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**THE UNION OF DEMETER WITH ZEUS:
AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS IN MODERN SYRIA**

BY

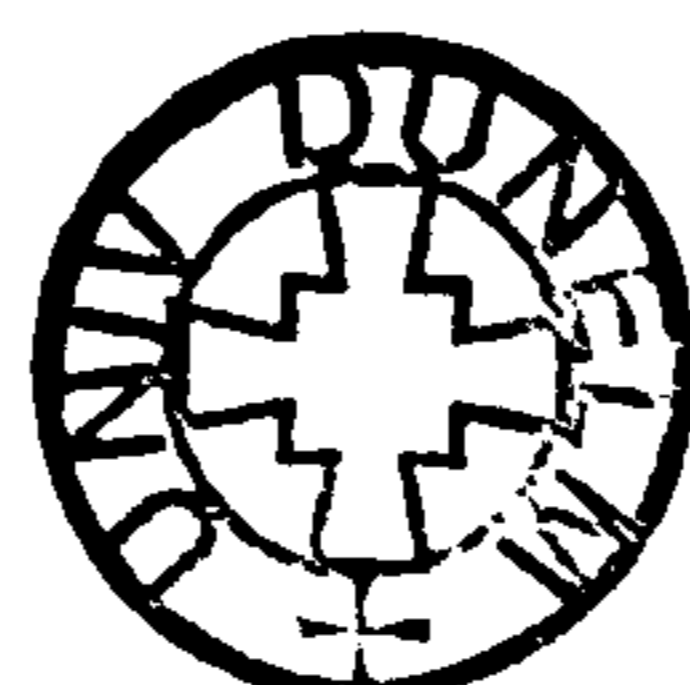
JAMES LONG WHITAKER

**A Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

**University of Durham
1996**

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3 1 OCT 1996

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‘Victoire c’est la volonté’.

Foch

ABSTRACT

THE UNION OF DEMETER WITH ZEUS: AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS IN MODERN SYRIA

by

JAMES LONG WHITAKER

'The Union of Demeter with Zeus: Agriculture and Politics in Modern Syria' is a study of the interplay between agriculture and politics in the French Mandated territories of the Levant between 1920 and 1940. This era saw the first attempts at a planned and systematic modernisation of rural production. The Mandatary was the driving force behind the changes, but its goal was as much to enhance its own dominance as to improve the lives of those in its charge.

In exploring the links between agriculture and politics in Syria during the Mandate, two relationships are of primary importance. The first was that between France and Syria, one in which France sought to promote rural regeneration through expansion of the production of certain important primary products and extension of the cultivated area by means of irrigation. Whilst impressive achievements, such programmes were limited by the inability of French officials to understand the other primary relationship between the individual peasant, his community, and society at large. This was embodied in *musha'*, a form of landholding and a system of cultivation. Enamoured by the ideal of the smallholder capitalist, the French sought to undermine the village community whilst failing to curb the excesses of the great landowners. Their activities stymied rural progress, but the Mandatary needed their support to maintain its hold over the countryside.

In its conclusion, this work draws together strands linking capitalism and agriculture; community and society; systems of knowledge, systems of power, and webs of expectation. These themes, taken as a whole, had enormous influence on rural development under the Mandate.

PREFACE

The writing of this study of the interplay of politics and agriculture in modern Syria has taken a long time, and has been fraught with difficulty. In composing it, I have been aware of my own limitations, but throughout have sought to follow the precepts of the great *savant* Jean Itard, guardian of Victor, the 'Wild Boy of l'Aveyron', and pioneer in the study of deafness and the education of deaf mutes. Like Itard, I have become convinced whilst pursuing my research, *'qu'on n'est savant que par l'expérience, lucide que par le doute, intelligent que par l'acceptation des limites du savoir acquis'*.

To Syrian and French readers, I wish to affirm that I have sought not to criticise, but to understand the complex, often tortuous, relationship between two countries, both of which I hold in affection.

Finally, let me say that whilst composing this work, I have kept in mind the injunction which my first supervisor, Professor Manfred Halpern at Princeton, long ago, instilled in all of his students, to wit: that each should strive to make every piece of research a model of clarity and thought.

I can only hope that you, the reader, will find that I have achieved this goal.

J.L. Whitaker

Durham,
August, 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In producing any work of this sort, an author incurs many obligations. Whilst it is impossible to thank all of those who have given me aid or counsel, it gives me great pleasure to single out certain individuals:

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Second, several scholars who assisted me with their knowledge and their support: Professor G. H. Blake, Professor of Geography, University of Durham, and Principal of my college, Collingwood College, who provided me with sound advice, helped me to secure the maps which are such an important part of this work, and arranged for its final printing; Professor R. A. Hinnebusch of the Department of Politics, St Catherine's College, St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A., who as one of the greatest experts on modern Syrian politics provided me with sound

critiques of my analysis; Mr. J. D. Norton, formerly Director of the Centre for Turkish Studies, University of Durham, who gave me wise counsel on a number of matters.

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Fourth, my friends and colleagues at Collingwood College, the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and the International Boundaries Research Unit, University of Durham, whose support has helped me immeasurably over the years.

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Seventh, certain others who offered me hospitality and assistance during this long intellectual journey: My close friends Carl, Grace, Sam, and Alice Farmer; Dr. Titus Boeder; Mme Marie-Thérèse George and her family (including Droopie and Noisette) with whom I

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Eighth, the staffs of the libraries and archives in the United Kingdom, France, and Italy from whence came the raw material which I have shaped into this study:

In the United Kingdom:

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In closing, I would like to pay tribute to two who are no longer with us, Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Albert Hourani. Marion was a wonderful person and a fine scholar, hard-driving, but also loving and kind who was always very good to me. It was Albert Hourani who aided me when I felt friendless and alone, and encouraged my passion for Syria, for we both felt that to understand this country is to understand the Arab World of which it is the beating heart.

Finally, I cannot forget to mention a swallow who continually whispered in my ear those profound words of Muhi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, a Spaniard who became a Syrian: '*Min kamal al-wujud wujud al-naqs fihi*', that is to say, 'It is part of the perfection of Being that there is imperfection in it'.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC L'Association Cotonnière Coloniale

ACCS Association en participation pour les essais de Culture de Coton en Syrie

AF *L'Asie Française: Bulletin mensuel du Comité de L'Asie Française*

BEO *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*

BSL Banque de Syrie et du (Grand) Liban

Bull. ACC *L'Association Cotonnière Colonial: Bulletin trimestriel*

Bull. BSL *Bulletin de la Banque de Syrie et du (Grand) Liban*

Bull. EHC *Bulletin économique trimestriel des Pays sous mandat français . Also known as Bulletin économique du Haut Commissariat.*

Bull. UES *Bulletin de L'Union Economique de Syrie*

DLBG Deutsch-Levantinische Baumwollgesellschaft

C.H.E.A.M. Centre des Hautes Etudes sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes, Paris

EHME Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914: A Book of Readings*

EHT Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914*

FCDEH Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914: A Documentary Economic History*

FO Foreign Office, London

Gibb Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, Report: 'Republic of Syria: The Economic Development of Syria'

HC Haut Commissaire/High Commissioner

IJMES *International Journal of Middle East Studies*

MAE Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris

MEEP *Middle East Economic Papers*

MF Ministère de L'Economie, des Finances et du Budget, Paris. Known during the period of the Mandate as the Ministère des Finances.

REH Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques

RGL *Revue de Géographie de Lyon*

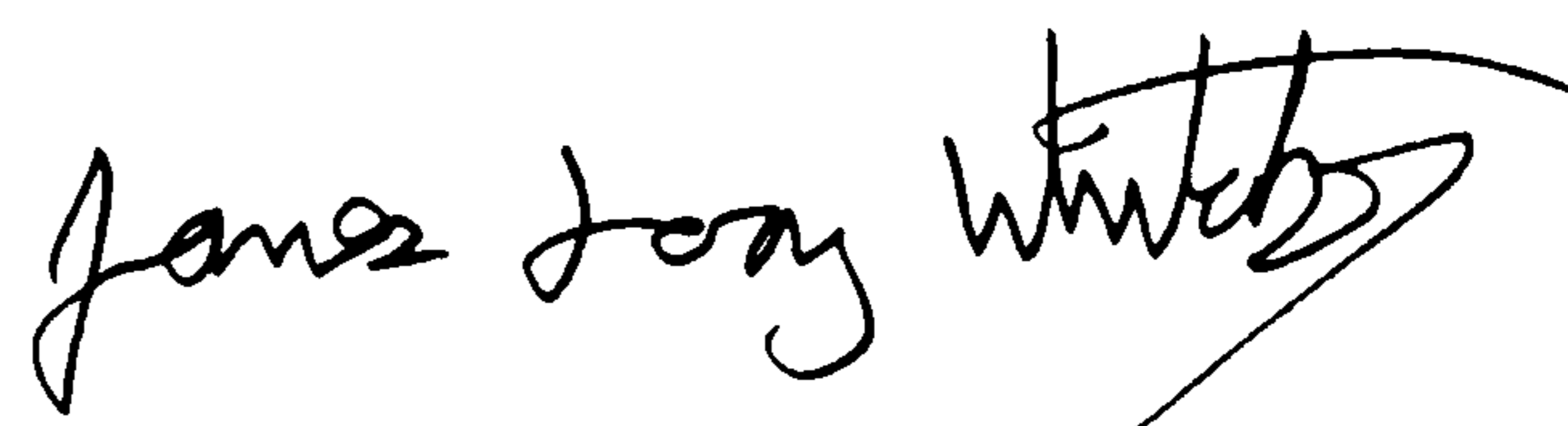
SACS Société Anonyme Cotonnière de Syrie

SAIC Société Anonyme de l'Industrie Cotonnière

UES Union Economique de Syrie

DECLARATION

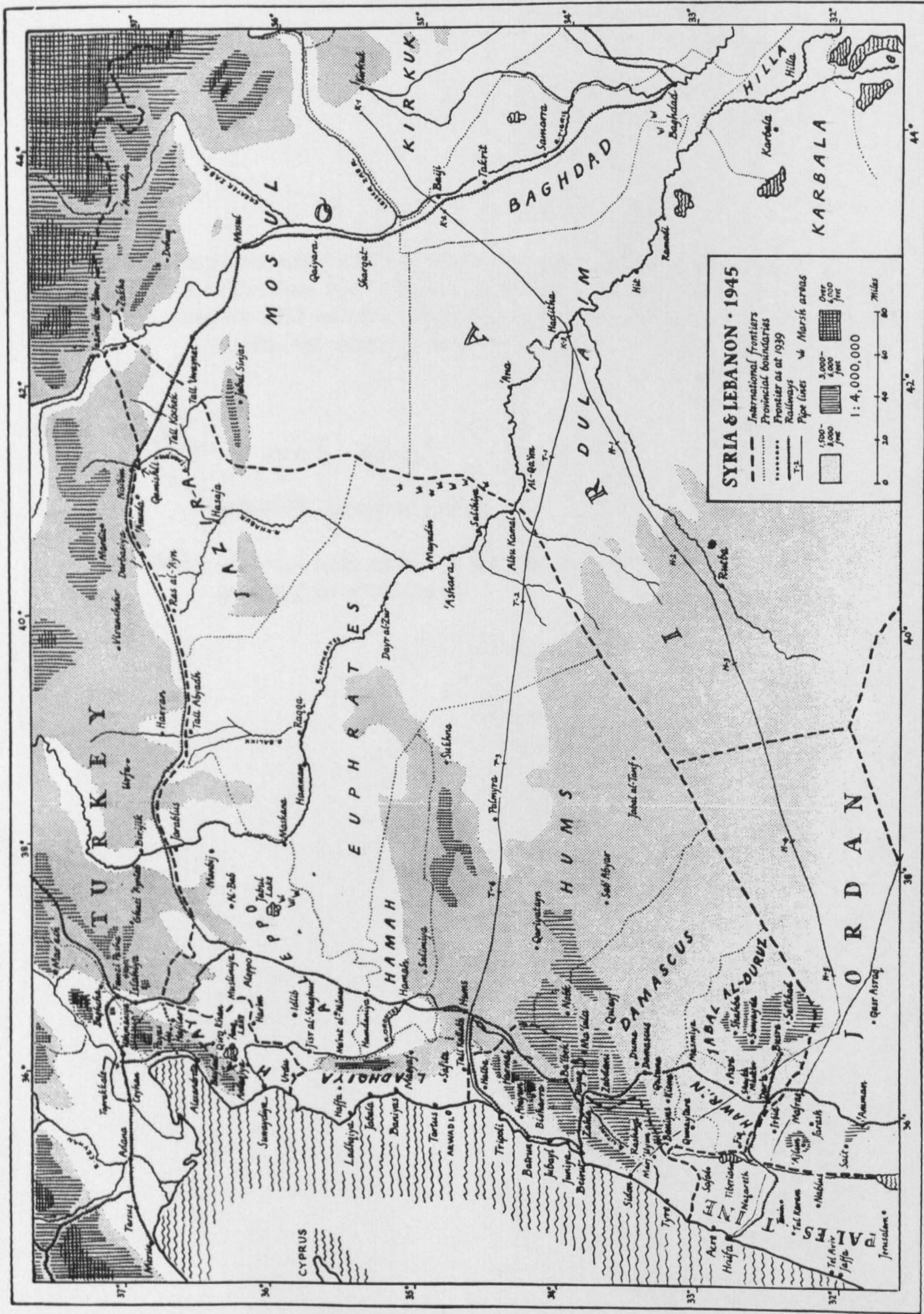
I declare upon my honour as a gentleman that the content of this thesis is my own work, and that I have not submitted it for a degree at this or any other university. Within this thesis, I have acknowledged all references to research made by others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James Long Whitaker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

James Long Whitaker

**Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
University of Durham**

26 April 1996



SYRIA & LEBANON - 1945

- International frontiers
- Provincial boundaries
- Frontier as at 1939
- +— Railways
- +— Pipe lines
- W Marsh areas

1,500-
1,000
500
feet

3,000-
4,000
feet

Over
4,000
feet

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0 20 40 60 80 Miles

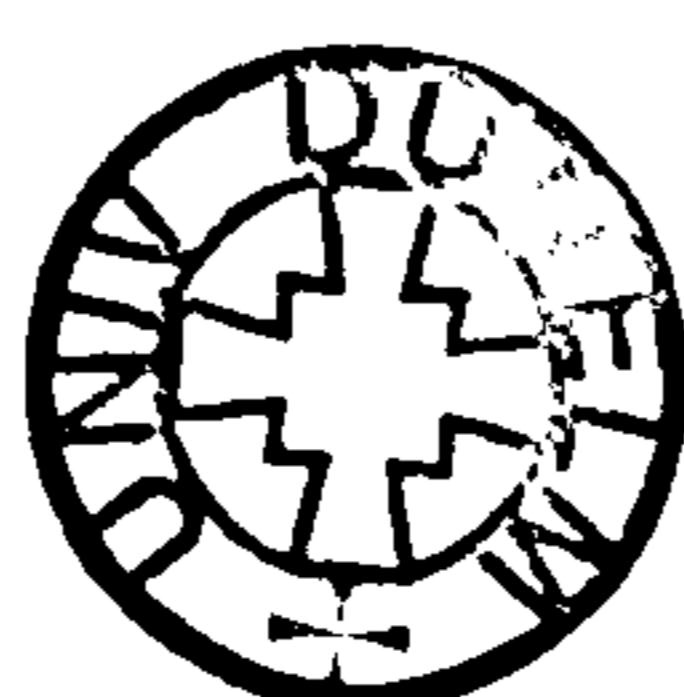
INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, in his introduction to *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (Oxford University Press, 1946), Albert Hourani noted that one of the problems facing the Arab World at that time was that of how the Arab countries would react to the fundamental changes caused by the spread of Western influence since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Would they do so in a negative way, borrowing Western technology in order to resist the encroachments of the Western states and the Western spirit or would they seek to reconstruct their society by assimilating, but not necessarily imitating, the best elements in Western life?

