

The Famine during the Reign of Mohamed Ali Pasha (Its Causes & Consequences)

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Abstract: Mohamed Ali collected the taxes on wheat in the years 1810, 1811 and 1812, and began trading in it. Then, in 1812, the Pasha monopolized the wheat that exceeded the consumption of its owners, and he did not let anyone sell anything of it to others, or transport it in boats, and took this crop. And he deducted its price from the taxes on the land for the following year (1813), then transferred it on his ships that he built and prepared for that, and from there to the ships of foreigners, where he sold the ardeb to them for a hundred piasters. Any quantities of them are sold to others.

Therefore, it was necessary to present a study on the problem of famine for several years during the rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha, with his application of the monopoly system on grain, and what measures he took to limit the spread of famine in the country by presenting a set of themes and answering their questions.

Keywords: Monopoly, Grains, Wheat, Floods, Crops, Buying and Selling, Famine, Nineteenth Century

INTRODUCTION

In 1812, Mohamed Ali Pasha issued a new system, the "monopoly" system, which he initially applied to internal trade, then extended to foreign trade. Perhaps this system succeeded in the beginning; Because the external circumstances surrounding Egypt helped make it a success.

With the beginning of his rule, severe drought occurred in some Mediterranean countries, England, and the Ottoman Empire; As a result of the lack of rain in these countries, they demanded Egyptian wheat in large quantities, which made Mohamed Ali seize the opportunity to revive his treasury, and make Egypt appear as the most important Ottoman region for many countries, and Egypt continued to supply the English garrisons in Sicily, Malta, and the army in Spain with wheat.

Trade became one of the foundations of Mohamed Ali's financial independence, the conditions of the treasury were very bad - before the rule of Mohamed Ali - and England needed wheat; also, to feed its inhabitants; As a result of the drought and drought that prevailed in most of the Mediterranean regions from 1806-1808, it cast a shadow over the grain market.

There is a reference to the arrival of a British warship in November 1807, in Alexandria, asking to supply it with large quantities of all kinds of grain; To supply Malta, these ships continued to frequent the port for this purpose, and England wanted from that, to seize the right to trade with Muhammad Ali in this commodity; To deprive France of

this advantage, and the English later relied on the transfer of their goods from Malta to Egypt on Austrian ships, and their commercial activity increased and they imported all they needed from the grain - but - the situation changed after England made peace with the Ottoman Empire in March 1809, and this resulted in the navigation route with India was opened, yet British ships continued to return to Alexandria; for loading grain and other merchandise.

AIM OF THE STUDY

Egypt is an agricultural country by nature, and the basis of its wealth is agriculture, Mohamed Ali was aware of this wealth since the beginning of his rule, so he owned land, taxation, and new plantations; To supply the industry with the raw materials it needs, but those efforts of Muhammad Ali were almost in vain; Because of the flood (the Nile flood), which constituted a great obstacle and a challenge to Muhammad Ali's policy of exploiting this wealth.

Therefore, it was necessary to present a study on the problem of famine for several years during the rule of Mohamed Ali Pasha, with his application of the monopoly system on grain, and what measures he took to limit the spread of famine in the country by presenting a set of themes and answering their questions:

- 1- The flood of 1818, did it have an effect on the prices of the wheat crop?
- 2- What measures did Muhammad Ali Pasha take, with the decrease of the floods of 1824 and 1825; To provide the necessary supplies for local consumption?

- 3- 1837, the year of the great famine: What measures did the Pasha take to reduce the specter of famine and to eliminate the panic that afflicted the population?
- 4- What is the position of foreign traders regarding the fluctuations in grain prices as a result of the famine?
- 5- What are the consequences of the famine crisis in Egypt?

First: Yields and Monopolistic Politics

A - Wheat

Wheat had retained its importance in agriculture during the era of Mohamed Ali, and the yield of it at that time was estimated between one and two million ardebs per year - that is, its production was fluctuating - and that; Because it depends on the amount of the flood, and in normal cases there were large quantities of it left for export, after local consumption.

The yield per acre ranged between four and seven ardebs, and in most cases it reached eight ardebs, as in Assiut, or to 10-12 ardebs, as in some of the islands in the Nile.

Many people overestimated the amount of wheat crop, some of them set the percentage of its cultivation compared to other crops from 50-60%, but the truth is that the average of this crop does not exceed 15-20%, and if it exceeds this percentage in some years that are characterized by the abundance of the crop, In the areas suitable for its cultivation, it does not exceed 25, 30% or 40%.

