

of production relations. Changes in their objective conditions of production forced many peasants to adapt to new production relations.

The cumulative effects of various legal, political and economic changes in the Empire, including those of the tax farm system, the promulgation of a series of legal changes to the status of land holding/ownership and the increasing presence of money economy were all stimuli to changes in the peasant economy. Many peasants, in the process, began to endure heavy indebtedness in loans and in interest on loans which were levied during this period at rates of 50 to 100 per cent. Consequently, they found it increasingly difficult to maintain and reproduce themselves on their land without further borrowing. The phenomenon of peasant indebtedness was particularly evident in areas put under the tax farming system, such as the Marj (Scholch,1982; Owen,1981).

While it is true that the transfer of the Marj land from the control of the state to that of the Sursuks did not result in the immediate expropriation of the direct producers, it nevertheless, did cause many to leave their land. Change in the Marj, or for that matter, in Beisan, was not only a matter of legal change in titular rights. Thus, in the case of the Marj the new owners, the Sursuks, not only functioned as land owners but also as merchants and money-lenders at the same time. In the absence of supervision over their operations, the Sursuks managed to extract onerous surplus labour from the peasants (Owen, 1981).

Peasants under the tax farming system were heavily taxed. Commenting on this phenomenon, one Israeli historian observed: