

Arab agriculture. Although peasant indebtedness also existed in the Ottoman period, there are quantitative and, more importantly, qualitative differences that distinguish it from the Mandate period. These differences account for the major factors that forced some small peasants to sell their lands or parts of it during the Mandate period.

There are no figures for debt during the Ottoman period, but British official reports acknowledge that before WWI “the sums involved were much smaller”³² than during the Mandate period.

However, the same reports point out that, “During the War [WWI] and for a few years after it, prices were very high. The farmer as a rule seems to have cleared off his debts and to have become comparatively prosperous, [and] his standard of living improved accordingly.”³³

Before I discuss and analyze the major factors that account for the development of debt after the WWI years, I present data on its magnitude. The extent of the seriousness of the debt problem can best be illustrated by juxtaposing the amount of average debt per family with that of its income. This is based on the survey of 104 villages (“26 percent of the total Arab farming community, holding 10 percent of the total cultivable area”³⁴) as prepared and reported by the

³²Johnson-Crosbie Report, 42; also see *Memoranda for Palestine Royal Commission*, Memo nos. 13, 14, and 15, 41-50, as reported in George Hakim, “Monetary and Banking System,” in Himadeh, 497.

³³Johnson-Crosbie Report, 42.

³⁴*Survey I*, 364.