Mohamed Ali's monopoly on the trade of wheat - the first agricultural crops monopolized by the Pasha - began with a lack of production in the countries of the Mediterranean basin. The price of an ardeb of wheat in Egypt was twenty piasters, and Mohamed Ali sold it to the Englishmen for ninety piasters and one hundred piasters, and he made abundant profits from that.

In the years 1810, 1811, and 1812, Mohamed Ali collected the taxes of the lands for an amount of wheat, and began to trade in it. Then, in 1812, the Pasha monopolized the wheat that was more than the consumption of its owners, and he did not let anyone sell anything of it to others, or transport it on boats, and took this crop. And he deducted its price from the taxes on the land for the following year (1813), then he transferred it on his ships that he built and prepared for that, and from there to the ships of foreigners, where he sold the ardeb to them for a hundred piasters.

In the year 1816, Mohamed Ali monopolized all the grain yields in excess of the consumption of their owners, and prevented any quantities of them from being sold to others. In the same year - August - the Pasha sold one million bushels of wheat at 62 cents a bushel, then raised the price to 87 cents a bushel. In 1818, a very high flood caused severe destruction and heavy losses, but the 1819 crop was distinguished, but prices were low and trade was stagnant.

The fall in wheat prices put the merchants who owed the Pasha in a very critical situation. Rather, Mohamed Ali's means of managing his business threatened the merchants who remained indebted. Instead of

Muhammad Ali reducing his prices, he decided at first to store his crops, and eventually had to reduce his prices; To stimulate demand, he nevertheless monopolized all existing trade.

No merchant could stand independently against the tyranny of the Pasha, for everyone was afraid to provoke the wrath of his agents, who depended on them, and he also excluded the national merchants completely from the field of trade, while we find that the foreign merchants who were angry because they did not get their prescribed share of Trade, they eventually urged their governments to pressure the Sublime Porte, in order to restrain the ruler of Egypt, and the merchants private complaints included:

First: Monopolizing and exporting all commodities that have any advantages in foreign markets for his own account, and I can (Salt) mention from them this year, all the safflower that the Pasha keeps for himself and a large part of the flax seed that he will only sell with bonds on Constantinople, and both procedures I think contrary to the spirit of the treaty concluded with the Sublime Porte.

Second: There is another misconduct, which is mixing a bad product with a good one, so we find that the commodity sold to the merchant achieves a price lower than the price of the commodity exported for the Pasha's account to the European markets.

A third: very painful corruption is the sale mostly to officials working in the administration and ports, who then naturally become interested in obstructing the interests of the merchants, and this often causes delays in shipping and leads to undue bias, and to the collection of unscheduled fees.

Fourth: The arbitrary and unstable method of fixing prices, which depends entirely on the whims of the Pasha, who rarely knows the true state of the market, or does not know it at all by virtue of his being surrounded by unprincipled men who do not hesitate at all to fill his ears with a thousand libel.

So, these were the complaints of foreign merchants in Egypt against Mohamed Ali's monopolistic policy, and if this is the opinion of Henry Salt, then Mohamed Ali has implemented this policy; Because he believed that it was the most useful for his treasury, which was in constant need of money to buy materials needed for military consumption. As for one of the merchants' complaints that mentioned mixing the bad with the good, Mohamed Ali and his office tried again and again to limit the fraud methods that were taking place, and perhaps they did not His attempts succeeded in deterring this method, but he certainly did not agree with it, and did not support it as the merchants believed. Rather, he was beaten by anyone who wanted to disrupt any commercial movement from which he might make sums of money.

Prices and gains: From time to time, Mohamed Ali would issue edicts with the intention of fixing prices, but often these prices were

wrong to a large extent and did not indicate the reality of market prices, because they were much lower than the market price at the time of issuing these edicts.

Mengin tells us that in 1821, the value of the wheat tax was 30 piasters per ardeb, while the government charged fifty piasters, and this also happened with the beans and corn - consumer crops - where the tax imposed on them was twenty piasters, while the government imposed an amount on one ardeb. Thirty piasters for beans and thirty-

two piasters for corn. As a result of all this, the budget profits from the various monopolies in 1821 amounted to 340,000 pounds.

