

to the landlord or urban financier for both his consumption needs and operating budget, with his land tied up as security for his debts, many of the peasants became -- as we have noted above -- sharecroppers on their own alienated land, or at least some of it, in this process. A counter-vailing trend was the acquisition of land by landless or small-holding peasants through the process known as mugharasa, primarily in groves and orchards. This involved the rejuvenation of the landlord's uncultivated land by the provision of labour and the sharing of stocks on the part of the peasant. In return, the landlord would transfer a part of the orchards to his active partner (i.e. the landless tiller) (Ashour, 1948a:42-43).

In the preceding decades, sharetenancy had the dual function of providing political protection from the authorities tied into the credit provided by the resident village potentates (mashayekh). These local landlords eventually become the peasants' last resort against the state's tax farmers (multazimun). In exchange for the potentate's mediation and supply of seeds, the peasants were obliged to supply a share of the harvest on the threshing floor (Granott, 1952:296), and provide free labour for the ploughing (and sometimes harvesting) of the sheik's land, in a system known as awneh (Ashour, 1948b:50). This practice, prevalent in central Palestine up to the forties, comes closest to the notion of corvée labour in Middle Eastern agriculture. However, the replacement of wergo and the tithe by the flat Rural Property Tax during the 1930s (cf. Doukhan, 1938: 99) helped, along with factors completely external to the village economy -- such as the urban pull of wage labour -- to reduce the peasant's dependence on the local potentates.

We can now conceptualize in three broad categories the central features performed by the institution of share-tenancy in mid-century agrarian Palestine: