

CHAPTER II

The Dynamism of Pre-Capitalist Palestine

The major problem found in almost all of the literature on Palestine's economy in its pre-capitalist period, is the absence of a precise description of the components of that economy. Most of the literature refers only in passing to the era prior to British rule. Terms used to describe the peasant economy of that era include "feudalism" (Owen, 1981), "semi-feudal" (Scholch, 1986), "Asiatic" (Saed, 1985; Gozansky, 1986) or "traditional and backward" (Granovsky, 1940; Kimmerling, 1983; Ohana, 1978; 1981). Until recently, the most detailed accounts have come from adherents of the "modernization" approach. (Kimmerling, 1983; Viteles; 1944; Taqqu, 1980; Granovsky, 1940). They maintain that Palestine's economy, prior to the introduction of Jewish capital, was largely traditional and backward. Backwardness, according to these authors, was a structurally built-in feature of Palestine's economy, caused primarily by the way the peasants conducted their productive life, and particularly, they maintain, by the Musha'a system of land tenure.

This literature argues that the Musha'a system was widespread in Palestine. Musha'a is described both as a collective mode of production and as a form of land tenure in which the ownership and the right of land use and distribution are vested in the commune and not the individual. Further, it is maintained that this practice discouraged the peasant from effectively using the land and was considered the greatest obstacle to private ownership of property.

This chapter will argue that, on the contrary, Musha'a was neither a major form of production nor a major form of land tenure but rather,