He noted further that Syria and Lebanon could serve as mediators of Western civilisation to the Arab East because of their geographical situation, their traditions and certain characteristics of their inhabitants. Therefore he felt it particularly important to examine the problem of Westernisation in Syria and Lebanon in order to clarify the conditions necessary for a unity and balance between traditional and new elements in the lives of their people and between them and the Western peoples with whom they are in such close contact.¹

<---Fig. 1. Syria and Lebanon, 1945. *Source:* Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958.).

¹ Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 1-2.



The questions he posed were and are interesting and valid ones. The work presented here attempts to examine them through the lens of the relationship between agriculture and politics in the French Mandated territories of the Levant between 1920 and 1940. Its focus is on agriculture because during this period, agriculture was one of the mainsprings of economy and society in the region. The era of the French Mandate saw the first attempt at a planned and systematic modernization of the processes of rural production. The Mandatary was the driving force behind the changes, but its goal was as much to enhance its own dominance as to improve the lives of those in its charge.

In examining the evolution of Syrian agriculture during the Mandate, the introduction and Chapter I lay the foundation for this study. The **INTRODUCTION** will first define the meaning of the word Syria as used here and then will look at some of the geographical and oecological parameters of agriculture in that country. Next will come a discussion of the background to Mandate in the late Ottoman period focusing on agricultural expansion, agrarian relations, and the results of the insertion of Syria into the world economy from the middle of the nineteenth century. Then the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* developed by Ferdinand Tönnies will be introduced in order to facilitate understanding of the development of Syrian society. Finally there will be a discussion of the great famine which devastated Syria during the First World War.

CHAPTER I will explore the character of French involvement in Syria and the Ottoman Empire as a whole before the First World War, and show how the strategies and methods used to pursue these interests mirrored those used to exploit the French Empire. This analysis will then examine the relationship between France and Syria in the years immediately after the Great War, a time in which France saw Syria as a potential source of primary agricultural products which were needed to supply the requirements of French industry. The ideas of one man, Edouard Achard, are of particular importance because his proposals for rural regeneration continued to shape agricultural policy in one way or another throughout the Mandate period.

The next three chapters examine in turn the three components of Achard's approach: **CHAPTER II** will analyse the all-important subject of agrarian relations during the Mandate. This will centre around the fundamental rôle played by *musha'* tenure, a form of landholding and a system of cultivation, which underpinned the rural village community. **CHAPTER III** will look at the expansion of production by examining policies towards wheat, silk, and cotton. **CHAPTER IV** will investigate the use of irrigation to extend the cultivated area, focusing on the various French projects to develop the Orontes, the river which the experts of that era believed to be the most useful for cultivation.

Finally, the **CONCLUSION** will discuss briefly three aspects of the development of agriculture under the Mandate. The first is the impact of French capitalism on rural Syria, and the manner in which it paved

the way for the emergence of a vigorous local capitalism. The second is the relationship between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between the organic community and the administratively created one. The third is the interplay of systems of knowledge, systems of power, and webs of expectation: For the way in which the French perceived Syria had a great effect on their methods of administration whilst the manner in which Syrians perceived France had an equally great effect on the way in which they reacted to this tutelage.

Introd. 1>A definition of Syria and a geographical description

The name 'Syria' can have several meanings²:

1>Geographical Syria in the larger sense, that region known as 'Bilad al-Sham' to the Arabs; 'La Syrie integrale' or the 'Levant' to French imperialists; and 'Suriya al-kubra' or Greater Syria to Pan-Syrian nationalists. It comprises all that land from the Taurus to the Sinai, west of the Euphrates, and includes from north to south: the Turkish province of Hatay (known during the Mandate as the autonomous *sanjaq* of Alexandretta), those portions of the Syrian Arab Republic west of the Euphrates, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel.

2>Mandatory Syria, that region awarded to France as a Mandate under the League of Nations by Allied Powers meeting at the Conference of San Remo in April, 1920, and confirmed by the League in July, 1922. These were officially known as the French Mandated States in the Levant (*Les Etats du Levant sous Mandat français*) and often called simply the 'Levant' or 'Syria'. These territories included the northern part of geographical Syria--Alexandretta, Syria, and Lebanon as well as part of the area east of the Euphrates called the Jazira.

² For a definition of the term 'Syria', see *Ibid.*, 4-5.

3>the State of Syria, one of the four states into which the French divided the Mandate. Between 1925 and 1936, these were the State of Syria, the Lebanese Republic, the States of Jabal Druz and of the Alaouites (after 1930, renamed, the Governments of Jabal Druz and of Latakia). After 1936, and the signing of the Franco-Syrian Treaty, the two Governments were merged into what was now known as the Syrian Republic.

4>Independent Syria which is the Syrian Republic of 1936 minus the *sanjaq* of Alexandretta which became formally part of Turkey in June, 1939.

In discussing agriculture in the Mandated territories, 'Syria' will be used in the second sense. Nevertheless because the focus will be on the dry-farmed agriculture of the plains, there will be little reference to the different régime of cultivation practised in the mountains of Lebanon and the Jabal Ansayria, with the exception of silk production. Moreover, the Biqa' valley will be treated as part of agricultural Syria because its inhabitants follow the same system of land tenure and cultivation even though this region has been united politically to Lebanon since 1920. Similarly some reference will be made to the 'Amuq plain as part of the valley of the Orontes.

Before exploring the links between society, polity and agriculture in Syria, one must examine the constraints imposed by geography and climate because if they do not determine the nature of cultivation and policies affecting it, they do have a great influence upon them.³ Geographical Syria contained within it a large slice of the justly

³ For the geography of Syria, see 1>Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946), 17-53; 2>W.C. Brice, *A Systematic Regional Geography, VIII: South-west Asia* (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1966), 200-16; 229-36.

celebrated 'Fertile Crescent' which according to the American Orientalist James Henry Breasted was that part of the world where civilisation first began. Nevertheless this crescent, like that of the moon, has waxed and waned over time, influenced not by shifts in the tides, but by those in climate and the affairs of men.

The section of the Fertile Crescent belonging to independent Syria is divided into two quite unequal slices: On the one hand, there is a narrow, continuously verdant zone comprising some 1.9 million hectares which is slightly more than 10% of Syrian territory; on the other, a 'transitional' belt of some 5.8 million hectares, a bit more than 30% of Syria, which links the cultivable area with the true desert. The arid regions make up the remainder, approximately 60% of the land area or 10.8 million hectares.⁴

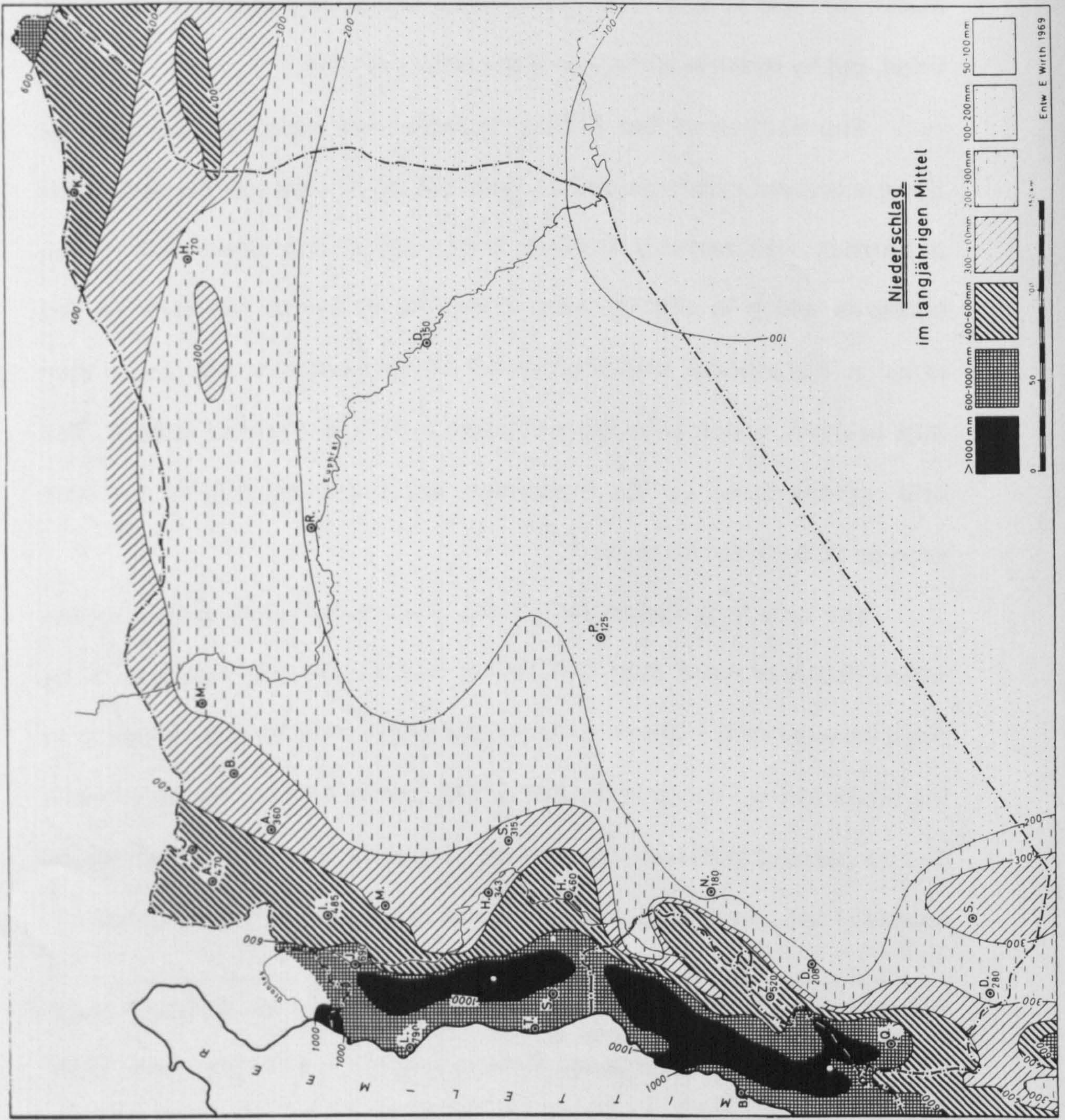
The only truly fertile part of the 'Fertile Crescent' is that region which receives more than 500 mm of rainfall annually because of its position west of the chain of mountains stretching from Mt Hermon in the south to the Taurus in the north. Here relief forms a series of more or less parallel features: First a narrow strip along the Mediterranean coast followed by the mountain chains of the Lebanon and the Jabal

Between pages 6 and 7: Fig.2. (left) Syria and Lebanon: Rainfall: yearly average over a period of several normal years.

Fig. 3. (right) Syria and Lebanon: Mean rainfall of the three dry years, 1958, 1959, and 1960.

Source: Eugen Wirth, *Syrien: Eine geographische Landeskunde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), Maps 3 and 4, between 92-93.

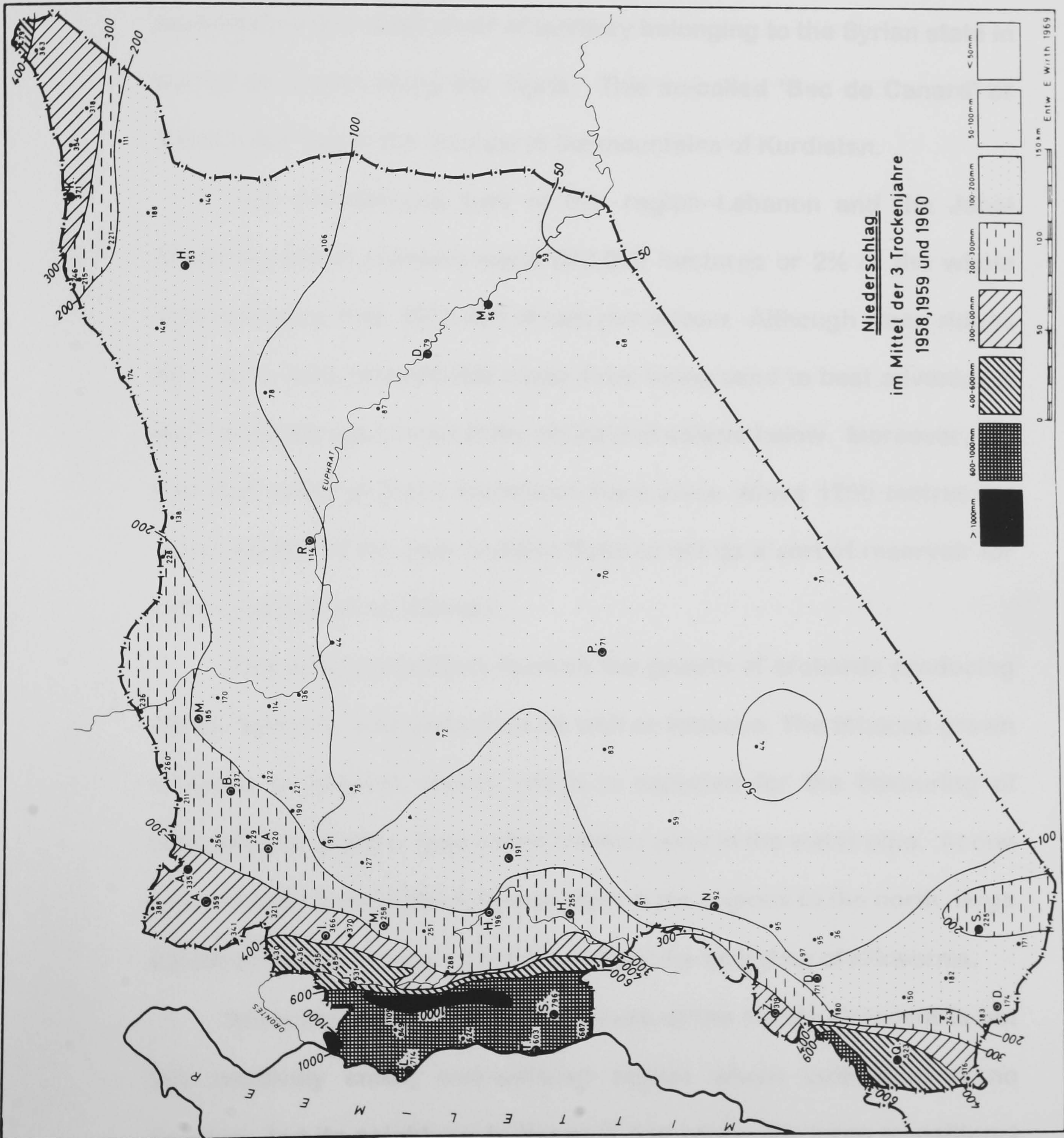
⁴ Nazim Moussly, *Le Problème de l'eau en Syrie* (Lyon: Imprimerie BOSC Frères, 1951), 15-17. The figures for area are taken from the table on 17. Note that to this, one must add the some 1,000,000 hectares comprising Lebanon, of which slightly more than half are exploitable.



