

declared the whole of the Beisan area as Jiftlik, turning the independent Amiri holders into mere tenants (Stein, 1984).

The concentration of land in the hands of the state was the first step toward its privatization. Land acquired by the state was used as a payment for debtors, as an immovable guarantee against loans from banks or individual creditors or leased for long term to potential investors.

Land Privatization

The legal provisions for land sales came in 1876 with the promulgation of the 1876 Land Law. This Law was aimed primarily at granting foreigners the right to own land in the Empire (Scholch, 1982:21). Yet, it has been reported that as early as the 1860s, various tracts of land were auctioned by the state and sold to investors, both European and Arab. One such sale involved the whole of the Marj, which was sold to the Lebanese merchant family, the Sursuks. More on the nature of this particular sale and its eventual sale to a Zionist colonial company will be discussed in the next chapter.

In 1872, the Bergheims from Germany, who were bankers, usurers, and merchants, bought the estate of Abu-Shusha south east of Ramleh in the Coastal Plain. This family, acting on behalf of the Imperial Ottoman Bank and some London banks opened the first real bank in Palestine, in which it is said to have invested 400,000 Turkish Pounds. Of that sum, half was invested in the purchase of the estate (Scholch, 1982:25). In both cases, that is, the Marj and Abu-Shusha, land was not sold for its value but rather for the amount of tax arrears owed by its cultivators. Thus in the case of Abu-Shusha, for example, the price