To give an approximate idea of the profits that the Pasha reaped from the monopoly system, we will take the year 1836 as an example, and then we will try to find out the difference between the prices at which the Pasha bought and the prices at which he sold (that is, the net profits that accrued to the government):

	Selling price in piasters	Purchase price in piasters	net profit in piasters
Wheat 19,426 ardeb	990.726	699.339	291.390
Beans 14.774 ardeb	809.820	353.376	456.444
Barley 24,957 ardeb	1.572.291	598.968	973.323
Rice 11.192 ardeb	3.547.864	1.399.000	2.148.864
Total		5.182.054	

In view of the decrease in the flood in two successive years, 1824 and 1825, Mohamed Ali was forced to issue an order forbidding the export of food commodities, especially beans and grains; In order to ensure the adequacy of supplies needed for consumption.

In any case, the flood of 1826 was the best flood in many years and eliminated the threat of famine, and the crops in both 1826 and 1827 were good, and Mohamed Ali hoped to increase his resources because of the order issued by the Emperor of Russia banning the import of wheat and closing the sea Black during the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1828.

But the demand for wheat did not reach the desired level; Because of the excellent harvest that was actually available in many Mediterranean countries in this year (1828), the vegetable crop in Italy was poor, which made the prices of beans increase greatly, and the Pasha sent forty thousand ardebs of beans to Fernandez, his agent in Leghorn; To sell it for his account, which harassed traders in Egypt.

In the same year, the flood was good, so Muhammad Ali offered his crops for sale, but at very high prices. He set the export price of beans at five dollars per ardeb, although in the spring of this year it was sold at a price between two and a half and three dollars per ardeb, and the price of wheat, which It had been sold at \$4.25 an ardeb in the previous year to ten dollars. The bountiful crops had filled the granaries of Alexandria in the spring of 1829, and had been snatched away by the merchants. Nevertheless, mismanagement had sapped the wheat of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, and there was not enough in Cairo to feed the population

The order was issued to return a hundred thousand ardebs to Cairo from Alexandria's warehouses to meet the shortage, and the flood of that year "1829" revolutionized the export situation, as the flood was so high that it destroyed all crops, then Muhammad Ali decided in 1831 AD, to allow farmers to sell their crops directly for consumers and peasants took advantage of this situation and demanded high prices, at which point the government was forced to compete to lower prices.

By 1837, Egypt suffered from a famine, and wheat was sold in Cairo at a price of 175 piasters per ardeb. However, the large quantities of lentils, grains and beans that were in the government's affairs in Alexandria were not distributed, as the flood of 1837 was expected to be good, but came weak. In order to overcome speculation and the prevailing fear of famine, he issued a decree setting the price of wheat at one hundred piasters per ardeb, and setting the price of beans, barley and lentils at sixty piasters, and prices had risen to between 160 and 170 piasters for wheat, 78 piasters for beans, and 85 piasters for barley. And 105 piasters for lentils.

Therefore, Egypt, which was an exporter of grain, became in a position to import, yet the merchants were afraid that if they imported the grain at high prices, they might find themselves in possession of large quantities of the grain, whose prices must be reduced to compete with the grain in the Al-Ashwan, and they also felt that the taxes Exorbitant imports, which they were forced to pay above the permissible limit of 3%, made the import process unprofitable. To counter this objection, Mohamed Ali allowed British merchants to import the grain and pay only 3% tax.

John Bowring mentions in his report, "There was a discrepancy in the prices of wheat throughout Egypt during his stay. While the price in Cairo was 180 piasters, it did not exceed 130 piasters in Alexandria, a hundred piasters in Esna, and ninety in Asyut., and sixty-four piasters in Girga.

However, in the winter of 1837, great panic spread; Because of what was expected from the lack of grain in the Egyptian markets, the price in Cairo rose to an unprecedented level, as the price of an ardeb amounted to 180, 190 piasters - equivalent to sixty shillings per quarter - although the average price ranged between sixty and eighty piasters. Mohamed Ali ordered that the maximum price be set at one hundred piasters, and he pledged to sell to people at that price.

Also, the Pasha stores were about to run out, and then it became impossible to obtain crops, which made Mohamed Ali import large quantities of wheat at his own expense; He saw importing as a means to supply markets and reduce prices.

Then he informed the British Consul General (Campbell), and he informed me (meaning himself) that he was determined to keep the price within the hundred piasters, and that whoever monopolized the market would be punished for the purpose of speculating to raise prices. Bowring managed to convince him in the end, that the only way to reduce the price of wheat and ensure its abundance, was to allow it to be imported, exported and traded freely. The Pasha took these views in the end.