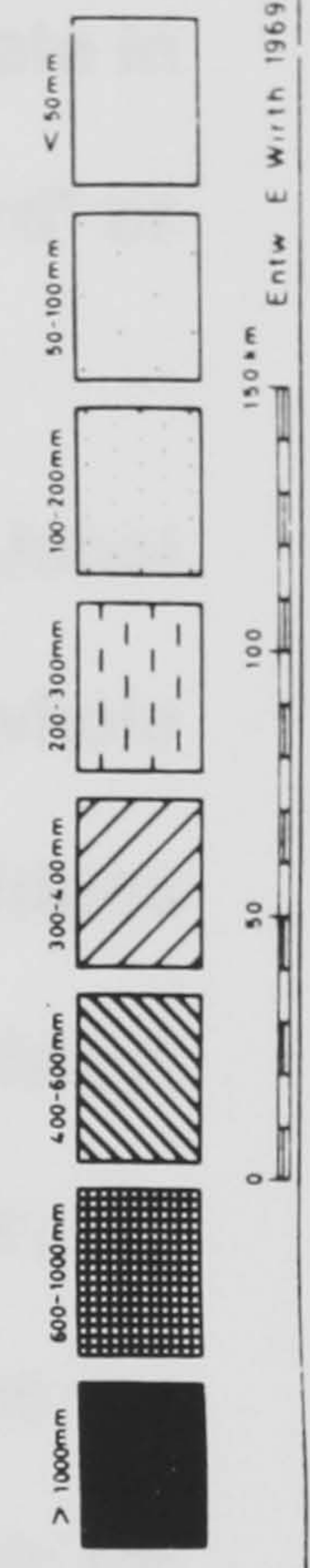
Niederschlag
im langjährigen Mittel

- > 1000 mm
- 600-1000 mm
- 400-600 mm
- 300-400 mm
- 200-300 mm
- 100-200 mm
- 50-100 mm
- 50-100 mm

Entw. E. Wirth 1969



Niederschlag
 im Mittel der 3 Trockenjahre
 1958, 1959 und 1960



Ansayria to its north; then the two rift valleys, the Biqa' and the Ghab; and finally the mountains of the Anti-Lebanon and the hills of the Jabal Zawiya beyond them to the north. These conditions of rainfall are replicated in the small sliver of territory belonging to the Syrian state in the far northeast along the Tigris. This so-called 'Bec de Canard' or 'Duck's Bill' lies in the shadow of the mountains of Kurdistan.

The mountainous part of this region--Lebanon and the Jabal Ansayria--which contains some 350,000 hectares or 2% of the whole receives more than 1000 mm of rain *per annum*. Although steep ridges and rocky soils prevent this water from being used to best advantage, the run-off serves to enrich the plains and valleys below. Moreover, the fact that some of these mountains have snow above 1200 metres for many months of the year enables them to act as a sort of reservoir for other regions not so blessed.

This area particularly favours the growth of orchards producing olives, apricots, and pistachios as well as tobacco. The tobacco grown is either a pungent variety which is exported for the flavouring of cigarettes or another type called tombac used in the water pipe. At one time, though more in the Lebanon than in the regions to the north, large stands of mulberry trees were planted for the breeding of silkworms.

Nevertheless the dominant feature of the Fertile Crescent is not this relatively small, well-watered region where cultivation is no problem, but its neighbour to the east and south, the large transitional

zone which serves as a passage to the steppe and desert beyond.⁵ This region of great interior plains is the most important area of Syrian agriculture because here are harvested the wheat and barley which are the staple food crops of the Levant. It is this great tract of land that gave Syria its reputation for agricultural fecundity in the eyes of French authors who described it as the 'granary of Rome'. Yet this was in many ways a false estimate, not so much because of the amount produced, but because of a certain inconsistency in its production.

These cereal-growing districts lie on the other side of the mountains which in large part block the rain-bearing winds. Therefore they are watered by only 200-400 mm of rainfall *per annum*. Nevertheless they are far more blessed with rain than the desert on their southern rim because the Jabal Ansayria and the Jabal Zawiya are lower in height than are the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon chains. Moreover, these mountains are more broken in their structures with several avenues into the interior: the 'Homs gap' (the plains of 'Akkar and Buqaya); the corridor of the Nahr al-Kabir al-Shimali at Latakia; and the trench formed by the valley of the lower Orontes. Although the rain-bearing winds can follow these pathways, they deposit water to an ever-diminishing degree the further east they move.

Until comparatively recently the peasants dwelling on the plains grew their grain under a system of 'dry farming', i.e. without the benefit

⁵ For the concept of the transitional zone and its rôle in Syrian history, see 1>Norman N. Lewis, 'The frontier of settlement in Syria, 1800-1950,' *International Affairs* (London), XXXI, 1, January, 1955, 48-60; 2>*Idem*, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), *passim*.

of irrigation. Of course over the millennia, the cultivator developed certain means of bringing groundwater and river water to his fields: The digging of shallow wells and the tunnelling of kilometres-long *qanats* or *foggaras* into aquifers were supplemented by such primitive lifting devices as the *saqia* ('Archimedes screw') and the *na'ura* (noria, a giant wooden water wheel), both propelled by animal power. These were limited in what they could achieve, but since more elaborate methods of irrigation were beyond their means, the peasants perforce had to place their chief reliance on rainfall.

This region was also the place where two worlds met, two worlds which existed in uneasy balance with one another because they often competed for the same stock of scarce resources: that of the village-dwelling peasant and the wandering herdsman. Nevertheless the conflict over scarce resources of land and water was only one aspect of their relationship. More often, there was the mutual dependence of two complementary ways of life linked by trade and intermarriage. In periods of agricultural prosperity, settled life became more attractive, and nomads began to abandon their encampments for the plough. This was a long, drawn-out process with differing degrees of sedentarisation, and should the time of plenty end, the trend reversed itself.

The transitional zone merges in the south with the steppe and the desert where lies the home of the true nomad. This vast region receives less than 250 mm of rainfall each year because the mountains on its western flank, the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges are of a height

sufficient to prevent rain-bearing winds reaching this area from the Mediterranean.

The distribution of precipitation is reinforced by the peculiar nature of the climatic régime with its alternation of extremes of wet and dry.⁶ Syria, which in latitude (32/33°-37/38°) lies between the temperate and tropic zones, has what geographers call a 'Mediterranean' climate. This gives it, in effect, only two seasons per year: a wet winter from November through April and a brutally hot and dry summer from May through October. It is this intense rainy period which compensates for the six arid months which follow it.

The problem is that the circulation of high and low pressure systems which cause this pattern is not as immutable as in northwest Europe. In Syria, one can be generally sure of rain only during the months of November, December, and January, but sometimes even this fails to come. If the low pressure systems pass to the north of the Mediterranean, the Levant is left with dry, sunny winters followed by drought, crop failure, and destitution.

Introd.2>Background to Mandate--expansion of cultivation in the late Ottoman period

When the French came to Syria in 1920, agriculture was still under the overwhelming influence of these vagaries of climate which fluctuated over space and time. Nevertheless, after long years of

⁶ For climate, see 1>Weulersse, 21-34; 2>Moussly, 17-28; 3>Louis Dubertret and Jacques Weulersse, *Manuel de Géographie: Syrie, Liban et Proche Orient*, première partie: *La Péninsule Arabique* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1940), 32-40.

stagnation, certain trends had been gathering momentum for nearly a century. These trends would eventually lead, not of course to the alteration of immutable patterns of rainfall, but to the transformation of particular conditions of society and polity which would enable the Syrian peasant better to work round them. The most significant occurrence was the extension of the cultivated zone eastward into areas which had not been worked for many centuries. Several interrelated factors stimulated this expansion: the improvement of security conditions in the countryside; an increase in population; the revival of Syria as a supplier of raw materials for the world market; and the beginnings of a change in the inextricably linked systems of land tenure and taxation.

A sine qua non for agricultural expansion was desert security. With the coming of the *Tanzimat*, the Ottoman reform movement which started in the 1840's, more efficient administrations sent increasing numbers of better-armed troops into the countryside. These expeditions were able to make real headway against nomad depredations which had slowly driven the line of cultivation west of the road linking Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. One of the principal results of this pacification was the founding (and often re-founding) of villages ever deeper within the transitional zone between the rainfed areas and the true desert.

Increased security after the tumultuous Egyptian interlude of the 1830's brought a growth in population from perhaps 1.5 million or more in 1840 to 2.5 million in 1878; to 3.1 million in 1895/96; and to 4.5 million

in 1914.⁷ This addition to the number of mouths to be fed must have augmented the need for basic foodstuffs, thus giving further impetus for an increase in the area of dry farmed cereals.

Another stimulus to agricultural expansion was the intermittent, but generally continuing insertion of Syria into the world economy in the course of the nineteenth century. During certain periods, agricultural products were grown, not just for local use, but for shipment abroad, either to other parts of the Ottoman Empire or to Europe and even to the United States. One can divide these exports into two categories: food crops and industrial crops.

Grain, the primary food crop, was sent in large quantities to Europe during the boom in the cereals market in the middle years of the century. With the coming of large quantities of American and Russian grain to Europe in the late 1870's, Syrian grain was gradually squeezed out. What is particularly interesting is the fact that even with the growth of population, and the problematic nature of the Syrian harvest, the Syrian peasant had sufficient grain to export. It is obvious that a surplus was being produced, and the incentive for surplus was the chance for profit under current market conditions.. The profit motive was certainly what impelled the middlemen who were well aware of the possibilities abroad, but the fact that a desire for gain penetrated the

⁷ This is the population of geographical Syria which includes Lebanon, Palestine, and the districts east of the river Jordan. For these extremely gross estimates and the comments and warnings which they produce, see 1>Justin McCarthy, 'The population of Ottoman Syria and Iraq, 1878-1914,' *Asian and African Studies*, XV, 1, March, 1981, 3-44; and the comments made on them by 2>Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914: A Documentary Economic History [FCDEH]* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15-16.

interior, even to the most isolated village, says something for the links being forged with the outside world.⁸

The industrial crops were another matter entirely. These, principally silk, and to a lesser degree, tobacco, licorice root, and cotton had long been grown in geographical Syria. They did not compete with the food crops because they were planted in the well-watered regions of western Syria, the coastal, mountain or upland regions where it was difficult to grow grain. These were specialty crops, and those who raised them did not participate in the expansion of the cornlands. Nevertheless, they are interesting if only because they demonstrate the possibilities of diversification and the risks of specialisation.

Silk and cotton were the most important of the industrial crops because during both the Ottoman and Mandate periods, they clearly illustrated the impact of foreign capital on agricultural patterns in Syria for both good and ill. Silk presents the classic case of a single crop tied to a single market. Although silk had been cultivated as an export crop in parts of the Lebanon for centuries, it was only in the 1840's that Lyonnais capitalists began to take a financial interest in the rearing of silkworms in Mount Lebanon for the mills of their native city. This demand stimulated the production of silk with a quality of international

⁸ For the grain trade during this period, and comments about the sensitivity of the peasant to the currents of the world market, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, 'The grain economy of late Ottoman Syria and the issue of large-scale commercialisation,' in Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (eds.), *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), 173-195.

standard. Because the silk industry was in a sense 'enclosed' in that the product was grown in the *mutasarrifiyya* of Jabal Lubnan which was administratively separate from the neighbouring Ottoman *vilayets* after 1861; and because its exports and outlook were tied to that single external market, its undoubted success had little effect on the economy of Syria as a whole. Nevertheless, the fact that it was dominated by entrepreneurs representing a single market ensured that it was protected from the competition of silk emanating from the Far East which outstripped it in quantity if not in quality. Moreover silk production served as a salutary example of both the rewards and the risks of monoculture.⁹

In contrast, cotton during the late Ottoman period was a crop whose potential was still to be realised. It had been grown in Syria and neighbouring areas of the Levant since the Middle Ages where it was used for local textile handicrafts. In addition, Syria was one of the main sources of supply for the cotton mills of Italy, France, and England, industries which had originally developed in order to process Levant cotton. Nevertheless, by the middle eighteenth century, European mills were gradually turning away from Levantine cotton towards cheaper and better sources of supply in the West Indies and later in the United States.¹⁰

⁹ For the rise and decline of silk production and the French interest in it, see Chap. III *infra*.

¹⁰ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 27, 28-29, 173.

Although there was an increase in production under the rule of the Egyptian Ibrahim Pasha in the 1830's and during the American Civil War when all sources of supply were needed, short staple Syrian cotton could in no way compete in the international arena with American, Indian, or Egyptian varieties. Its only market was a local one, and cotton production lost its *raison d'être* when the Syrian handicraft industry collapsed in the 1840's before the onslaught of cheaper and better cotton goods from Lancashire. When this industry revived in the 1870's, craftsmen were so seduced by the quality of Indian, Egyptian, and American cotton that they never returned to the local product.¹¹

Even within the Ottoman Empire, the cotton of Cilicia was considered far superior to that of Syria. When the Germans made an effort at the beginning of the twentieth century to invest in cotton cultivation, efforts which were ultimately unsuccessful, their activities focused on the plains of Cilicia rather than those of Syria.¹²

In examining the courses followed by silk and cotton over more than a century, one observes how the decline of the former mirrors the rise of the latter. The fact that silk was a specialty crop grown for a

¹¹ For cotton in the Syria during the nineteenth century, see 1>Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1981), 172-73; 2>Issawi (ed.), *FCDEH*, 276-77; and 307-08: 'Cotton in Aleppo region, 1864': Excerpt from 'Report on Aleppo Cotton', 9 June 1864, France, *Correspondance commerciale [CC] (Alep)*, vol. 33, 1863-66. This report illustrates the problems inherent in the marketing of Syrian cotton abroad, problems which were to recur often during the next eighty years: 'Badly cleaned. . . a large amount of fragments of pods. . . a result of poor methods and bad tools employed. Attempts have been made to introduce. . . machines used in Europe; but whether because people here did not know how to work them or whether. . . they are not suited to local cotton varieties, they were unsuccessful.'

¹² For a discussion of German investments in cotton production in Cilicia, see Chap. I *infra*.

particular market enabled it to flourish. Nevertheless when fashion changed and an economic crisis ruined the financial structure which had nurtured silk production, this production rapidly collapsed.

By contrast, there was little international demand for Syrian cotton during the late Ottoman period because the quality of the fibre produced was neither high nor consistent. During the Mandate period, foreign capital made great efforts to introduce varieties with more desirable attributes. As did silk, cotton suffered a body blow when the French firms which promoted it foundered during the economic crisis of the nineteen thirties. Nonetheless their collapse did not stymie the growth of cotton production, for its potential was so great that local entrepreneurs were willing and able to fill the gap.

Introd.3>Background to Mandate--agrarian relations in the late Ottoman period

If agricultural expansion was encouraged by improved security, population growth, and the opportunity to supply primary products for the world market, it was also facilitated by a change in the inextricably linked systems of land tenure and taxation. Tenurial relations between the one who possesses the land and the one who works it affect not only how much the cultivator produces, but also how this 'revenue' is apportioned between producer, landlord, and government.

In Syria there were different categories of land determined by the nature of ownership (*raqaba*), consonant with the system prevalent in the lands of Islam and which were set out in the Ottoman Land Code of

7 Ramadan 1274/21 April 1858.¹³ According to the Code, land was divided into five categories:

1> *mulk* or private freehold property

2> *arazi amiriye* or *miri* for short, public land whose *raqaba* belonged to the state, acting as trustee for the community of Believers. Those who controlled or worked this land, whether absentee landlords or their peasants merely had the right of usufruct (*tasarruf*) over it.

3> *waqf*, mortmain dedicated to the maintenance of a charitable or religious institution.

4> *matruka*, land reserved for public use, and consisting of roads, threshing floors and the like.

5> *mawat*, land unowned and unclaimed by any person.

Of these land categories, the two most important were *mulk* and *miri*. *Mulk* was taxable and confined largely to urban and village property (houses and other buildings); the orchards and gardens surrounding villages; and land held in certain specific geographical regions such as Lebanon with extensive planted areas and a large Christian population.¹⁴ In the 1940's, Paul Klat who did research on

¹³ The Ottoman Land law of 1858 is set out in 1>Aristarchi Bey (Grégoire) (tr.), *Législation ottomane ou Recueil des lois, règlements, traités, capitulations et autres documents de L'Empire ottomane*, I (Constantinople [Istanbul]: Imprimerie Frères Nicolaïdes, 1872), 57-170; 2>George Young, *Corps de Droit ottoman: Recueil des Codes. Lois, Règlements, Ordonnances et Actes les plus importants du Droit Intérieur, et d'Etudes sur la Droit Coutumier de l'Empire Ottoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), VI, 45-83; 3>For a commentary, see W. Padel and L. Steeg, *De la législation foncière ottomane* (Paris: A. Pedone, Editeur, 1904), *passim*.

