low Nile levels (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 318). This diagnosis reveals an early historical awareness of the relationship between deteriorating water infrastructure and disruptions in economic and social balance, as declining agricultural production was not merely a technical issue but a factor threatening general stability (Ashtor, 1976, p. 226).

In response to these challenges, the Ayyubid state regularly intervened to repair damage to irrigation networks by clearing silt from canals, restoring damaged dikes, and reorganizing watercourses to ensure that water reached lands distant from the Nile. These efforts required significant financial resources and the mobilization of local labor, indicating that the state understood investment in water infrastructure as a direct investment in agricultural stability and food security (Butzer, 1976, p. 51).

Administrative records also reveal a precise bureaucratic organization for managing irrigation networks. Canals were registered by name and route, lands benefiting from them were identified, and responsible authorities were appointed to supervise their maintenance. This organization reflects an advanced level of planning and administration and shows that water management was not a spontaneous local matter but part of the broader public policy of the Ayyubid state (Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 166=168; Lev, 1999, p. 143).

This organization helped reduce the effects of natural fluctuations in Nile water levels, as improved irrigation networks enabled more efficient storage and distribution of water, positively affecting the stability of agricultural production in al-Hawf and strengthening its role as a strategic grain reserve (Lapidus, 1988, p. 324). Moreover, the system played a role in regulating the relationship between the state and peasants, as equitable water distribution helped reduce local conflicts and ensure fair access to agricultural land. Thus, the stability of the irrigation network became a major factor in maintaining social peace within the region (Bianquis, 1998, p. 125).

Accordingly, water infrastructure and irrigation networks constituted the true foundation of agricultural development in al-Hawf. Any developmental policy during the reign of al-Malik al-Ādil could not succeed without maintaining and improving this network. Technical, administrative, and social considerations converged in this field, making water management a central axis of the Ayyubid developmental project and a fundamental pillar in preserving state stability and food security (Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 73).

1.5 .The Strategic Importance of al-Hawf in the Policy of al-Malik al-Ādil

The importance of the al-Hawf region during the Ayyubid period was not limited to its economic and agricultural dimensions; it extended to a strategic role closely tied to state security and internal stability. Securing grain production in this region was directly linked to supplying Ayyubid armies, particularly amid the ongoing conflict with the Crusader powers, where food constituted a decisive factor in sustaining military campaigns and

ensuring their ability to operate over long periods (France, 1994, p. 212; Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 67). This connection reflects the state's awareness that military superiority depended not only on combat strength but also on stable logistical supplies, foremost among them food provisions—the backbone of any prolonged war effort.

Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, as a statesman with strong administrative experience as well as a military leader, recognized that effective control over major grain-producing regions was fundamental to building state power. He therefore paid special attention to al-Hawf within his developmental policies, understanding that any disruption in its production or distribution would directly affect the state's military capacity, especially during mobilization, sieges, and extended wars (Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 69; Lev, 1999, p. 146). Consequently, the focus on al-Hawf was not an isolated economic measure but part of an integrated strategic vision linking agriculture to military capability.

Regular agricultural production in al-Hawf also contributed to reducing social unrest, which often accompanied food crises in both rural areas and major cities. The availability of grain enabled the state to intervene quickly to contain price inflation, prevent famine, and reduce social tensions, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of Ayyubid rule and reinforcing its capacity to control both rural and urban spheres (Ashtor, 1976, p. 230). Food security thus emerged as a central element in maintaining social peace and political stability, as famines historically ranked among the primary causes of unrest in medieval societies (Lapidus, 1988, p. 326).

The importance of al-Hawf also lies in its role as a link between water policy and security policy. The stability of agricultural production depended on effective management of irrigation networks and the maintenance of hydraulic infrastructure. The state understood that neglecting this infrastructure could lead to declining production, triggering food crises and social unrest that threatened internal security. Investment in land reclamation and the maintenance of canals and dikes in al-Hawf was therefore, in essence, an investment in security and stability rather than merely an economic improvement (Butzer, 1976, p. 54).

