

evidence. In his visit to Palestine in the early 1920s, Dr. Strahorn, from the "American Geographical Reviews" observed:

Up to within recent years the land was cultivated from the Arab villages, located round the rim of the Plain. Cereals together with minor garden areas around the villages constituted the Arab cropping system. In very recent years considerable areas of land have passed under the control of Jewish colonies and villages: gardens and orchards are now dotting the former expanse of grain-fields. (6)

This description suggests that the Marj was populated and cultivated and that the produce had changed largely due to economic development. The Director of the survey, Simpson, who surveyed the area in 1930 shared Dr. Strahon's opinion. In his Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development, John Hope Simpson observed:

It is a mistake to assume that the vale of Esdrealon was a wilderness before the arrival of the Jewish settlers and that it is now a paradise. A very large amount of money has been spent by the various Jewish agencies, and great improvements have been made. ....There can be little doubt in time, the application of capital, science, and labour will result in general success. It is, however, unjust to the poverty-stricken fellah who has been removed from these lands that the suggestion should continually be made that he was a useless cumberer of the ground and produced nothing from it. It should be quite obvious that this is not the fact.

"In ancient times", Simpson continued, "Esdrealon was the granary, and by the Arabs is still regarded as the most fertile tract of Palestine." (7)

Yet the most striking evidence on the fertility and productivity of the Marj can be discerned through the examination of the "sale contracts" themselves. Throughout the "sale documents", reference is made to the productivity of the Marj which produced different crops