¹⁴ As non-Muslims, Christians had the freehold of lands granted them by the Islamic state on condition that they paid tribute (*kharaj*) on it. Although there was a formal distinction made in the Land Code (Arts. 2.3 and 2.4) between *mulk kharajiya* and *mulk 'ushriya* (land which the Islamic state gave to the victorious Muslims on condition that they paid the tithe [*'ushr*] which was assessed at a much lower rate than the *kharaj*), in fact this distinction no longer had much significance in late Ottoman times.

land tenure during the Second World War for the Middle East Supply Centre, noted that in the Syrian Republic, *mulk* covered only 1,250 sq. km. out of a total area of 185,680 sq. km. (.7%) and a total occupied area of nearly 80,000 sq. km. (1.6%), most of which was concentrated in and around cities.¹⁵

Miri comprised the overwhelming proportion of lands within the Ottoman Empire. It consisted of agricultural land outside villages and urban areas, which in Syria was for the most part cereal-producing. Klat found *miri* to occupy some 40,000 sq. km., 21% of the total, 50% of occupied land, and 73% of agricultural land (which he defined as occupied land less *matruka* land).¹⁶

A special category of 'state' land not listed in the Land Code was what in Syria was called *Sultaniya* land. These lands were the private property of the Sultan, and were amassed for the most part by the rapacious 'Abd al-Hamid II in the late nineteenth century. In Syria, they were to be found largely in Salamiya *qada'* east of Hama and in the eastern and southeastern portions of Aleppo *vilayet* along the Euphrates. After the deposition of the Sultan in 1908, the Ottoman government confiscated these lands from him. Henceforth they were treated as State Domain, and continued to be so treated during the Mandate period.

Waqf was *mulk* which had been 'given to God', for some charitable purpose, usually to support mosques or other religious

¹⁵ Figures extrapolated from Paul J. Klat, 'The origins of landownership in Syria,' *Middle East Economic Papers* [MEEP], 1958, 64 and Table.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

buildings. It was not taxable and was administered by trustees. In Syria, a fairly large, but indeterminate amount of agricultural land was *waqf*.¹⁷

What was important for the Ottomans as for their predecessors was the revenue produced by the lands within the empire, whether this took the form of men or money. In Syria this in effect meant revenue derived from *miri* land which composed the bulk of the agricultural wheat-producing lands of the interior. The type of 'income' squeezed from these lands gradually changed over time. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the Ottoman state was young, it had a need for a continuous supply of cavalry levies rather than for cold cash. Therefore the state made land grants to its cavalrymen (*sipahis*) with the proviso that they would use the proceeds derived from the exploitation of their holdings to equip units for military service. These grants were called *timars*, and the state did not lose control of them since they could be revoked at any time. Moreover, the grantee was responsible for the burdensome task of management.

With passage of time, the Ottomans found themselves faced with a static empire, a professional army equipped with firearms, and an increasing administrative burden. As a result, they had less need for untrained cavalrymen and more for taxes, a state of affairs aggravated by the inflation of the late sixteenth century. To compound the problem,

¹⁷ For *waqf* in Ottoman Syria, see 'Abd al-Karim Rafeq, 'Land tenure problems and their social impact in Syria around the middle of the nineteenth century,' in Tarif Khalidi (ed.), *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984), 378-81.

the central government in Istanbul became powerless to collect the money itself in its more distant provinces. Therefore a number of money-raising expedients were tried in order to refashion the *timar* system into one which would suit the changing needs of the Ottoman state. This involved making use of a new kind of middlemen whose only interest in his land was to collect the taxes due, remitting part of them to the Ottoman authorities whilst keeping the rest for himself. By the nineteenth century, two principal vehicles had evolved as a means of garnering revenue for the government.

First were those large estates outside village boundaries which were leased to an individual, usually an urban or rural notable or a government official, who collected the taxes due. The lessees of these *çiftliks* or *mazra'as* paid annual rent to the state for the use of this property, and it could be passed down the generations so long as the annual fee was paid. They held the *tasarruf* over the land, but did not cultivate it themselves. Rather they sublet it to the peasants of the neighbouring villages who did so.

Second were those larger pieces of land which were auctioned to individuals for several years as 'tax farms' (*iltizam* or in Syria, *muqata'a*) with the proviso that they maintain it in cultivation. In this case, a local man received the right to collect income from it during the period of his allocation, part of which he turned over to the government whilst retaining the rest as his fee. As one can imagine, the result was that the tax farmer or *multazim* sought to squeeze as much as possible as quickly as possible from the peasants under his control before his

lease was up. Sometimes one piece of land might be divided into tax farms by different individuals who in turn might sublet part of their holdings as tax farms to others. The ultimate refinement was the allotment of tax farms for life (*malikane*) which the holder could pass on to his descendants.

It should not surprise us that the system of tax farming in its various forms developed widely in Syria from the end of the sixteenth century, for Syria was one of the places where the central Ottoman government had the least control. Nevertheless one cannot posit from this the creation of vast *latifundia* ruled by avaricious and brutal landlords, for reality was considerably more nuanced. For one thing, the balance of power between *multazim* and peasant did not necessarily shift in favour of the former. Indeed there is some evidence that village solidarity expressed in communal landholding systems (*musha*) was proof against exactions of the tax collector who often had trouble raising the sums due him. Moreover there was no unilinear progression from *timar* to *iltizam* to *malikane* because these arrangements tended to co-exist in different configurations depending on local conditions. The only thing one can say with assurance is that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the *timars* had practically disappeared in Syria.¹⁸

¹⁸ For these different categories of tax farm in Syria, see Rafeq in Khalidi, 374-78. For another discussion of the relationship between *timar*, *iltizam*, and *malikane*, See Haim Gerber, *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 51-56. Note that Gerber must be used with the knowledge that his theories tend to be generalisations based on examples taken principally from Anatolia and Palestine.

In any case, the line drawn between *timars* and *iltizams* held as *malikane* on one hand, and *mulk* property on the other was by this time a very fine one. Legally, of course, the distinction was still in force. Yet in reality, so long as the leaseholder paid his dues to the government and saw to the continuous tilling of his estates, he could do with them practically anything he chose.

In Syria, this uneasy equilibrium between the Ottoman authorities who needed revenue, the tax farmers who collected it, and the peasant communities who supplied it crumbled during the nineteenth century. The increase in the effectiveness of the central government led to the enactment of a series of measures so designed as to make taxgathering both more efficient and more remunerative. These produced a change in the way men of influence now controlled the countryside. The position of the notable, whether urban speculator or tribal shaykh, was enhanced and he was now better able to increase his holdings. To a certain degree, his desire to do so was a sign that the Syrian notable saw agriculture as an area of profitable expansion. Such an attitude was primed by increased security in rural districts and the growth of a grain export market in the 1860's and 1870's. After the collapse of this market in the late eighties, the slack was taken up by the growth of urban agglomerations such as Damascus and Beirut with their appetite for fruit and other specialty crops. The coming of railroads to Syria in the eighties, facilitated the shipment of perishable agricultural products to heretofore 'distant' urban markets. Nevertheless the undoubted attraction of profit must not blind us to the

fact that for the notable, a far greater incentive was the fact that the more villages he was able to bring under his control, the more he was able to dominate the countryside. To do so strengthened his influence in relations with his peers whilst increasing his revenues through manipulation and control of peasant debt.

The principal act which enhanced the ability of the notable to increase his holdings was the Ottoman Land Code of 1858. This code was an attempt to bring some order into the confusing and overlapping tax jurisdictions coterminous with the land tenure system whilst asserting the *raqaba* of the state. Nevertheless it was more a recognition that certain processes were taking place rather than the creation of new circumstances. The ultimate aim of course was to increase tax receipts. Therefore the code dealt mostly with *miri* land (Arts. 8-90), although it did confirm owners in their possession of those allodial estates which had been separated from the state domain over the preceding centuries (Art. 2).¹⁹

The goal of this land code was to ensure that each person who had rights over state land should have in his possession a certificate of title (*sened tapu*) which he would receive directly from the state his landlord. The abolition of the taxing powers of those who mediated between the state and the peasant, and the assertion of the rights of the

¹⁹ For the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, see 1>Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, 'The application of the 1858 Land Code in Greater Syria: Some preliminary observations,' in Khalidi (ed.), 409-21; 2>Klat, 'The origins . . .,' 59-61; 3>G. Baer, 'The evolution of private landownership in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent,' in Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa, 1800-1914: A Book of Readings [EHME]* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 83-85.

former was an attempt to ensure that the Porte ultimately would receive more money.

Like many reforms of the *Tanzimat*, the 1858 Land Code was only partially successful in its application. The land registration which underpinned its reforms proved difficult to carry out in practice. Even after the creation of a *Defterkhane* or Land Registry Office, it proved impossible to institute a proper cadastral survey since there were few Ottoman officials with the training to do so. As a result, land registration proved very inaccurate: Inefficiency and bureaucratic confusion ensured that the boundaries of lands enrolled were not clearly delineated which meant that sharp operators often could sell the rights to the same piece of land many times over.

As for the notable, he could now obtain definite confirmation of his rights to property which heretofore had been clouded by the welter of tenurial types and jurisdictions. Among the tribes where there was a long tradition of communal grazing rights, lands came to be registered in the name of the tribal shaykh who thus suddenly became a great landowner. Many of the poor peasants and beduin saw the new code as a pretext by means of which an impersonal and distant government could register them for military service whilst extracting more revenue. Therefore they were more than happy to have their lands placed under the name of a familiar local notable or shaykh who would 'protect' them from such exactions.

Since tax collection was now considerably more regularised, the process leading to rural debt accelerated as peasants borrowed from

the local notable in order to meet the annual demands of the publican. This inevitably brought the alienation of peasant rights in favour of the rich as the great landlord foreclosed on those who were unable to meet their debts to him.

The Ottoman Land Code of 1858 and laws elaborating it which were passed until 1914 brought increased revenue to the central government whilst impoverishing the peasant and degrading his social status. Moreover it confirmed the landholding rights of wealthy urban notables and tribal shaykhs. This completed their transformation from *seigneurs* into *proprietors*, i.e. from men who held land in their function as agents of government to those who did so as a private possession complete with title, even though this property remained *miri* land and so was still technically owned by the state. Their relationship with the peasants on the land changed also. Previously their rights over the peasants were those of taxation, public rights which higher authority had granted them. With the creation of the system of *sened tapu*, certificates of title to land, the notable changed from a government agent into a mere landlord. Although he was still liable for tax, his relations with those who worked his land were now the private ones of owner and tenant.²⁰

²⁰ For these definitions, see Ester Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 81-83, 86-87.

Introd.4>Background to Mandate--agrarian revolt in the late Ottoman period

The strains resulting from the insertion of Syria in the world economy during the second half of the nineteenth century led to outbreaks of peasant revolt centred in southern Syria, the region which had been most closely tied to Europe through its participation in the grain trade. These revolts were different from much of the rural violence in the Levant in the nineteenth century in that they did not arise from tensions between different religious communities (*millet*s), but rather from frustrations of peasants oppressed by their lords and impoverished by the fluctuations of an international economy over which they had no control.

Previous upheavals had tended to take the form of inter-communal strife. For example, sporadic revolts had occurred early in the nineteenth century, particularly among and between the 'Alawis and Isma'ilis of the Jabal Ansayria and the Ottoman government.²¹ Then there was the turmoil occasioned by strife in Mount Lebanon in the late 1850's which had its origins in the changing balance of power between Druze and Maronites co-existing uneasily in the mountains. This civil war reached its climax by the massacre of Christians in Damascus during the month of July, 1860, a bloodbath which brought the intervention of a French expeditionary force with the sanction of the Great Powers. In this case, perceived hardships occasioned by the reforms of the *Tanzimat* and the insertion of Syria into the European

²¹ For comments about this, see, Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers. . .*, 58-61.

economy had aggravated a series of conflicts which had been polarising Muslims, Druzes, and Christians, over some forty years. The fact that the supposedly 'inferior' Christian communities had become more prosperous due to their better ability to participate in markets dominated by Europeans generated resentment among other communities who were not so blessed. The conflict between them was then primarily a clash of rich and poor, exacerbated by the fact that the 'rich' happened to be Christian.²²

The sustained series of peasant rebellions which occurred in the Hawran and Jabal Druz (a region also known as the Jabal Hawran) from the beginning of the 1860's to the end of the 1890's were different in that they produced an alliance across lines of religious community with Christians, Druze, and Muslims; peasants, hillmen, and beduin opposed to Damascene notables and the Ottoman authorities and their troops.²³

The cultivators of the Hawran reacted vigorously against what they perceived to be their exploitation by a heterogeneous and ever-shifting alliance of central government officials, European commercial interests, and urban notables, aided and abetted by certain local leaders. These groups had introduced the Hawran to the world grain

²² For the civil war of 1860, its causes and consequences, see Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1996), *passim*.

²³ For the commercialisation of agriculture in the Hawran and the events which sprang from it, see the series of articles by Linda Schatkowski Schilcher: 1>'The grain economy . . .,' 173-95; 2>'The Hawran conflicts of the 1860's: A chapter in the rural history of modern Syria,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies [IJMES]*, XIII, 1981, 159-79; 3>'Violence in rural Syria in the 1880s and 1890s: State centralization, rural integration, and the world market' in Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (eds.), *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East* (Miami, Fla: Florida International University Press, 1991), 50-84.

market during the 1860's whilst seeking its re-integration with the Ottoman Empire which they hoped would bring an increase in the tax revenue supplied. As a result, the inhabitants of this particular region experienced extraordinary prosperity followed by extraordinary suffering when that economy collapsed starting in the late 1870's. Reductions in profit and revenue led the largely urban-based combine to pressure its rural suppliers for more product. Moreover the Ottoman government began to make concerted efforts to assert its authority in the Hawran by sending punitive expeditions and stationing troops in the region. These troops had to be supplied and paid, and the onset of the depression impelled the authorities to seek new sources of revenue to fill their depleted coffers by attempting to farm the taxes more efficiently. As the economic crisis bit deep, notables refused to bid for the right to collect taxes because there was no profit in it for themselves. The government, desperate for funds, either tried the expedient of direct taxation or pressured local leaders to farm their own villages. In addition, it employed gendarmes to extract further contributions from unwilling peasants.

The different elements within the Hawran--Druze from the Jabal Druz; beduin tribes; Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic Christian villagers; and Sunni Muslim villagers formed an ever shifting kaleidoscope of alliance and opposition, depending on the circumstances. These people lived a marginal existence even during the best of times, and as the crisis worsened could sacrifice no more. Their only possible answer was violent opposition to further exactions.

In 1890, this produced an episode of 'radical populism' in which peasants from all communities united in revolt against their leaders, seeking a more equitable apportionment of the tax assessed and demanding that they not be taxed directly by the government. These protests culminated in April, 1890 with the proclamation of a commune (*'ammiya*) by Druze and some Christian peasants. Their programme included the election of their own shaykhs and a division of the harvest which would allot the peasants three quarters of it. This was not a revolt against the Ottoman government *per se* because the peasants were careful to proclaim their loyalty, offering to pay their taxes, and even proposing that an ethnic Turk be made governor of the Hawran instead of a prominent notable or local shaykh.

Rather than taking advantage of this opportunity to split the peasants from their leaders, the Ottomans chose to send troops into the Jabal Druz to crush the rebellion. Moreover they sought to register the lands in the Hawran starting in 1892 in order to privatise cultivation and establish direct control over it. Finally, the railway, often threatened, was pushed through the Hawran between 1892 and 1894.

The opening of the railway led to the disintegration of the urban combine as Hawrani grain flooded the market and sent prices plunging. This situation was exacerbated by the crash in the financial markets of both London and Paris in 1895 which gave Syrian investors a twenty million franc loss. In the Hawran, the final collapse of the grain market led to a catastrophic reduction in tax revenue and forced peasants to abandon cultivation altogether.

The Ottomans now tried to impose direct taxation on the peasants, and sent armies sweeping through the Hawran. The peasants, particularly the Druze, resisted heroically, and finally in 1897, there was a general uprising of peasants from all communities against the exactions of the government.

Finally the government relented and abandoned direct taxation, and in 1900, the Sultan proclaimed a general amnesty. Although the Ottoman apparatus was ultimately able to triumph because of superior resources, good will was never re-established between the rural inhabitants of the region and the officials and notables from Damascus.

