

tenants.¹⁷ These commissions appear to have been dispatched from 'Akka in the early 1870s to areas in the region that today encompasses southern Syria, northern Israel and northern Jordan. Yitzhak Shechter theorizes that *şemsiyye* is a category that was assigned by tapu commissions to the lands of villages which were abandoned or sparsely populated, i.e. their agricultural lands were under-utilized. They were then offered to nearby inhabitants for a fee equal to the assessed value of the land (*bedel-i misl*) and, if they did not want them or could not pay the fees, the lands were auctioned. Shechter hand-copied and studied a *şemsiyye* register in the 1920s while working in the lands division of the Palestine-Israel Colonization Association.¹⁸ Michael Fischbach states there were special commissions sent out from 'Akka that were charged with investigating areas of land to determine whether they were under continuous cultivation. Lands that were not being exploited were then auctioned by the state.¹⁹ According to Alexander Schölch these surveys may have been even more widespread: "At the end of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s, the government conducted outright sales campaigns of land that was not continuously cultivated, especially

¹⁷ See Munir Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners: Land Law, Governance, and Politics in Palestine 1858-1948", PhD dissertation, New York University (September 2008) and Raya Adler, "The Tenants of Wadi Hawarith: Another View of the Land Question in Palestine", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 20/2 (May 1988), 197-220.

¹⁸ Yitzhak Shechter, "*Rishum HaQarqa 'ot b-Aretz Israel ba-Makhatsit HaShniyah shel HaMeah Ha-yud*"tet (Land Registration in Eretz Israel in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century)", *Qatedra* 45 (September 1987), 147-160 (Hebrew). It is not known where the register Shechter examined is today. In his article, he reproduces the texts of selected documents from the register that he examined.

¹⁹ In his doctoral dissertation, Michael Fischbach mentions (p. 94) a *şemsiye* commission surveying in the Jordan Valley (Ghor) sometime between 1870 and 1872. I have not found this same information in his 2000 book of the same title.