This interconnection between development and security demonstrates the maturity of Ayyubid political and administrative thought under al-Malik al-ʿĀdil. Developmental policies were not separated from strategic considerations but were integrated into the broader state project. Al-Hawf thus became a space where natural resources, administrative organization, taxation, food security, and military capacity intersected within a unified system (Cahen, 2001, p. 231).

Accordingly, al-Hawf can be viewed as a practical model of the integration between natural resources, economic policy, and strategic considerations in the Ayyubid state. It formed a cornerstone of the developmental project that al-Malik al-ʿĀdil sought to establish, demonstrating that agricultural development was not an end in itself but a means to ensure political stability and enhance the state's resilience in facing both internal and external challenges (Bianquis, 1998, p. 128).

2. Land Reclamation Systems and the Development of Water Resources in the Policy of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil al-Ayyubi

2.1 . Land Reclamation as a Strategic Choice in the Ayyubid Developmental Project

Land reclamation constituted one of the central pillars of the developmental policy adopted by al-Malik al-ʿĀdil al-Ayyubi. The state did not limit itself to exploiting existing agricultural lands but sought to expand

cultivated areas by rehabilitating fallow lands and reclaiming cultivable regions, particularly in strategically important provinces such as al-Hawf. This orientation reflects a clear understanding that increasing agricultural production depends not only on improving productivity but also on expanding the agricultural domain itself to ensure resource sustainability and enhance the state's long-term productive capacity (Ashtor, 1976, p. 217).

This policy must be viewed within the broader economic context of the medieval Islamic world, where agricultural expansion represented a major tool for strengthening the economy and securing state revenues. An increase in cultivated land meant higher crop output, greater fiscal returns, and more stable markets—objectives that the Ayyubid state recognized early and pursued through systematic reclamation programs (Cahen, 2001, p. 220; Lapidus, 1988, p. 315).

Sources indicate that the Ayyubid administration paid particular attention to lands damaged by neglect, silt accumulation, or weakened irrigation systems. These lands were reintegrated into the production cycle through comprehensive rehabilitation projects. This approach was closely tied to the growing need to secure grain supplies, both to meet domestic market demands and to sustain military efforts, making agricultural reclamation an indispensable strategic choice (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 322; Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 72).

The policy also reflects the political and military transformations experienced by the Ayyubid state. Continuous conflict with Crusader powers necessitated strengthening food self-sufficiency and reducing reliance on distant or unstable regions. Dependence on local production near centers of governance became essential to minimizing risks associated with warfare and disrupted transport routes (France, 1994, p. 218).

2.2. Mechanisms of Land Reclamation in the al-Hawf Region

In the al-Hawf region, the Ayyubid state adopted a set of practical and systematic mechanisms to reclaim land and reintegrate it into the production cycle. Foremost among these were the clearing of canals and secondary waterways from silt, the re-excavation of old water channels, and the reinforcement of embankments that protected agricultural lands from the dangers of flooding or drought. These measures constituted the technical foundation that enabled the state to recover vast areas of land that had fallen out of agricultural use due to neglect or the deterioration of irrigation networks. Ayyubid administrative manuals confirm the particular attention given to water management as a cornerstone of the agrarian economy (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 320; Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 161). This orientation demonstrates the state's awareness that expanding agricultural land required not only reclaiming new areas but also rehabilitating degraded lands and reintegrating them into the productive system (Hassan, 1996, p. 201).

The cleaning and re-excavation of canals were conducted in regular cycles, since silt accumulation represented one of the main threats to the continuity of irrigation, especially in the interior areas of al-Hawf that depended on a complex irrigation network directly affected by fluctuations in the Nile flood (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 322; Ibn Iyas, 2007, p. 52). These activities were therefore not merely reactive responses to occasional problems but part of an ongoing water policy aimed at preserving the efficiency of the irrigation system and ensuring water reached the most distant agricultural lands. This contributed to reducing land degradation and preventing farmland from reverting to wasteland (Al-Shatir, 2010, p. 187; Hassan, 1996, p. 93).