B- Rice

Rice was one of the important crops in Egyptian agriculture, and Mohamed Ali monopolized it since 1812, and his profit from it in 1823 amounted to about 6,856.875 piasters. from military service, in return for their cultivation of rice.

He expanded the area of lands cultivated with rice. In 1829, he imposed on the mission of half of the lake alone the cultivation of 4,500 acres, which required bringing in paid labor from other missions to cultivate and harvest these acres, which numbered 3782 workers, in addition to the people of this region.

One of the documents tells us the extent of Muhammad Ali's interest in this crop. He wrote to the governor of Rashid about the need to take care and interest in improving the quality of this variety, and the crop in 1823 reached 122000 ardeb, increased in 1829 to 150,000 ardeb, and in other years it reached 20,000 ardeb. Rashid - who was famous for cultivating this variety - had a production of 110,000 ardeb.

The production of one acre crop ranged between four and five of barley rice before it was bleached. Before it was offered for trade or consumption, the rice was bleached in government departments in each of Damietta, Fuwah and Rashid. An example of his interest in the bleaching process is his acceptance of an idea put forward by one of the people. "Hussein Ajwa" is called for a department run by two revolutions only instead of four, and he made a "kitchen" for it from tin and presented it to the Pasha, who liked the idea and agreed to implement it in Damietta, and Rashid for the government, as he brought from the United States a steam-run rice department, and settled in Rashid and came by a person from the United States to manage and supervise it. In 1836, about 80,000 ardeb of Damietta rice and 60,000 ardeb of Rashid rice were sent to the government annually. In 1844, the government specified an area of 98,000 acres for the cultivation of this variety, and its production was estimated at 490,000 ardeb.

C- Corn

Corn of all kinds was the basis of the food of the farmers - who are the majority of the population - during the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha, and therefore the lack of its crop is a disaster for the country, and from here its importance arose among agricultural crops, so that the Duke of Ragoza, who visited Egypt in 1835, estimated its area at a quarter of the area of cultivated land Its yield reached 950,000 ardebs in 1821, and increased to 1326,956 ardebs and half ardebs in 1832 AD. Maize was of two types: Shami maize and municipal maize (summer, Owaija and Hamra).

Fourth: The arrangements made by Muhammad Ali to confront the grain import crisis

As an experiment, Mohamed Ali issued an order containing some articles on November 26, 1837 as follows:

First: The freedom to import grain is allowed from the beginning of December 1837 to the end of February 1838.

Second: Conditional (restricted) trading, later modified to become unrestricted, is allowed for grain inside Egypt.

Third: The grains are subject to government inspection in the markets to ensure that the specifications are observed, and that they are not mixed with anything that makes them harmful.

As a result of this more liberal policy, grain began to enter the market, and Mohamed Ali ordered his agents to import quantities of grain, and the following table shows the amount of food commodities exported in Ardeb in the years 1816, 1829, 1836, 1843, 1844.

commodity	1816	1829	1836	1843	1844
Wheat	134.000	150.000	19.426	446.598	287.502
Beans	230.000	160.000	14.724	397.945	430.489
Lentils	26.000	40.000	—	8.645	5.538

Barley	10.000	80.000	24.957	16.988	57.051
Maize	60.000	30.000	—	3.920	—
Summer Corn	—	—	—	—	—
Hummus	20.000	—	—	9.973	8.385
Lupine	12.000	20.000	—	11.221	22.053
Fenugreek	15.000	—	—	—	—
Total	507.000	480.000	59.107	895.29	805.480

Below we will list some documents that indicate clear evidence of Mohamed Ali's monopoly on the grain crop. The first of these documents is a document that refers to an order from Mohamed Ali to the commissioner of the tribal regions to collect the rest of the grain, and supply it to the Ashwan without delay for the year 1827 (1243 hijri). Mohamed Ali also mentioned the number of ardebs and acres that are in each of the reins, which are left with these missions to be supplied to Al-Ashwan, which indicates the keen vigilance of Mohamed Ali and his great interest in this crop.

Another document indicates that he had given an order to the grain overseer informing him that he should not spend the grain coming from the Upper Egypt regions, and those in the Ashwan, except after obtaining his personal permission; This is due to the high prices of grain in Europe.

