

Socio-Economic Transformation in Palestine

In Palestine, the late 19th century marked the beginning of a process of land concentration and eventual commoditization. Large tracts of cultivable land were seized by the Ottoman state during this period. Some of it was Matruka (or Musha'a) land which the 1858 Land Code considered as a separate category, other was Mulk land, whose owners had failed to acquire new registration papers for their property. In the early 1880s, the major segment of Mulk land which was declared as state property was that owned by the deposed Sultan. However, Amiri land formed the largest portion of land seized by the Ottoman state.

The section within the 1856 Land Code requiring the land proprietor to cultivate it for three consecutive years resulted in the confiscation of large areas, particularly in the Marj plain. This was largely due to the fact that the Law ignored natural factors which are important in agricultural production. For instance, it is common practice in grain cultivation that the land be left fallow for one season to allow the soil to regenerate its fertility, normally after 1 or 2 years (al-Murr, 1924). Moreover, in low-land areas such as the Marj, rain falls are usually unpredictable and crop failures not infrequent. Under these circumstances various tracts of land became vulnerable to state confiscation.

Another method of state land-grabbing was a practice known as Jiftlik, whereby the Sultan could confiscate any tract of cultivable land and turn it into his own private property. In the late 19th century, Jiftlik lands were created in almost all parts of the Empire (Barakat, 1975; Saleh, 1979). In Palestine, Sultan Abdel-Hamid