The state also regulated irrigation by controlling canal openings and precisely determining water shares to ensure fair distribution and reduce local conflicts among peasants over water access. This organization

demonstrates that reclamation was not purely technical but also administrative and social, requiring close coordination between the central authority and local communities (Al-Shadhili, 2012, p. 137; Hassan, 1996, p. 205). In this context, water management functioned as a tool for regulating the rural landscape and promoting social stability as much as increasing agricultural productivity (Al-Nusayri, 1991, p. 74).

Sources also point to the existence of a local administrative apparatus responsible for water distribution and monitoring compliance with irrigation regulations, indicating a relative development of rural administrative structures during the Ayyubid period. New functions emerged related to irrigation management and the supervision of hydraulic infrastructure maintenance (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 320; Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 168). This organization helped reduce water-related disputes, which were among the most significant sources of tension in agrarian societies, particularly during years of low Nile levels (Hussein, 1988, p. 95).

Evidence also suggests that local populations participated in reclamation efforts, either through direct labor in maintaining water infrastructure or by complying with the regulatory framework governing land and water use. This reflects a pattern of cooperation between the state and society in managing agricultural resources. Such interaction was a key factor in the success of reclamation (Al-Shadhili, 2012, p. 142; Al-Shatir, 2010, p. 191) projects, fostering a shared interest in preserving agricultural resources and ensuring their sustainability (Awad, 2008, p. 221).

Peasant participation also helped reduce maintenance costs and ensured the continuity of repair works, as canal cleaning and embankment reinforcement became a collective responsibility shared by both state and society. This model reflects the nature of Ayyubid developmental policy, which combined governmental initiative with community participation (Hassan, 1996, p. 212).

Thus, the mechanisms of land reclamation in al-Hawf were not merely limited technical procedures but part of an integrated developmental policy combining engineering, administrative, and social dimensions. These efforts revitalized the agricultural landscape and strengthened its stability in ways that served the state's economic and strategic objectives simultaneously (Al-Maqrizi, 1997, p. 323; Al-Shatir, 2010, p. 193).

2.3. Land Reclamation and the Balance of Relations Between the State and Peasants

Land reclamation under al-ʿĀdil al-Ayyubī was not limited to decrees issued by the central authority; it was closely tied to the state's effort to establish a balanced and well-considered relationship with the peasants, who were the primary actors in the agricultural process. The state understood that the success of reclamation projects depended heavily on the cooperation and acceptance of rural communities (Bianquis, 1998, p. 126).

Expanding the cultivated area was accompanied by incentives for the peasants, most notably the reduction of tax burdens in the initial years of reclamation and granting them usufruct rights over newly reclaimed lands. These measures encouraged peasants to invest labor and resources in cultivating the land (Ibn Mammati, 1989, p. 170).

This approach reflects the state's awareness that overburdening peasants with taxes at the early stages of reclamation could lead to project failure and abandonment of the land—a risk the authorities sought to avoid by implementing a flexible taxation policy (Ashtor, 1976, p. 230).

Moreover, the organized distribution of water helped reduce local disputes among peasants, as water was the vital resource determining agricultural productivity. The precise management of irrigation networks ensured fair access to water and minimized rural conflicts (Al-Shadhili, 2012, p. 142).

These policies contributed to greater social stability in rural areas, as peasants perceived themselves as partners in the state's developmental project rather than mere taxpayers. This perception positively influenced the continuity and reliability of agricultural production (Lapidus, 1988, p. 326).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the land reclamation policy in al-Hawf helped redefine the relationship between the state and rural society, based on cooperation and shared interest, which became a key factor in the success of the Ayyubid developmental project.

2.4. Impact of Land Reclamation Policy on Economic and Strategic Stability

The land reclamation policy and the development of water resources in al-Hawf had a structural impact on the Ayyubid agricultural economy. The expansion of cultivated land and the improvement of irrigation networks led to a noticeable increase in cereal production, particularly wheat and barley, which were the staple foods in medieval Egypt. This rise in production contributed to market stability and reduced price fluctuations, enabling the state to intervene effectively during periods of scarcity or disruptions in other regions (Ashtor, 1976, p. 214; Bianquis, 1998, p. 126). This development reflects a shift in agricultural policy from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention and the construction of strategic reserves.