Second: The flood of the Nile River and its impact on crop production

The annual flood of the Nile was one of the vital affairs of Egypt. The Egyptians in every age felt the need to measure its height. The ancient Egyptians established many measures at different points in its course; To know in advance the measurement of the height of its waters, if the end of this height is suitable for agriculture or not suitable for it, and one of those measurements was in the city (Thebes - Luxor), and the second was on the island of Elephantine in Aswan

The scale of the kindergarten in Cairo was established in the days of Suleiman bin Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad caliph in the year 97 hijri, and it was renewed in the year 190 AH by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'moun, and he ordered its restoration after them Al-Mustansir Billah, the Abbasid Caliph, and built a dome on it, which the Mamluks used in their war against the French, until he came Muhammad Ali Pasha, and he restored that dome, and the engineers entrusted with the restoration process, made an external door for the scale, engraved on it the repair they had done in both Arabic and French

The flood of the Nile is insufficient if its height is less than 20 cubits, and in this case part of the land remains without irrigation. If it exceeds that by (a cubit and a half), the water will flood the islands in the Nile, but if it is more than 24 cubits, the increase will be too much, and in this case the bridges will become susceptible to cracking and breaking.

The flooding of the Nile was insufficient in the years 1824, 1825, 1833 and 1837, which left a large part of the land without irrigation; This resulted in a significant shortage of agricultural crops.

With the previous reference to the decrease of the Nile flood in the years 1824 and 1825, the situation that resulted from this decrease must be described in detail: "The insufficient flood of the Nile in two successive years left a large part of the land without irrigation, which caused great damage to the farmer, and with He was not charged with paying taxes on uncultivated lands, but under the pressure of paying back taxes and the lack of crops needed for livestock fodder, he sold - as best he could - the livestock necessary for farming, to secure a livelihood until the time of the new crop.

The increase in the Nile was very large in the years 1809, 1818, 1819, 1820, 1829, 1840, 1842, and the destruction of crops and dwellings, Al-Jabarti says about the drowning that occurred in the year 1809 - specifically in the incidents of Ramadan corresponding to the fourth day of 1224 hijri. Sharqi, as it is calculated by the full area of the general irrigation, the Nile in this year increased excessively, rose to the heights, and damaged, with its excessive increase, the derives and the qasab in Qibli, as well as the flooding of rice, sesame and cotton farms, and many gardens in the Eastern Sea, due to the blockage of the Pharaonic Canal in that area.

As for the year 1817 / 1233 hijri, al-Jabarti mentions that "the Nile increased in this year by an excessive increase that we neither heard nor seen, until the summer crops such as corn, indigo, sesame, reeds, rice and most of the gardens sank, so that the sea and its coasts and the Malak became a sea of water, and villages collapsed because of it Many people and animals drowned until the water was springing among people from the middle of the houses, and the sea of Giza mixed with the sea of ancient Egypt until the boats were walking over the island of Al-Rawdah, and the farmers' wailing and screaming increased over what drowned them from the farms, especially corn, which is most of their strength, and many of the people of the country mourned for tambourines."

And Mimou, Consul General of France in Egypt, Jean François Mimaut (1776-1837), states that "the water covered and swept away a large number of villages, and that many hundreds of unfortunate

people died, and that many fields of cotton and indigo were drowned, and that almost the entire crop of reeds was spoiled, and the loss is estimated. The total amount is 15,000,000 francs, or 20,000,000 francs”.

CONCLUSION

During the reign of Mohamed Ali Pasha, Egypt was exposed to the threat of famine several times in different periods as a result of an excessive decrease or increase in the flooding of the Nile River, which led to the occurrence of many crises as a result of the lack of local consumption of food commodities, especially grains such as (wheat, rice and corn). The Pasha tried to reduce this danger by constructing many aqueducts and dams that prevented this excessive increase, and

he also prevented the export of grain abroad; In order to fill the shortage inside the country - despite the importance of trading in these goods abroad - as well as working not to restrict the freedom to import food commodities from abroad, while placing adequate control over the markets; To ensure that there is no fraud, even though he has been monopolizing all these crops since 1812.

It must be said, that Egypt was exposed to another danger that plagued it for several years during his reign as well, which is the risk of the spread of the plague, which at times coincided with the threat of famine, which would have inevitably led to the destruction of the Egyptian people, had it not been for the wisdom of Mohamed Ali, and his attempt to get out of these natural disasters with less Possible losses.

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