

paid for an estate estimated at 20,000 dunams was 46,000 Tariff Piasters or only about 46 Turkish Pounds (Scholch, 1982:25).

It has also been reported that in 1874 Baron Montefiori, a French creditor to the Ottoman state, announced the sale of 12 plots near the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem with an estimated area of 25,000 dunams (Scholch, 1982:22). In fact, one document shows that Theodor Hertzl, the first leader of the World Zionist Organization proposed to the Ottoman Sultan in the early 1880s the purchase of the whole of Palestine. In return, Hertzl offered to "regulate the whole finances of Turkey" (Mandel, 1976:38).

The family whose land acquisitions were of the greatest importance in this process was the Rothschilds. This family, whose loans to the Ottoman state exceeded all other credit sources, acquired the lion's share in the land sale process. They expanded their land ownership in Palestine throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, with holdings which stretched over the most fertile land in Palestine, namely the Maritime Plain. The Rothschilds established their first 5 agricultural settlements on an estimated area of 25,000 dunams in 1872. By the year 1890, their estate grew to 14 settlements stretching over 107,000 dunams, to 22 settlements occupying about 220,700 dunams in 1900, and 47 settlements occupying an area estimated at 420,600 dunams in 1914. (13)

Despite the absence of legal protection for the peasants cultivating the land offered for sale, very few cases of eviction from the land were reported during Ottoman rule. From the major land sale cases registered in this period, historical records provide proof for only one case; that is, of Abu-Shusha peasants for whom, despite the fact that they possessed legal title deeds, the sale of their land