

hamula head, conforming to the new laws while preserving options to later divide and re-divide holdings among themselves without incurring transfer fees.

The third case, brought by Bayt Kahil villagers, focuses on property mortgages and the inconclusively much-debated question of whether the Land Code resulted in the impoverishment of peasants, and mass landlessness engendered by new economic situations which compelled rural farmers to take usurious loans. This case shows that the tapu office, the sharia court, and the Ottoman Agricultural Bank all worked in conjunction with each other, at least in a town the size of Hebron, whose population at the turn of the twentieth century was about 20,000.³⁰⁵

In conclusion, it is argued that these three end-of-the-nineteenth century cases reflect the great degree to which Land Code reforms had been incorporated into Hebron society. The first section of this chapter traces the development of Jamrūra and surrounding villages over the Ottoman centuries, providing background and context for the three case studies that follow in this chapter's subsequent sections.

A Historical Sketch of Ottoman-era Jamrūra and Its Environs

Until recent decades, when Israel confiscated parts of the farmlands (*mezra'*) of Jamrūra in the name of security and under the Absentee Property Law of 1950, very little was generally known about this historically non-settled, agricultural area which, since 1949, straddles the Green Line

³⁰⁵ I have calculated this number from the 1905 nufüs population registries for the city. ISA, RG83, *nufüs*.