The relative stability in grain production also enhanced al-Hawf's economic role within Egypt's broader economic system, transforming it into a key supplier for major urban markets, particularly Cairo, which heavily relied on surrounding agricultural provinces to meet its food needs. Regular food supplies helped curb speculation and monopolistic practices, positively affecting the purchasing power of urban populations and maintaining social stability in cities (Cahen, 2001, p. 220; Lapidus, 1988, p. 319).

Financially, agricultural expansion increased land tax revenues, as reclaimed lands represented additional income for the state. This allowed the Ayyubid authority to diversify its revenue sources and strengthen its ability to fund administrative and military structures without overburdening peasants, demonstrating the effectiveness of development policies in balancing treasury needs with sustainable agricultural production (Cahen, 2001, p. 220; Lev, 1999, p. 148).

From a military perspective, the availability of sufficient grain was crucial for sustaining Ayyubid campaigns, especially during prolonged conflicts with the Crusaders. Conducting long sieges or extended military campaigns required a stable system of food supply for the armies, meaning that successful reclamation projects in al-Hawf directly strengthened the state's logistical capacity and military readiness (France, 1994, p. 218; Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 74). Agricultural expansion thus became an integral component of military strategy rather than a separate economic activity.

The abundance of agricultural production also reinforced social stability, as ready access to food mitigated crises caused by famine and price inflation—common triggers for popular unrest in medieval societies. This, in turn, allowed the state to consolidate political legitimacy and reinforce public confidence in its capacity to manage resources and meet basic needs (Lapidus, 1988, p. 326).

The interconnection of economic, financial, military, and social outcomes highlights the comprehensive nature of the Ayyubid land reclamation policy. It was not designed for isolated sectoral objectives but formed part of a strategic vision aimed at strengthening the state and ensuring long-term stability. Investment in land reclamation and water management established a solid productive base, underpinning the Ayyubid state's economic and military policies during al-ʿĀdil's reign (Bianquis, 1998, p. 128; Humphreys, R. S, 1977, p. 73).

Thus, the land reclamation policy in al-Hawf serves as a clear example of how natural resources were mobilized in the service of the state, intertwining agricultural development with food security, fiscal stability, and military capacity within a single integrated framework. Consequently, this policy transcended purely agricultural concerns to become a cornerstone in building the Ayyubid state and enhancing its resilience against both internal

Conclusion

The analysis of Sultan Al-Adil's developmental policy in the Al-Hawf region demonstrates that agricultural development was not merely a peripheral economic activity but a fundamental pillar in building the Ayyubid state and enhancing its internal stability and resilience against external challenges. Al-Hawf represented a strategic space where geographical factors, water resources, administrative organization, and food security intersected within an integrated developmental vision.

The study shows that land reclamation in Al-Hawf was a deliberate response to the state's economic and military needs. Expanding the cultivated area and improving irrigation networks contributed to increased agricultural production and ensured the steady supply of grain to urban markets and garrisons. Moreover, flexible taxation policies and the organization of relations with peasants reflected the state's understanding of the importance of social stability in the success and sustainability of developmental projects.

The findings also highlight that the development of water resources was not merely a technical measure but a strategic tool for managing rural areas and maintaining economic balance. Efficient irrigation systems helped mitigate the effects of Nile fluctuations, reduce local conflicts, and ensure equitable access to agricultural land, which in turn reinforced food security—a cornerstone of social stability and the legitimacy of Ayyubid authority.

Thus, the experience of Sultan Al-Adil in Al-Hawf represents an advanced model in the history of the medieval Islamic state, demonstrating how agricultural development and natural resource management can serve as strategic instruments for political and military security. This experience also opens new avenues for comparative studies of developmental policies among medieval Islamic states and re-examines economic history as a critical factor in the formation and sustainability of political authority.

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