The events in the Hawran in the last quarter of the nineteenth century highlight two salient characteristics of agriculture during the Ottoman period. The first was the appearance of Syria as a supplier of grain to the world market in the eighteen sixties. A world grain shortage and high prices brought prosperity not only to grain merchants and notables based in Damascus, but penetrated deep into the countryside to the peasant producer of the Hawran, the principal source of cereals. Unfortunately the insertion of Syria into the world economy meant that she became exposed to its fluctuations. The collapse of the grain market in the late eighteen seventies ushered in a period of economic crisis and social dislocation for the peasant communities of southern Syria.

It was the existence of strong peasant communities particularly in southern Syria that was the second characteristic of agriculture in the Ottoman period. Like so much of rural Syria, the Hawran was in a

frontier zone where cultivation was difficult because of the erratic rainfall, and where a *mélange* of peasants and beduin lived side by side in an uneasy relationship of conflict and co-operation. As a result of these circumstances, a system of cultivation grew up in which the members of the village community as co-holders of village lands allotted shares in their patrimony on the basis of what each production unit could contribute in terms of manpower and/or capital-- in this case plough teams. Moreover to ensure absolute equality, each member had rights to a certain portion of village land rather than control over any specific piece of property within it. To reinforce this principle, the lots were changed periodically, and each rightholder was given parcels of the different types of agricultural land worked by his community. Nevertheless if cultivation was strictly by individual production units, nonetheless these units were subject to communal disciplines of ploughing and harvesting, and confined their crops to cereals.²⁴

This '*musha*' tenure, so typical of the Hawran, created strong communal bonds among the peasants, and in the economic crisis of the eighteen eighties and nineties, the peasants, driven to desperation, united in revolt against those who exploited them. This did not occur just at the level of the individual village community or even at that of neighbouring communities working together, but at the level of the entire 'community' of countryfolk oppressed by notables, merchants, and the Ottoman government. The interests of this wider union

²⁴ For an extensive discussion of this form of tenure, see Chapter II *infra*.

transcended the separate interests of its members who as Druzes, Beduin, Christians, or Muslims usually went their separate ways or could even be in conflict.

The issues raised by the insertion of Syria into the world market and the effects this had on the peasant communities of the Syrian interior did not end in the late Ottoman period, but arose again during the French Mandate, but in somewhat altered form. In order to understand this more clearly, it might prove useful to examine certain concepts developed by Ferdinand Tönnies to explain social change.

Introd.5>Theoretical interlude--*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in a Syrian context

Tönnies distinguishes between two 'normal' or ideal types of social organisation, the *Gemeinschaft* (community) and the *Gesellschaft* (association).²⁵ He points out that the rural village community is an 'outstanding example' of a *Gemeinschaft*like structure. It is so because it is bound together by kinship, either real or fictitious; neighbourhood--the fact of living together; common agricultural disciplines; the holding of common property; willing obedience to the

²⁵ 1>Ferdinand Tönnies, 'The nature of sociology,' ['Das Wesen der Soziologie'], paper read before the Gehe Foundation, Dresden, 1907 in Werner J. Cahnman and Rudolf J. Heberle (eds. and trs.), *Ferdinand Toennies on Sociology, Pure, Applied, and Empirical* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 99-106; 2>*Idem*, 'Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft' in Alfred Vierkandt (ed.), *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1931), Part Five of Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, Charles P. Loomis, ed. and tr., (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 250-59 .

decisions of a common leader--all permeated by the two principles of fellowship and authority.

Gemeinschaftlike organisations evolve as the original bases of their union change. Tönnies believes that this progression is natural, one which occurs during the process of evolution towards modern life. The change is marked by the rise of individualism. Whereas previously, persons might have worked co-operatively together, now they do so on the basis of exchange founded on impersonal contracts. Such collectives are economic, indeed capitalistic, in character. Unlike a *Gemeinschaftlike* structure which carries its purpose within itself, this new type of association is animated by an external purpose which is rational, the means to achieve an end.

Tönnies believes that the state usually exemplifies this *Gesellschaftlike* structure. Although ideally its own citizens might see it as the family writ large, a natural whole composed of its members and dependants, in reality its *Gemeinschaftlike* qualities tend to be subordinated to the 'decisive criterion' of the economic relationship between the whole and its parts, i.e. ownership rights. Usually, the state is created by capitalistic and middle class, largely urban groups in order to protect persons and property and nourish the status and honour of its supporters, The state claims to represent all the people, rich and poor, but in so doing, it merely emphasises the gap between those who control it and the mass of the people below.

Tönnies thinks that political and intellectual organisations eventually develop within cities with the aim of closing what has

become a yawning chasm between rich and poor. Through the activities of these groups, the 'consciousness' of the *Gesellschaft* becomes the consciousness of the mass of the people rather than of just a few. The result is that the people increasingly identify with the state, and see it as the weapon which they can use to better their condition, crushing the monopoly of wealth which is held by the few, and winning a share of the output for themselves. Now each person receives what is necessary for a comfortable life, and property for communal use is held in common by the *Gesellschaft*, i.e. by the people or their association, the state.

Tönnies remarks on the effect which application of such policies would have on the nature of the state. In his opinion, a state which follows this course, a course which he calls 'socialism', can no longer be considered a *Gesellschaft*, but will become a community, a true *Gemeinschaft*. The problem is whether it is possible for the modern state to transform itself into such a community or whether it will remain an association based on individualism and the cash nexus.

Although the progression from *Gemeinschaftlike* structures to *Gesellschaftlike* structures, appears to be a linear one, Tönnies emphasises that it may be possible for the former to remain even whilst the latter develops. He believes this would occur if the whole or the commonwealth, although no longer similar to a natural union in form, still wishes to maintain a common spirit. He asserts that it is religion which nourishes this communal spirit, and which hallows the commonwealth. Yet perhaps something else can also nurture this

spirit: the bonds of the past, of family and neighbourhood along with those stemming from a common life and common burdens.

One might say that the peasant communities of the plains of inner Syria were typical *Gemeinschaftlike* social formations. The characteristics of such entities were reinforced in the Syrian case by the existence of *musha'* tenure and the common agricultural disciplines associated with it.

According to Tönnies, the replacement of organisations founded on communal co-operation by those based on impersonal exchange and individual action leads to the attenuation of the spirit of *Gemeinschaft* and its transformation into one of *Gesellschaft*. During late Ottoman times, the insertion of Syria into the world market did not destroy the spirit of *Gemeinschaft* among the villages of the Hawran. On the contrary, the introduction to the market strengthened this spirit by uniting those who might otherwise have been in conflict.

The reason for this was that introduction to the market created an impersonal exchange relationship between two parties which heretofore had either been in relations of dependency or had little to do with one another. The cultivators of the Hawran were merely reacting vigorously against what they perceived to be exploitation by a heterogeneous and ever-shifting alliance of Ottoman officials, European commercial interests, and urban merchant-notables, aided and abetted by certain local leaders. For example, in calling for the restoration of sharecropping agreements with their shaykhs to replace direct government taxation, the peasants were rejecting the principle of

impersonal exchange so typical of *Gesellschaft*, and calling for a restoration of the *Gemeinschaftlike* structures which had served them so well in the past.

Tönnies believes that the state is the exemplar of a *Gesellschaftlike* structure although ideally its own citizens should find it imbued with the spirit of *Gemeinschaft*. The events in the Hawran during the last decade of the nineteenth century certainly damaged the legitimacy of the Ottoman state in the eyes of the cultivators. This claim was further tested and found wanting by the great famine which disrupted rural structures during the First World War. An Ottoman government which was unable to prevent greedy cartels of speculators from enriching themselves at the expense of hundreds of thousands of their compatriots could hardly retain Syrian loyalties which now switched definitively to the more promising horse of Arabism.

Introd.6>The Great War and the last years of Ottoman rule

Between 1915 and the end of 1918, some 500,000 out of a population of some 4.5 million souls living in geographical Syria died from starvation or those diseases which sprang from it.²⁶ A famine was not expected at the beginning of the World War in 1914 because there were adequate grain supplies from the recent harvest and Syrians presumed that it would still be possible to import foodstuffs from the

²⁶ For this famine, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, 'The famine of 1915-1918 in greater Syria' in John P. Spagnolo (ed.), *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992), 229-258. The casualty figure is given on 229.

area east of Suez. Nevertheless high prices and shortages began to affect the civilian population from the second half of 1915, and the crisis only worsened as hostilities progressed. That mass starvation did occur was due to a number of factors combined:

1>The stifling of all imports by the Allied blockade of the Levantine coast.

2>Meagre harvests due to inadequate rainfall.

3>Ottoman inefficiency and inadequate planning.

4>The heartlessness of German military officials stationed in Syria.

5>The Arab Revolt which led the authorities to divert grain supplies from Syria in order buy the loyalty of southern beduin tribes.

6>Prohibitive grain prices due to speculators who cornered the market in order to make fortunes at the expense of their compatriots.

7>Methodical hoarding on the part of the general population.

The blockade of the Entente Powers along the Syrian coasts throughout the period of hostilities prevented imports of grain from overseas to supplement local resources when these ran short. A normal harvest gave Syria self-sufficiency, but during the War, it was necessary to provide nourishment to other groups deemed more important for *raisons d'état* before feeding civilians. The sectors of the population given priority were the huge Ottoman army mobilised in Syria during the conflict; the inhabitants of the two Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina; southern beduin to keep them from joining the Arab Revolt; German units which came to be stationed in Syria after 1917; Ottoman

officials and supporters and their families. The grain required to supply these extra mouths in the absence of imports had to come from what was in essence a supply that could not be readily increased, and which in all likelihood would produce a deficit. These deficits did appear, not only because of the usual weather problems, but also due to the requisitioning of labour and draft animals normally used in agriculture to aid in the war effort.

Therefore the Ottomans resorted to extraordinary measures in order to extract Syrian grain from its producers. First, they ordered that the *'ushr*, the annual tithe of 10%, be paid in kind rather than in specie, but when the gendarmerie came to collect it, they found little to be had at the meagre prices they were offering. Pressure on the peasants to sell, only led them to conceal their harvests, and gave them little incentive to plant for the following season.

Moreover the grain that did reach the markets in Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut was largely cornered by speculators, eager to make a killing, and indifferent to the suffering their tactics might cause. The government sought to counter these tactics by forming syndicates of its own to buy grain and re-sell it to the populace at reasonable prices, but most of these combines failed. They offered too low a price to draw custom, and if they paid a higher rate, they could not sell to bakers at a more moderate one and still meet their expenses.

The coastal areas, Mount Lebanon, and northern Palestine, districts which had always been forced to import grain from the interior or buy it abroad, suffered particularly during the crisis. Since such

transactions were now impossible, the luckless inhabitants found themselves at the mercy of smugglers and black marketeers who supplied little grain at exorbitant prices. The result was starvation: Probably more than 200,000 died in northern Lebanon alone.²⁷

As the war progressed, government efforts at organising supply continued to prove ineffectual. Although the Ottomans made the entire Syrian region a single supply zone, grain purchases and distribution were left to private entrepreneurs who followed official guidelines as to quantities to be bought and profits to be earned. The results were predictable: Government sponsored syndicates could hardly compete on the open market with private entrepreneurs who offered, not increasingly worthless Ottoman paper currency, but sound gold coins. Even the threat of confiscation made to anyone who refused to accept the scrip could not dampen the desire for gold.

As a result of this failure of supply, the Ottoman authorities made food the currency of political loyalty. They gave priority to selected civilian groups in allotting scarce victuals: public institutions, Ottoman officials and their kin, and the families of serving military personnel--with the rest of the civilian population left to scrounge or starve.

This attempt to squeeze grain from ever more reluctant producers to feed a restricted bunch of Ottoman loyalists caused the prices of the grain available to make a stratospheric leap. It also

²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

increased the price of gold which was now the only acceptable medium of exchange.

By 1917, the results were catastrophic, and even the creation of a Public Food Service (*L'asha 'ummumiya*) in Damascus whose task was to give food relief to the poorest inhabitants of the city was quite inadequate. Poor weather and unrest in the countryside, not unrelated to the progress of the Arab Revolt, reduced the harvest of 1917. This brought even harsher methods to obtain grain using the army as bludgeon.

The stationing of large numbers of German troops in Syria starting in 1917 proved an added calamity as food had to be found for them. The Germans refused to interfere in what they saw as a catastrophic, but hopeless supply situation, although they did appeal for a supply of hard currency to purchase food for military needs.

As Ottoman authority slowly collapsed, Druze shaykhs who now controlled the grain of the Hawran found it politically expedient to sell their supplies to the Arab rebels and their British allies. The Ottomans sought to make deals with speculators whereby they would be given free rein if they would supply grain to the Ottoman army, but the speculators simply refused to keep their word, secure in the knowledge that the Ottomans were now incapable of making reprisals.

Moreover local authorities began to do a curious thing: The rains in the winter of 1917-18 were heavy which meant that there would be a plentiful yield come the spring, barring unseen calamity. Nevertheless these officials deliberately underestimated the size of the crop to be

reaped in their districts whilst finding many more civilian mouths to feed. With civilian quotas set so high, it was quite easy for them to retain the grain from their own districts at harvest time rather than delivering it to military depots. Perhaps local administrations took such actions in order to profiteer. Yet one could give equal weight to the possibility that this was done in answer to pressure from their constituents, anxious about their own welfare and no longer having confidence in or fear of the representatives of Istanbul.

There was one final paroxysm of hoarding during the summer of 1918 as speculators strove to make a final killing before the collapse of the Ottomans brought an end to the war and the restoration of normal conditions of trade. The creation of an Imperial Food Council and the first Ministry of Food in the summer of 1918 came too late to act effectively.

The Entente blockade was not lifted until October when British and French troops landed along the coast, and for the first time in four long years, food supplies could be landed from abroad. The French bought grain in Damascus to help feed the coastal areas, and accepted the offer of a Japanese company based in Egypt to supply grain for Syria from the Far East. This proposal was deemed particularly advantageous because Mediterranean sources could then be used to supply France itself. 1919 saw a poor harvest and the French purchased grain from other parts of the Mediterranean to feed their military forces in the Levant rather than seeking to burden Syrian producers. The free market in grain was not restored in Lebanon until

the end of 1921 with the closure of the Bureau de Ravitaillement, and the French refused to intervene in the beginning of 1922 when Beirut millers pleaded for a policy of protection to block foreign imports. To this appeal, the French retorted, perhaps quite rightly, that the Beirut grain merchants were far more interested in turning a quick profit for themselves than they were in the welfare of Syria's slowly recovering agriculture.

When one looks at this unhappy culmination to four centuries of Ottoman rule in Syria, certain continuities with the events of the Hawran not so many years before become apparent. In each case, outside forces played a prominent part in shaping local economic trends. Moreover, the Ottoman authorities were unable and perhaps unwilling, even in time of war, to control combines of urban notables whose manipulation of the market proved so detrimental to other sectors of the population.

Local and regional networks of patrons and clients functioned to provide food for the starving, however little this turned out to be. Perhaps there were links between speculators, landowners (or speculator/landowners), and the peasant and between urban notables and their local clients which alleviated some of the misery. Smugglers could only operate with the connivance of local civilians, military authorities, and officials more sensitive to the needs of their friends and relatives than to those of the state they ostensibly served. The events of the last year of the war when local leaders upheld the

requirements of their clients over the demands of the Ottoman war machine seem to argue for the reassertion of parochial allegiances.

Nevertheless Syrian networks could only provide relief to a limited degree because much of the responsibility for the situation in which they found themselves lay in the hands of those outside the Syrian arena. One of the prime causes of the famine was the blockade of the Levant coastline by the navies of the Allied Powers right up until the end of the war. This prevented any food entering from abroad to compensate for local shortages, and ensured that the coastal regions suffered much hardship. Moreover it was the Arab Revolt which forced the Ottomans to divert wheat from Syria to feed southern beduin tribes and the population of the two Holy Cities. Yet in the end, it was the success of this same 'national' rebellion which provided a new pole of legitimacy to attract the allegiance of Syrian Arabs now finally disillusioned with Ottoman and Turkish rule.

