

Daniela Pioppi, *Declino e rinascita di un'istituzione islamica: il waqf nell'Egitto contemporaneo* [**The Decline and Revival of an Islamic Institution: the waqf in Contemporary Egypt**], La Sapienza Orientale – Ricerche, Università degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', Facoltà di Studi Orientali, Roma 2006.

English abstract

One of the major changes in the Middle East during the past three decades has been state retreat from welfare programmes. Parallel to this phenomenon, religious charitable institutions have started to emerge and have in many cases filled the gap left by the state in providing social services to the population. These mushrooming Islamic charitable institutions have been described as the social basis for Islamic political opposition or, by optimists, as the emergence of a timid but increasingly independent civil society. Advocates of both explanations, however, agree on portraying them as a serious challenge to the regimes' control on society.

The research work presented in the book intends to contribute to the study of this broad topic by taking as case study the recent revival of the institution of *waqf* (Islamic charitable endowment) in Egypt. As one of the main sources of income for religious charitable institutions prior to the emergence of the modern national state, the *waqf* was nationalised by Nasser, yet it has recently re-appeared as a symbol of 'civil society independence' and as an efficient way to finance development activities, somehow in agreement with global liberalisation and privatisation trends. The research argues that, far from being a challenge to the regime (whether from Islamic opposition or 'liberal' civil society), this revival is part of a broader regime strategy, which aims at delegating to the private sector some important functions of the state (i.e. in welfare and redistribution) without losing control on society.