

attempts at technical improvements.<sup>52</sup> The wide annual fluctuations in rainfall increased the risk of using resources for costly technical improvements: Insufficient rain and thus a bad harvest spelled calamity for the peasants, many of whom were in debt. Even in a good rain year, the failure of a new technical method would have negative consequences.<sup>53</sup>

These problems were less pronounced on the plains and coastal areas: Not only was rainfall relatively more plentiful, the climate more temperate, and the terrain easier for cultivation, but also the underground water was easier to extract. This allowed for the extensive spread of the irrigated citrus orchards and other cash crops within the limits set by the ability to extract the water and the availability of monetary resources with some, especially merchants and large-landed individuals, who were the only ones who could make an investment that would take several years before it provided a return (e.g., orange trees took about seven years to bear fruit).<sup>54</sup>

There were basically three groups that took advantage of the westward expansion of cultivation.<sup>55</sup> First, there were both the inhabitants of nearby hill villages and the nomadic tribes in the southern part of the country around Gaza. However, for them, this practice was not new, but had been carried out previously

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<sup>52</sup>Sarah Graham-Brown, *Palestinians and Their Society, 1880-1946* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), 42-3.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Montague Brown, "Agriculture," in Himadeh, 139.

<sup>55</sup>Scholch, 112-113; Owen, *Middle East*, 174-5.