The horrors of the famine struck at the very legitimacy of the Ottoman government and its officials. The failure of the government to curb speculation and inflation was bad enough, but when it made food the currency to reward political loyalty, the allegiance of the victims shifted elsewhere.

This shift was made possible because the opening of the Arab Revolt in the spring of 1916 presented another option, at first quite insubstantial, but one which became ever more viable as time went on. The presence of strong contingents of Ottoman and German forces in Syria itself prevented the outbreak of any insurrection there.

Nonetheless tidings of the rebellion gave concrete focus to the idea of Arabism which had been evolving slowly in the non-Turkish provinces of the Ottoman Empire since the late 19th century.

Faisal's Arab Kingdom, created from a portion of the ruins of Ottoman Syria, was a product of this new legitimacy, although it must be said that if all Syrians wanted self-rule, not all of them wanted Hashimite rule. Because the new régime inherited a legacy of famine, destitution, and internal unrest, it proved too weak to outface the French, eager to claim Syria for themselves as spoils of war. Therefore it was France under the leadership of High Commissioner [HC] General Henri Gouraud, not the Syrian nationalists, who replaced the Ottomans in the Grand Serail in Beirut--and France had its own priorities for the agriculture of Syria.

CHAPTER I

THE MANDATE--I: FRENCH THEORY AND SYRIAN REALITY

It was during the French administration of Syria between 1920 and 1945 that agriculture first became subject to a programme of systematic amelioration. This is not to say that there had been no improvements previously. It is simply that during this period, specific policies were adumbrated and carried out with the object of regenerating agriculture from the nadir to which it had descended at the end of the Great War.

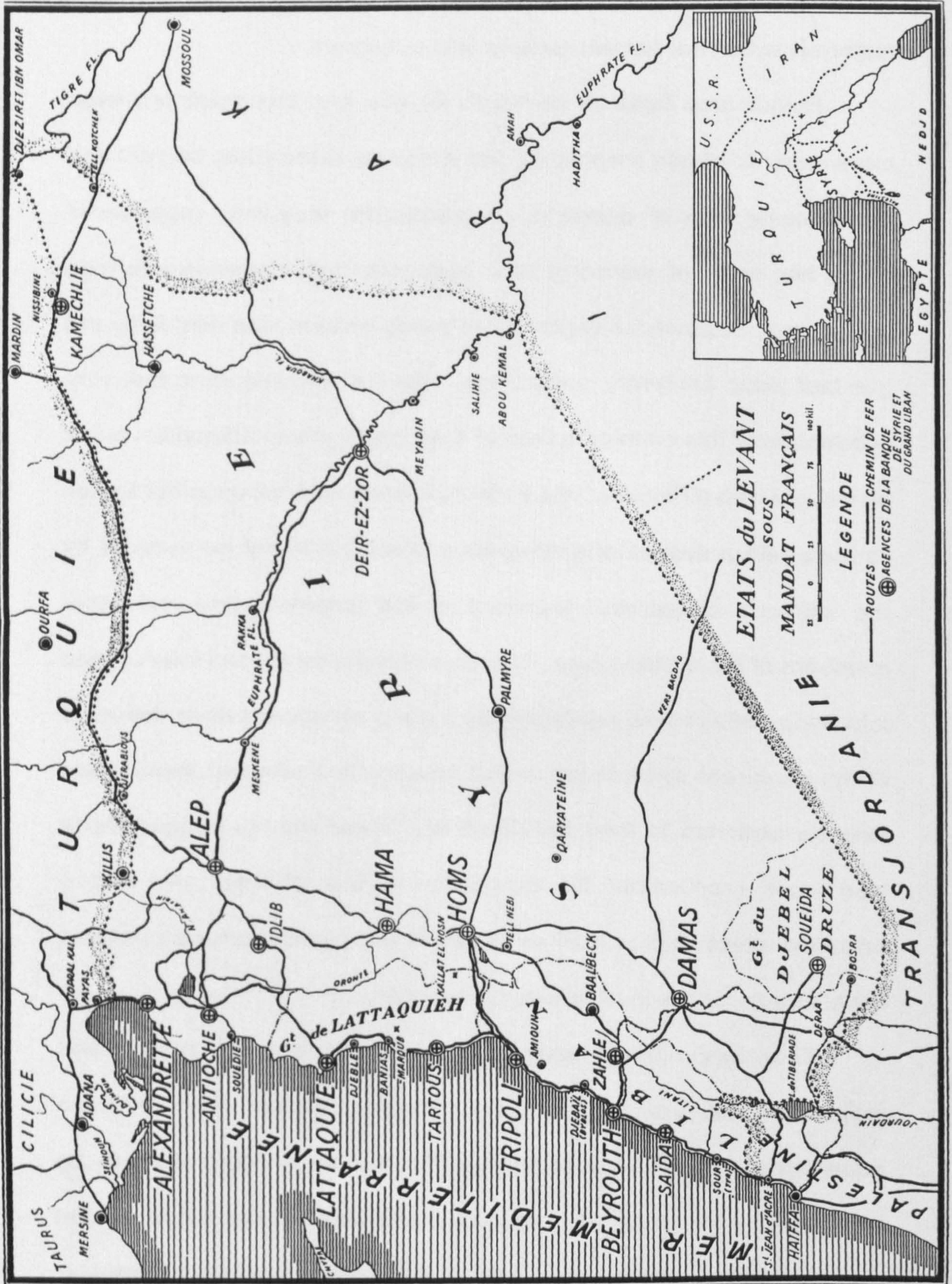
This period was also the first in which a European power had become politically responsible for shaping Syrian destinies. Moreover this power accepted the charge, at least in theory, as a representative of the international community embodied in the League of Nations rather than as a colonial ruler. In other words, theory had it that Syria was not to be exploited for the benefit of the foreigner, but to be guided by the foreigner towards independence and self-sufficiency.

The European power which put itself forward as best suited to act as tutor for Syria was France. Her motives were hardly disinterested since she had long been involved in the affairs of what she termed the 'Levant', as protector of (Christian) minorities; as purveyor and pioneer of education; and in the quarter century preceding the Great War, as economic entrepreneur. The horrors and the destruction occasioned by that war impelled her towards a policy of autarky in preparation for

any future conflict. As a result she cast around for sources of raw materials within her colonial empire and elsewhere.

France saw Syria as one such source, and this made her even more eager to obtain a mandate. Nevertheless these same horrors and the colossal task of domestic reconstruction they had engendered made her wary of incurring new and potentially expensive foreign obligations. A powerful segment of French opinion was decidedly not '*partant pour la Syrie*', particularly when it seemed that the very occupation of this country in face of a surging Syrian nationalism might be fraught with difficulties. As a result, France entered upon her Syrian venture with a degree of ambivalence which could not be masked by the euphoria of extreme members of the colonial party and other members of the Syrian lobby. French ambivalence toward intervention into Syrian affairs was reinforced by a deep scepticism as to the value of the resources to be found in that country, and whether these could ever be exploited to their full potential. These doubts dogged those who were responsible for administering this charge, and had a profound effect on their abilities to devise and pursue coherent policies towards agriculture in all its various aspects.

Therefore with the coming of the French to Syria, another and quite different era began. The familiar, *laissez faire* Ottoman administration and its inexperienced Sharifian successors were slowly replaced by a cumbrous, layered bureaucratic apparatus whose primary mission seemed to be control rather than execution. Moreover France had its own agenda based on its past relationship with the



Levant which conflicted in many ways with Syrian aspirations as these emerged from the crucible of the Great War. Nevertheless this agenda could not be fully realised because Wilsonian ideals, much at variance with the cynical practices of the old diplomacy, forced the victors to cloak their ambitions under the guise of a tutelage supervised by the newly created League of Nations.

I. 1 > France and the Ottoman Empire--culture and Catholicism

In the period immediately before the First World War, when European Powers decided it was time to stake their claims to the lands of what appeared to be a moribund Ottoman Empire, France sought Syria as her special sphere of influence and control. She did so because of the long historical association which she had enjoyed with those lands on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This connexion had led to the elaboration of certain interests set atop the twin pillars of religion and economy.

The association founded upon religion and the culture which flowed from it was the stream which had the longest course. Enthusiastic French publicists liked to trace French influence back to

<---**Fig. 4. The French Mandated states in the Levant, showing boundaries as of 1930-36, roads, railways, and agencies of the Banque de Syrie et du [Grand] Liban. Source: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques--Nantes.**

the Crusades, St Louis, or even to Charlemagne. More modest, but still impressive assertions dated her link to the Levant to a series of capitulatory agreements made with the Ottoman Empire starting in the sixteenth century. These granted her a protectorate over all European Catholic Christians which over time was extended to local Uniates as well.

French cultural and religious influence increased by leaps and bounds after her intervention in Lebanon during the massacres of 1860. Schools run by French religious orders, many banned from teaching in the *métropole* itself, were viewed as effective purveyors of French culture and French political influence, even by radical, laicist politicians of the Third Republic, who were happy to accord these agents certain fiscal subventions.¹ Yet the clientele created by these schools came largely from a narrow segment of the population: Of those educated within them, only 6.5% were Muslims whilst 44.4% were either Latin Catholics or Uniates; 22% Greek Orthodox or Gregorian Armenians; and 26.8% Jewish.² Thus those most touched by French influence were not members of the leading status groups in Syrian society, but those who by virtue of their religion held an inferior position in a Muslim-

¹ cf. the 'profound' statement of Léon Gambetta, 'A cardinal and some missionaries render greater service than an army corps.' He had said this in relation to the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, but one could apply such sentiments to the Levant with equal relevance. For this, see Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Lyon [C.C.I.L.], Fonds Musées-- Tissus CCIL 93c 1*1, Dossier <<7>>, [Syrie]Documents divers, 1918 à 1924: Conseil supérieur de la guerre, section française, 1^{ère} section: Levant, 'La politique française dans le Levant,' Versailles, 27 November 1918, 5.

² For these percentages, see Jacques Thobie, *Ali et les 40 voleurs: impérialismes et moyen-orient de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Messidor, 1985), Table on 27.

dominated polity. These were also those to whom France turned when she sought Syrian interlocutors, and they distorted her image of Syria.

Yet the traditional prestige which France enjoyed among her Christian clientele was besmirched by the outbreak of laicist zeal during the ministry of Emile Combes (1901-05) which culminated in the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1904 and the complete separation of Church and State in France. In the eyes of her European rivals, principally Germany and Italy, this break with the Roman Catholic Church made a mockery of French claims to 'protect' all Latin and Uniate Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Therefore these states were emboldened to assert vigorously the right to protect their own missionaries and their own religious orders living in Ottoman territory in order to whittle down the French protectorate and the claims deriving therefrom.³

I.2>France and the Ottoman Empire--tentacles of financial control

Whilst the impact of French cultural and religious influence was important in creating a clientele devoted to France and willing to serve French interests, such prestige merely served to supplement the more solid potential of railroads and other investments when it came time for France to gobble up her portion of the Ottoman patrimony. For many years, France had exploited economic interests in the Ottoman Empire

³ For a discussion of the French religious protectorate and the complications arising from the outbreak of laicist zeal in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, see William I Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 33-48.

with a particular emphasis on Syria. These had increased dramatically in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first fourteen years of the twentieth century as France manoeuvred to obtain her 'fair' share of the 'Sick Man of Europe' whose demise appeared so imminent.

An examination of the manner in which foreign investment was apportioned within the Ottoman Empire (excluding Egypt) at the outbreak of war in 1914, reveals that nearly 75% of it was placed in loans made to the Ottoman government whilst the other 25% was sunk into the private sector.⁴ Of these government obligations, French investors, seduced as always by the apparent security of government debt, held 60%; with Germany holding some 16%; Great Britain 14%; and other European capital, 10%.⁵ The chief agency for the supervision of this debt was the Ottoman Public Debt Administration set up in 1881 by the Decree of Muharram to administer the repayment of Ottoman loans after the great bankruptcy of 1874-75. The Council of the Debt was run totally by foreigners, with the leading part being taken by representatives of England and France. In order to ensure the regular payment of the interest and service charges on the Ottoman Debt, the Public Debt Administration obtained control of some 25-30% of the financial resources of the Empire. It managed and collected revenues from such important enterprises as the tobacco and salt monopolies; stamp, alcohol, and fishing taxes; and the tithe on silk. The

⁴ These percentages are derived from figures given in Thobie, *Ali . . .*, Table on 17.

⁵ See *Idem, Intérêts et impérialisme français dans l'empire ottoman (1895-1914)*, Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne--Série Sorbonne 4 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne/Imprimerie nationale, 1977), Table on 307.

monies generated here went directly to service the Debt rather than being put to more productive use.⁶

French investors had even more financial power in the Ottoman Empire due to their control of the Banque impériale ottomane. This bank, founded in 1853, was both a private bank and the Ottoman state bank with the right to issue Ottoman paper money. It was administered by boards of directors in London and Paris, and served as an important link between foreign capital and the Ottoman state. For example, it had a seat on the Council of the Debt, and had a favoured position in obtaining foreign capital whilst its financial preponderance served to reassure foreign creditors as to the security of their loans. Moreover its sixty-two branches throughout the empire placed it in an excellent position to take part in local investment opportunities. It goes without saying that the bank ensured that the privileged situation which it had created for itself was not profitless.⁷

The foreign creditors of the Ottoman Empire were quite happy to encourage it to indebt itself further after the constitution of the Public Debt Administration because these loans were sure to prove profitable

⁶ For a brief discussion of the Ottoman Public Debt up to the First World War, see Thobie, *Ali . . .*, 17-18. Thobie enters into far greater detail in *Intérêts . . .*, 94-125 and 219-315. See also, G. Poulcy, *Les Emprunts de l'Etat Ottoman* (Paris: Jouve & Cie, Editeurs, 1915). Good summary treatments of this subject are 1>Owen, 191-200; and 2>Issawi (ed.), *EHME*, 94-106 which has interesting tables of the loans contracted. These tables are on 100-01, 103-06. The only discussion in English which follows the Debt until the settlement of 1928 is D.C. Blaisdell, *European Financial Control in the Ottoman Empire: A Study of the Establishment, Activities, and Significance of the Ottoman Public Debt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929; AMS Press, Inc., 1966).

⁷ For the Banque impériale ottomane, see Thobie, *Ali . . .*, 16; *Idem*, *Intérêts . . .*, *passim*, particularly 81-88, 113-119, 449-59,

for foreign investors and were 'guaranteed' by the existence of an organism whose control of revenues would service them. Moreover such loans ensured that the Ottomans would remain dependent on European capital and firmly within the European sphere of control. Nevertheless one must emphasise that the Ottomans found themselves in a certain sense placed on a treadmill, for these loans were not used for productive investment within the empire. Instead they were used to service or pay off previous debt, or were sunk in military expenditure.

Since it was impossible for the Ottomans to generate enough capital internally for the economic development of their empire, they had perforce to turn to foreign capital. Thus whilst the other 25% of the foreign investments in the Ottoman domains were indeed placed in productive enterprises, these investments were perhaps more productive for the accounts of the foreign entrepreneurs than for those of the Ottomans themselves. Of these investments, France had some 45%; Germany, 25%; Great Britain, 16%; and other European powers, 14%.⁸

I.3>France and the Ottoman Empire--railways and other enterprises

As foreign capitalists, French and other European entrepreneurs were interested in the Ottoman Empire only insofar as they could make quick and steady profits from their investments. Therefore they tended to place their money either in those activities which by their very nature

⁸ These percentages are derived from table in Thobie, *Ali* . . . , 19.

seemed to offer an assured success or in enterprises where profits were 'guaranteed' by a subvention from the Ottoman state. The 'sure' money earners included banking, public works, municipal services, mining, and oil exploration.

Railways were the principal investments of the second type. They appeared quite attractive to European investors because entrepreneurs could usually cushion potential losses by obtaining various privileges from the Ottoman government in order to sweeten the concession. For example, the concessionaire might gain the right to exploit mineral wealth for a certain distance on either side of the track; the right to develop quarries and gravel pits or cut timber if needed for construction; and even the right to explore for antiquities.⁹

Perhaps the most important means of encouraging the construction of railways were certain forms of financial support which the Ottoman government promised the concessionaires. The principal method employed was the so-called 'kilometric guarantee', i.e. a sum of money usually drawn from the tithes of the lands through which the lines passed and collected by the Public Debt Administration. The way this worked was that the Ottoman government would guarantee that the proposed line receive a certain gross revenue per kilometre, and if it did not, undertook to pay the difference between the two sums.

