

than that in the Maritime Plain. Extensive production of cereals continued to be the major occupation of the peasants throughout the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Rent in kind remained as the major form of surplus extraction. For the Lebanese merchant family, for example, the Marj land was but another form of commercial enterprise. As absentee landlords, the Sursuks were never directly involved in the production process. Through a local manager who oversaw production, they collected their share, usually in crop, at the end of every production process. Despite the fact that they accumulated large sums of capital from the exploitation of the peasants in the Marj, the Sursuks did not reinvest this capital in agriculture.

Instead, one author observed, they used the capital

...in trade and usurious operations, in building and buying urban buildings to rent as shops, warehouses, stores and apartments: it was much less frequently invested in industry, to set up spinning mills and manufactories. Since, during the export and import era, investment as trade served the highest returns. (Smilianskaya, 1966:236)

Thus in the absence of other prerequisite for the development of agriculture in the Marj, the surplus labour extracted from the peasants functioned primarily as usurious money lent back to them at high interest rates. This form of exploitation increased the dependence of the peasants on the landlords.

The prolongation of the life of share-cropping in the Marj can also be attributed to the fact that peasants there could use the system to supplement other income. The losses incurred by peasants who lost their Amiri holdings to the Sursuks, were important but partial. As share-croppers, they could still make use of other means of production