

## 2 CRYSTALLISATION 1908-1914

By 1908 resentment against the incoming Jews backed by foreign protection, endowed with the privileges and advantages of the Capitulations, began to assume new dimensions. Following the Ottoman Revolution of 1908, a Palestinian newspaper, *Al-Asma'i*, seized the occasion of parliamentary election, and drew a comparison between the conditions of the Palestinian Arab peasant and his Jewish counterpart, then went on to point out the harm done by Jewish immigration:

They harm and do evil to the indigenous population, by relying on the special rights enjoyed by foreign powers in Turkey and on the corruption and treachery of the local administration. In addition they are free from most of the taxes and heavy impositions on Ottoman subjects; they compete with the native population with their labour, and create their own means of sustenance and the (native) population cannot stand up to their competition.<sup>1</sup>

As a remedy the paper proposed that its readers buy local rather than foreign products and called upon wealthy Arabs to support the development of native commerce and industry.

The Palestinian peasants resented the Jewish colonists and were hostile from the moment of the settler's arrival in some cases.<sup>2</sup> 'In December, 1908, villagers from Kafr Kama tried to seize some land belonging to J.C.A. in the *Caza* of Tiberias.'<sup>3</sup>

### The Land-sellers

Hand in hand with this resentment went the indignation at feudal landowners profiting from land sales to Jews at high prices:

In November, 1908, it was reported that the peasants in the region of Haifa and Tiberias were adopting an aggressive attitude towards Arab landowners with large estates (Mustafa Pasha, Fu'ad Sa'd and the Sursuq family) and also towards Jewish colonies.<sup>4</sup>

This raises the issue as to the exact identity of the landowners who profited at the expense of obvious harm done to Arab tenants with utter disregard for the pressure of public opinion against the sale of

land to the colonists.

A hitherto unpublished manuscript written by a prominent member of the Khalidi family<sup>5</sup> and completed in 1911, sheds light on the general state of political information in Palestine at that time, as well as providing valuable information on Jewish colonies. This manuscript, entitled *al-Mas'ala al-Sahyuniyya* (The Zionist Question), left its imprint on a number of individuals who later played key roles in the national movement in Palestine, like *Haj Amin al-Husseini*.<sup>6</sup> The author started by defining Zionism, its origins, history and aims; the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine being the most important of all aims. With some detail and considerable knowledge, the author described Herzl's efforts, the Zionist Congresses and the institutions designed to serve and achieve Zionist aims. Furthermore, he drew a subtle and definite distinction between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews. After a short account of Jewish history, the author dealt in a careful and informative fashion with the activities of Jewish immigrants and their colonies. The author provided his readers with a list of all the Jewish colonies, the area of each colony, its original name in Arabic, and from whom the land was bought.

In the overwhelming majority of cases the lands were sold by one or the other of the following three categories:

- (1) Absentee landlords, mostly Lebanese families — Sursuq, Tayyan, Twainy, Mudawar and others.
- (2) The Ottoman Government, apparently through auctions owing to the inability of the Arab peasants to pay their taxes.
- (3) The Palestinian landlords, mostly Christian families, — Kassar, Rock, Houry, Hanna and others.<sup>7</sup> Some lands were sold by Muslim notables, but the author did not always disclose their names. In two cases, he wrote, 'one of the effendis of Safad or Ramleh'. Only three villages were reported to have been sold by the peasants and represented less than 7% of the total land bought by the Jews.

In all, the Jews at that time owned 28 villages and a total area of 279,491 *dunum*; a fraction of Palestine's cultivable area. In a letter published in *al-Ahram* on 4 August 1909, a Palestinian studying at *al-Azhar* accused the Jews of employing devious means; namely, bribing the Ottoman governors of the *ancien régime* as a means of obtaining land in Palestine. There were other attempts by Palestinians to make capital out of associating the previous regime with concessions made to the Zionists, including laxity in the application of laws regarding Jewish