⁹ For the various methods used to promote railway construction within the Ottoman Empire, see 1>Edward Meade Earle, *Turkey, the Great Powers and the Bagdad Railway: A Study in Imperialism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 77-80 and 85, fn 7; 2>Orhan Conker, *Les Chemins de fer en Turquie et la politique ferroviaire turque* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1935), 79-82 where he gives examples of the financial outcomes of various kilometric guarantees; 3>Blaisdell, 127-29.

The Ottoman authorities were willing to offer such privileges and guarantees in order to facilitate the development of a communications network of strategic interest to the state but which, given the parlous state of its own finances, the government could not construct for itself. These considerations meant that in practice, kilometric guarantees were given only to important standard gauge lines (1 m. 435 wide), and not to narrow gauge ones (1 m. 05), or tramways of purely local interest.

Such incentives were fairly typical of an era which saw a dramatic increase of railway mileage throughout the world. For example Congress offered certain types of concession to encourage companies to build railroads in the western half of the United States. In one instance, the Union Pacific system was granted the right of way through public domain, and given twenty sections (1 section=1 square mile) on either side of its route with full rights to explore for minerals and other assets. Moreover Congress gave the company a fifty million dollar loan in the form of government bonds.¹⁰

Nonetheless in the Ottoman case there was a definite negative side to the subsidies. The kilometric guarantees did not encourage the railway companies to improve their lines or increase traffic beyond a certain level because whilst better materiel and more traffic meant more receipts, they usually brought greater expenses which were not offset by the guarantee. Indeed the increase in receipts might lead to

¹⁰ Earle, 79.

the suppression of the guarantee, and by themselves might not ensure the railways a profit. As a result, the investors adopted the more prudent course of an assured but small return to one involving greater rewards, but also greater risks. Thus in the long term such a commercial strategy worked against the interests of the Ottoman state whose ultimate aim was not to coddle foreign entrepreneurs, but to establish a strong and rationally organised network of railroads throughout its domains.¹¹

A large proportion of the French share in this capital investment was concentrated in Syria. For example, a major French enterprise was the construction and management of the port of Beirut, the first modern facility of this type to be built in the Levant. Construction was undertaken between 1890 and 1895 by a French company (Compagnie impériale ottomane du port, des quais et des entrepôts de Beyrouth) which was responsible for administering it and maintaining it. Various improvements were made over the years, and by 1914, Beirut possessed the best port on the Syrian coast, attracting to it much of the trade of southern Syria. Its charges were high compared to Alexandretta, the chief port of northern Syria, but it continued to bring a steady and ever increasing profit to the company and its investors.¹²

Considerably less successful were companies providing public services to Beirut. The Beirut Gas Company (Société anonyme ottomane du gaz de Beyrouth) was established in 1887 and controlled

¹¹ See the comment in Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 324, fn 49.

¹² For the port of Beirut, see *Ibid.*, 172-77, 377-84. Table of profits gained on 379.

largely by the Banque impériale ottomane. The Lebanese Tramways (Tramways libanais Nord et Sud de Beyrouth) were set up in 1894, and the Beirut Waterworks Company (Compagnie des eaux de Beyrouth) was founded in 1909. Each of these enterprises started with overweening ambitions which were never realised due to a failure to appreciate the realities of the situation with which it was forced to deal. They continued to exist, but were never able to furnish all the services projected, and provided no pots of gold to their investors.¹³

The centrepiece of French economic influence in the Levant was the railway finally known as the DHP (Société ottomane du chemin de fer de Damas-Hama et prolongements) which was controlled 70% by French investors. At the beginning of the 1890's, when consideration was first given to the building of a railway from Beirut to Riyaq, Damascus, and Muzayrib, it was viewed as a sure money-maker because of the profits to be made from the shipment of Hawrani grain to Beirut, and from the growth of rail traffic which would be generated by the two dynamic cities of Damascus and Beirut. A certain fillip to the affair was given by the parallel construction of the port of Beirut under the leadership of some of the same financiers. It was hoped that these elements would feed on one another, making the whole a dynamic economic combination.

By 1914, the expectations of the investors had been amply fulfilled with prospects of still more to come. The DHP network

¹³ For the Gaz de Beyrouth, see *Ibid.*, 189-92, 439; for the Tramways libanais, see *Ibid.*, 329-330; for the Eaux de Beyrouth, see *Ibid.*, 445.

stretched for 682 kilometres, and comprised 249 kilometres of narrow gauge railway as well as 433 kilometres of standard gauge. 331 kilometres of the standard gauge trackage enjoyed a kilometric guarantee. The narrow gauge segment (which included sections of rack-railway over some of the more forbidding mountain terrain) went from the port of Beirut over the Lebanon mountains to Riyaq then south to Damascus and from there to Muzayrib in the Hawran. This was the first, and most difficult part to be constructed and was completed in 1894-95, but without kilometric guarantee. The next part, standard gauge and with kilometric guarantee, was built between 1900 and 1906 and ran for a total of 331 kms. from Riyaq through Homs and Hama to Aleppo where it joined the German-built Baghdadbahn. The final section of 102 kms. from Homs to the port of Tripoli, standard gauge but without kilometric guarantee, was constructed between 1909 and 1911.

In the general settlement of accounts between French and German railroad interests concluded in February 1914, the French gained the right to push their Tripoli-Homs line east to Palmyra and Dayr al-Zur whilst the Germans were allowed to build lines from Aleppo to Alexandretta and from Aleppo to Maskana on the Euphrates with a zone of protection of 60 kilometres between the two rival networks. Finally in April, 1914, the DHP obtained the privilege of pushing its lines south to Lydda in Palestine--a station on the Jaffa-Jerusalem line--without a kilometric guarantee but with a subvention based on a more flexible formula whose elements included the length of the line, the

gross receipts received, and the number of kilometres actually covered by the trains. With these agreements, the shareholders seemed to have obtained an assured investment, at least until the far distant date of 5 May 1943 after which the Ottoman government was to have the right to repurchase the entire system.¹⁴

The DHP did prove to be a profitable enterprise, but this was largely due to the financial participation of the Ottoman government through its subsidy. Between 1902 and 1914 it paid the DHP some 22 million francs, a sum equal to the gross receipts of the guaranteed section (Riyah-Aleppo) and 30% of the receipts of the whole (some 73 million francs). As Thobie points out, 'This indemnity is thus the very motor of the system insofar as it assures the profits.'¹⁵

Yet despite its profits and its ever-expanding network, the DHP was not a particularly rational system, compared with those of its competitors, the German-built Baghdadbahn and the Ottoman-built Hijaz Railway. The DHP was essentially a system of only local importance tying as it did coastal ports to cities of the interior beyond

¹⁴ The clearest and most accurate presentation of the lengths, the gauges, and the finances of the different parts of the DHP is to be found in *Syria and Palestine*, Handbooks prepared under the direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office--No. 60 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), 68-76. For a more complete elucidation of the railway question in Syria and the Ottoman Empire before the Great War, see 1>Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 164-72, 318-29; 2>William I. Shorrock, 'The origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon: the railroad question, 1901-1914,' *IJMES*, I, 1970, 133-53; 3>*Idem*, *French Imperialism . . .*, 138-64; 4>Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine, 1906-1914: A Study of the Antecedents of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), 113-99; 5>Earle, *passim*; 6>Conker, 15-82; 7>Issawi (ed.) *EHME*, 248-257; 8>*Idem*, *FCDEH*, 220-224; 9>Dr. George-Samn , *La Syrie* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1920), 154-61.

¹⁵ Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 324.

which there was only desert. The fact that its lines were of two different gauges meant that its most important section, the one linking Aleppo with Beirut was never able to realise its full potential because of transshipment costs. Moreover its southern branch effectively led nowhere, and could not compete with the Syrian section of the Hijaz Railway, built and constructed at hardly any charge to the Ottoman state. This became even more obvious when the Ottomans built a line linking Dara'a on the Hijaz Railway with the port of Haifa which was a natural and now easily reached outlet for shipments from Damascus.

The DHP was faced by a two pronged system which was of strategic rather than merely commercial importance because its components linked Istanbul with two distant, but important regions of its Empire--Iraq and the Hijaz.¹⁶ The first prong was the German-built line known as the 'Baghdad Railway'. The Germans had conceived their enterprise in the grand manner with the aim of linking Berlin to the Persian Gulf via Istanbul. Konya, Adana, Aleppo, Nusaybin, Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. This standard gauge line was built in two tranches: First, track was laid down from Ismit to Ankara and from Eskishehir to Konya by the Anatolian Railways (La Société ottomane des chemins de fer d'Anatolie) between 1888 and 1896.¹⁷ Second, lines were constructed from Konya by the the Baghdad Railway Company (Compagnie du chemin de fer de Baghdad known as the

¹⁶ For an interesting argument along these lines see the opinions of Charles Rabot in George-Samn , 157-58 fn 1.

¹⁷ The short line--91 kms.--from Haydarpasha to Ismit had been built by the Ottoman government between 1871-73. The Anatolian Railway Company had taken it over from its British lessors as part of its own concession.

Baghdadbahn) which received its concession in 1903. By the end of the Great War, the Baghdad Railway stretched unbroken to Aleppo with the first trains entering that city in October, 1918.¹⁸

The other prong was the narrow gauge Hijaz Railway which linked Damascus to the two Holy Places. This was funded by a subscription collected from Muslims worldwide, and laid down between 1901 and 1908 largely under the direction of German engineers.¹⁹

One might describe those Frenchmen who promoted railways, ports, and utilities in Syria as mere businessmen because they sought immediate profit and regional economic preponderance. Nevertheless if they were not strategists who sought to dominate an entire empire through control of its communications, their activities did consolidate the ascendancy of their own country in a region which she considered to be her historic domain of action. Unfortunately the interests of France in Syria, confined largely to public utilities, communications, and the education of minorities, were in sectors far removed from the concerns of the majority of the Syrian Muslim population. Such activities gave her citizens little insight into the nature of Syrian society; into the all-important relations between town and countryside; or into the problems peculiar to rural life. This ignorance was

¹⁸ For the Baghdad Railway, see Earle, *passim*.

¹⁹ For the Hijaz Railway, see 1>William Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz Railroad* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1980); 2>Walter Pinhas Pick, 'Meissner Pasha and the construction of railways in Palestine and neighboring countries,' in Gad G. Gilbar (ed.), *Ottoman Palestine, 1800-1914: Studies in Economic and Social History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 179-218. This is a study of the life and career of the German engineer who was technical director and chief *de facto* of the Hijaz Railway project.

exacerbated by the refusal of French capitalists to put money into agricultural projects where profits could be neither immediate nor guaranteed, but through which her nationals might have gained experience of the real Syria.

I.4>France and the Ottoman Empire--agriculture

The one exception to this general tendency to avoid agricultural investments was French financial support of Lebanese silk production. Here there was a tight link between the producers and the market, and the silk manufacturers of Lyon were willing to make investments in order to maintain their dominance. Nonetheless silk was a speciality fibre and its production and trade were conducted under peculiar conditions. French involvement here tended to reinforce their predilection for Christian Lebanon in all its aspects whilst giving them little insight into the very different problems of the inner Syrian grain lands.²⁰

Thus French capitalisation of the Lebanese silk industry occupied an anomalous position in relation to the general thrust of French investment in the Ottoman Empire. This becomes clear when looking at the record of those few other agricultural projects which attracted French interest before the First World War. François Brun and certain Jesuit fathers established two small vineyards in the Biqa' valley in 1876 and 1880 respectively. The increasing number of wine-drinking

²⁰ For silk production see Chapter III *infra*.

Europeans and imitative locals soon guaranteed success. Although Egyptians began to demand these Lebanese wines from the 1890's, such small enterprises found themselves in stiff competition with Jewish and German vintners in Palestine. By 1914, the two estates comprised a maximum of 300 hectares, valued at 3000 F per hectare including their wine-making installations. This was tiny when compared with the productive potential of the German and Jewish colonies to the south. Nonetheless, in 1913 the French vineyards did ship 800 hectolitres of their product to Egypt, Europe, and even as far away as America--a triumph, but a small one.²¹

In contrast to these small-scale exploitations were several projects for large scale agricultural development proposed in the years just before the Great War. In 1910 a French financier sought a concession of 3,491,000 hectares of former imperial domain land located in Cilicia, Syria and Mesopotamia. The entrepreneur made his proposal after the definite termination of the Ottoman loan project of 1910 in the hopes that the revenues of the lands to be conceded could be used as collateral for a new loan to Istanbul. Neither the French nor the Ottoman governments seemed interested in this somewhat ill-conceived idea and nothing more was heard about it for the moment, particularly when the Ottomans raised a new loan, this time from Germany.

²¹ For the vineyards in Lebanon, see Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 421-22, 426.

A new round started in 1913 when another French financier, an associate of the first, heard of an official notice to sell 2,572,000 hectares of former imperial domain land in the *vilayets* of Syria and Mesopotamia. This gentleman, backed by the resources of the Crédit foncier d'Algérie et de Tunisie,²² formed the Société des domaines impériaux with the idea of obtaining all this land against a loan of 100 million F to the Ottoman government. Although this time the Quai d'Orsay supported the affair, the Paris financial markets were not keen on giving such a huge sum because of the continued swelling of the Ottoman floating debt coupled with the refusal of the Ottoman Bank to promote a new bond issue before the consolidation of those which had already been placed on the market. Moreover the Ottoman government itself decided on a new game, by turning this project into a settlement plan for thousands of refugees from the Balkan Wars.

This scheme also attracted the interest of French financiers, with the most serious offer being made by a Franco-Austrian group. It too had a short life because the plan to install refugees included what was in effect a building society to make loans to the new colonists. Such an institution proved unacceptable because, if set up, it would have been in direct competition with the state building society, the Crédit foncier ottoman. This institution happened to be run by another French financial combine which put pressure upon the Quai d'Orsay to block the settlement project. As a result, the Public Debt Administration was

²² Whose chairman, the former Minister of the Colonies André Lebon, would become president ten years later of the Union Economique de Syrie, the most important French business lobby during the Mandate.

persuaded to issue an unfavourable opinion which led the Ottomans to cancel their settlement plan in January, 1914.

The final, and most important development scheme to be proposed before the War was that of the Société des fermes impériales de Tchoucour-Ova (Çukurova) which was a concession given life by a contract signed in April, 1912. A group of French entrepreneurs in association with the Ottoman government proposed to exploit the 80,000 hectares contained within the imperial domain of Çukurova, situated north-east of the Adana plain, primarily to grow wheat and cotton, but also linen, hemp, poppies, legumes, and even sugar cane. The capitalists planned to recruit local workers to take in the cotton harvest, and the nature of the terrain supported the employment of agricultural machinery. They believed that the market of Adana would prove an excellent local outlet for the products of this scheme which could also be shipped abroad via the railroad connecting it to the port of Mersin. All of this would be produced, processed, and transported using economies of scale similar to those applied in cultivating the vast plains of the United States and Canada. It was hoped that profits would also be similar--a minimum of 17% of the capital engaged.

Such a rational and potentially successful enterprise aroused much opposition from those who had vested interests of their own in the region: First, from local landed magnates who feared for their estates. Second, from German entrepreneurs, chief among them the Deutsch-Levantinische Baumwollgesellschaft (DLBG) which was seeking to develop cotton cultivation in the Adana region as a result of

the 1903 Baghdad railway convention.²³ The Germans were not particularly happy to see a successful French enterprise planted in the midst of what was supposedly their own sphere of influence. Third, from Ottoman nationalists who felt that foreigners had been given too many advantages in a project which was in any case illegal because it had never been debated by the Ottoman parliament. Even more important was the certainty that this concession would give France a sure grip over an entire province which could only be the prelude to military occupation and imperialist control.

As a result of this opposition, the concession was declared illegal in December, 1912, but was once more recognised as valid in February, 1913. Its area of operation which had already been restricted to an initial slice of 45,000 hectares was further reduced by local manipulations to a mere 10,000 hectares. Yet egged on by the Quai d'Orsay, the French group persisted in its efforts, and finally had its original slice of 45,000 hectares restored--on 30 October 1914. Alas, too little, too late!²⁴

²³ For the DLBG, see 1>Edouard-C. Achard, 'Etudes sur la Cilicie et la Syrie: le Coton en Cilicie et en Syrie,' Documents économiques, politiques et scientifiques, 3. Supplement to *L'Asie Française: Bulletin mensuel du Comité de L'Asie Française [AF]*, XXII, 203, June, 1922, 23, 31-34; 2>Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of Turkey [EHT], 1800-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 'Cotton production in the Adana and Izmir region, 1910' [Selection from W.F. Brück, 'Türkische Baumwollwirtschaft,' *Probleme der Weltwirtschaft*, No. 29, Jena, 1919, 58-79], 242-45; 3>Donald Quataert, 'Ottoman reform and agriculture in Anatolia,' unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, U.C.L.A., 1973, 283.

²⁴ For these large scale pre-war French agricultural projects in the Ottoman Empire, see Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 423-26.

In seeking reasons for the dearth of French agricultural investment within the pre-war Ottoman Empire, one can contrast the relative success of such small-scale ventures as the vineyards of the Biqa' with the failure of the more ambitious schemes. The vineyards were too small to threaten the integrity of the empire. Indeed their influence was beneficent rather than maleficent because they acted as a sort of '*tache d'huile*', setting an example for their Lebanese neighbours who were not slow to copy their methods and emulate their success.²⁵

The much weightier projects which revolved around the imperial domains were another matter entirely. These did not involve the building of railways which merely passed over the land from one point to another, but the exploitation and even the purchase by European Christians of vast estates in the very heartland of the Ottoman Empire. These were the patrimony of the Ottoman state held 'in trust' so to speak for the entire community of Believers whose representatives were not happy to see them exploited by the infidels.²⁶ Unlike the system of the DHP which slowly came to fruition over a period of

²⁵ For an example of this, see Issawi (ed.), *FCDEH*, 312 where a British official gives an account of Lebanese winemaking in 1898: 'Journey from Bitlis to Beirut,' FO 195/2024.

²⁶ Granted that foreigners had been permitted to purchase lands within the Ottoman Empire on an equal footing with Ottoman subjects since the law of 13 Safar 1284/16 June 1867. This was confirmed by the protocol of 7 Safar 1285/9 June 1868 between the Porte and France to which other Powers adhered in the course of the next fifteen years. Nonetheless this fact does not invalidate the real concerns of Ottoman nationalists when faced by what they feared might be the prelude to foreign occupation. For the law, the protocol, and commentaries upon them, see 1> Aristarchi Bey, 19-26; 2>Young, I, 334-45; 2>Padel and Steeg, 16-23.

twenty-five years, these agricultural projects were conceived in haste during the years just before the First World War in order to exploit the misfortunes of a government so strapped for cash that it was willing to alienate part of its lands. Two of the schemes came to naught, in essence because the parlous state of the Ottoman fisc made European financial markets extremely wary of underwriting vast projects which might never bring a return to their investors. The third had more potential, but was never given a chance to realise this, stymied as it was by powerful opposition from various quarters. Perhaps it would have overcome its adversaries had the War not intervened, but it is more likely to have died on the vine. For such a 'plantation', no matter how beneficial in economic terms, posed an unacceptable political threat to the integrity of the state which acted as its host. It was only when France had achieved secure political control over Syria and the Lebanon by other means that the time appeared propitious for French investment in the agricultural sector.

1.5>The empire, cornucopia for the *métropole*

It is perhaps not surprising that French capitalists should have neglected somewhat risky long term investments in agricultural projects within the Ottoman Empire in favour of assured profits to be found within the sectors of banking and communications. Nonetheless, despite appearances to the contrary, this attitude did not reflect a general indifference to the productive potential of other regions outside

Europe on the part of French merchants and investors. Of prime importance in this respect, were the French colonies.

France was a principal participant in the European scramble for colonies which took place between 1880 and 1914, and during a period of less than thirty years acquired an empire of nearly twelve million square kilometres with a population of some fifty million. Yet apparently France did little to exploit this vast domain. For example, she placed only 9% of her total foreign investment in her own empire whilst sinking 25% into Russia. Moreover only 10% of French foreign trade was with its colonial empire, the second largest in the world after that of Great Britain whose Indian possessions were its largest export market in 1914.

Such percentages are in fact misleading. In looking at French overseas investment, one finds that the French colonial empire with a total investment in 1914 of between 4.1 and 7.5 milliard francs²⁷ ranked third behind Russia with 12.3 milliard and Latin America with 8.3, and ahead of Austria-Hungary (3.2), Spain (3.1), and the Ottoman Empire (2.8). Another measure of the importance of the French colonial empire

²⁷ Depending upon what was included in the calculation. The lower figure included private capital of companies listed in the *Annuaire de la Cote Desfossés* (a publication listing those companies quoted on the Paris Bourse) and debt incurred by the colonies themselves for public works; the higher one comprised metropolitan funds applied to the development of the empire; funds of private companies not found in the *Annuaire Desfossés*; and investments placed by family or individually-owned firms. The totals excluded investments of French *colons* in North Africa. For the figures and a discussion, see 1>Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), 95-101 and 384-85, fn 19; 2>Jacques Thobie, Gilbert Meynier, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de la France coloniale, II, 1914-1990* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 57-65.

to metropolitan capitalists is total private direct investment.²⁸ Here, one finds the empire with 2 milliard F to be equal with Spain and hard on the heels of Russia (2.2 milliard F) for second place.²⁹

A third measure of the interests of French capitalists in their empire is the number of companies holding imperial investments. Of the 469 companies with such investments listed in the *Annuaire Desfossés* nearly half (200) were founded before 1914, whilst one third (156) were set up between the end of most colonial conquests in 1898 and 1914. In 1913, for example, more companies were formed for colonial investment (51) than for investment outside the French Empire (24). In the final analysis what counted for most was the rate of profit achieved. For companies with capital placements in the colonies during the years immediately preceding the Great War, this rate was often considerably higher than it was for companies engaged in home and foreign activities. As Marseille points out, economic activities in the French Empire were indeed 'good business'.³⁰

Nonetheless one must emphasise that certain parts of the French Empire drew more investment than did others. More than half of the 45 milliard francs invested outside the *métropole* was placed in Algeria which was the private preserve of French financiers. By contrast, a region such as French Equatorial Africa, thinly populated and with

²⁸ Marseille defines direct investment as 'the flow of capital which is oriented towards the purchase of shares issued by companies operating in the colonies.' Marseille, 386, fn 40.

²⁹ For private direct investments by French capitalists in the French Empire and elsewhere, see *Ibid.*, 106-07; Thobie *et al.*, 58.

³⁰ For the figures and an analysis, see Marseille, 106-113 and 387, fn 48. Quote on 109; Thobie *et al.*, 58-59.

apparently little prospects, was not particularly attractive to metropolitan capital, and was left in a state of underdevelopment, the “Cinderella” of the empire.³¹

The figures for investment and commerce between France and her empire give the lie to those who claim that there was a ‘general indifference. . .to colonial expansion’ on the part of French banks and French industry. Rather they support the assertion that ‘the empire was indeed considered by metropolitan investors as not just a reserve for the future, but as a card of first choice’.³²

One can make a similar case for trade between the empire and the *métropole*, particularly with regard to the raw products of colonial agriculture. The empire in 1913 supplied 9.4% of French imports and contributed 13% of French exports. These gross figures are hardly earthshaking, but they conceal a reality which shows that the empire was ‘an essential commercial partner’ for France.

For example, if one examines total exchanges (imports and exports combined), one finds that with 1,729 million F in the period 1911-13, the French empire ranked as the third most important commercial partner of the *métropole* behind Britain (2,396.3) and Germany (1,843.6). Moreover it served as the most important outlet for certain sectors of French industry--textiles, iron and steel, candles, locomotives, ball-bearings and pipes--whilst providing the mother-

³¹ Thobie *et al.*, 59-62.

³² For the negative assessment, see C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, ‘French business and the French colonialists,’ *The Historical Journal*, XIX, 4, 1976, 982-84 (quotation on 982). For the positive one, see Marseille, 113; Thobie *et al.*, 59.

country with more than a quarter of its primary agricultural products. Among these, it supplied more than half the wine imported, 85% of the rice and 100% of the sugar in 1913.³³

The substantial place held by the French Empire in the provision of certain primary agricultural products was complemented by the fact that nearly a quarter of the 469 companies involved in the Empire--111 or 23.6%--were engaged in running plantations. Moreover another 161 (34.3%) were involved in the ancillary services of finance, commerce, and transport.³⁴

Unfortunately investment in agriculture and its supporting activities was unable to make good certain deficiencies. For example in the textile sector only 3.2% of the wool, 0.2% of the silk and 0.1% of the cotton used by French industry came from the French Empire. With regard to the latter, the largest percentage was imported from the United States. The efforts made by the French colonial cotton development group, the Association Cotonnière Coloniale (ACC) to promote cotton cultivation in French West Africa met with a uniform lack of success due to little scientific research; rudimentary methods of cultivation; insufficiently trained technical personnel; and prices so low that the peasant was hardly tempted to switch from millet to cotton.³⁵

³³ For the statistics and discussion of the commerce between France and her empire, see Marseille, 40-57; Thobie *et al.*, 52-56.

³⁴ Marseille, 108; Thobie *et al.*, 58.

³⁵ For the textile statistics, see Marseille, table on 55. For the ACC and its pre-war attempts to develop cotton cultivation in French West Africa, see Emil Schreyger, *L'Office du Niger au Mali, 1932 à 1982: la problématique d'une grande entreprise agricole dans la zone du Sahel* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1984), 9-13.

The coming of the First World War with its appalling sufferings and massive waste of resources led those in charge of the destinies of France to cast around for succour. To them, the empire appeared to be a vast reserve which might supply the transfusion of men and materiel to stanch the terrible hæmorrhage which was sapping the energies of the mother country. Despite much rhetoric, little could be done during the war itself to set a programme in train to realise such a hope. Moreover, even if the colonies had miraculously produced vast quantities of primary products, it would have been extremely difficult for France to bring them to her shores at the height of unrestricted submarine warfare.

Therefore it was only after the war, under the leadership of Albert Sarraut, twice governor general of Indochina and Minister for the Colonies between 1920 and 1924, that a plan for the systematic exploitation of the French colonial empire was put before the Chamber of Deputies. He expounded his ideas in a book, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923), which became the bible of French colonial development policy. In it, Sarraut called for a vast infusion of capital to improve the infrastructure of ports, railways, and roads. At the same time he promoted the production of primary products in order to give autarky to the mother-country should she be caught in another world conflict. The fact that Sarraut was unable to propose any sound method of financing this vast scheme does not obviate the fact that by the end of the Great War, France was eagerly casting about for each and every source of raw materials in regions

subject (or potentially subject) to French influence. Syria and Cilicia were two of these.³⁶

1.6>The Levant as a cornucopia?

Hence when France came to stake her claims in the 'scramble' to partition the Ottoman Empire after the Allied victory, she did so with the requirements of *la mise en valeur* very much in mind. In the Levant, *la mise en valeur* did not mean expansion of the concessions in communications and utilities because these were highly developed sectors where most of the profits had already been made. Moreover concessions were by their very nature parasitic enterprises whose aim was more to bring profits to their shareholders than to improve the welfare of the countries in which they operated. Indeed the local inhabitants complained vociferously about the high charges which they believed were designed to bring profits to the concessionnaires, and which were well above the true cost of the services provided.³⁷

³⁶ For the theory and practice of 'la mise en valeur' during the First World War and afterwards, see 1>Robert Cornevin, 'La France d'outremer,' in Alfred Sauvy *et al.*, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres, 3--Divers sujets* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1972), 274-93; 2>Thobie *et al.*, 71-100, 136-54, 227-34; 3>C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1981), 132-34, 141-43, 211-13, 226-28.

³⁷ For a comment by a senior official of the Mandate on the unfortunate consequences of a "politique des Sociétés concessionnaires" for the economic development of the Levant states, see the report of Jean de Hautecloque, Delegate of the High Commissioner at Damascus to High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux, on 'L'Avenir économique de la Syrie,' 13 January 1940, 3-4. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères--Archives Diplomatiques--Nantes [MAE--Nantes], Fonds Beyrouth [FB], Syrie, 1918-1940, Carton 364--Services Techniques.

Thus for France, *la mise en valeur* meant exploitation of the resources of the newly won territories in the Levant. Development of their natural resources might prove profitable and was not incompatible with the mission entrusted to her by the League of Nations. Since mining possibilities appeared to be limited,³⁸ the new mandatary decided to focus on agriculture. Indeed the agricultural potential of the Levant territories was the strongest card held by advocates of a French occupation in the face of public indifference and even downright hostility.

Despite the trumpet calls of the French colonial party for the occupation of '*la Syrie intégrale*' which stretched from the Sinai to Cilicia and from the Levantine coast far beyond the Euphrates, many people were not quite sure what these exhortations entailed; what they might cost the French tax-payer; and what would be gained in the end. For example, the President of the Comité lyonnais des intérêts français en Syrie, one of the principal French pressure groups in favour of the Syrian enterprise, supported intervention in Syria only insofar as it was consonant with both the military and financial abilities of the French state. This in face of calls for a hegemony which should stretch to Kurdistan, Lake Van, and even across the Persian frontier!³⁹

³⁸ With regard to the possibilities of mines in Syria, Professor Paul Huvelin of the University of Lyon who headed the French Mission to Syria in 1920, remarked that 'the Syrian mining concessionnaires used their genius to sell a bearskin that did not exist'. For this comment and a discussion of the limited mining possibilities in Syria, see Paul Huvelin, 'Que vaut la Syrie,' Documents économiques, politiques et scientifiques, 1. Supplement to *AF*, XXI, 197, December, 1921, 18-19. Quotation on 18.

³⁹ For this, see 'Réunion du Comité lyonnais des intérêts français en Syrie,' 5 May 1920 and report of meeting attached, CCIL, Fonds Musées--Tissus CCIL

These men realised as did High Commissioner General Henri Gouraud that the resources of France were limited in terms of both men and money; that she was already deeply committed in Morocco; and that the defence of the Rhine came above all else. Moreover there was an enormous war weariness, and a people and an army which had already sacrificed so much were not particularly happy to involve themselves in matters generally considered 'exotic enterprises'.⁴⁰

Given this background of hostility to any French intervention in the Levant, those who supported this venture were forced to present the sceptics with a balance sheet which carefully weighed the gains and losses to be accrued. General Gouraud gave one such crucial exposition to hard-bitten members of the Finance Committee of the French Chamber of Deputies at a session held on Saturday, 20 November 1920.⁴¹ The previous day, an important member of this committee⁴² had told Paul Huvelin, secretary-general of the Comité Lyonnais des Intérêts Français en Syrie, that he was determined to find ammunition to use against Gen. Gouraud and Alexandre Millerand.⁴³ Because a budget of fifty milliard francs was in deficit by two milliards,

93c 1*1, Dossier <<3>>: Congrès français de la Syrie--1919/Comité Lyonnais Syrie--1920.

⁴⁰ *Loc. cit.* Also 'Notes de l'entretien avec le Général Gouraud,' 20 November 1920 and 'Comité lyonnais des intérêts français en Syrie: Réunion du 23 novembre 1920' which are contained in the same file.

⁴¹ For this, see MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 2377: 'Note sur les questions posées au Général Gouraud Haut Commissaire en Syrie et Cilicie par la Commission des Finances le 20 Novembre 1920.'

⁴² Charles Dumont, a former Minister of Finance who was Rapporteur of the budget to the Chamber.

⁴³ Prime Minister from January-September, 1920 and then elected President of the Republic where he took a special interest in foreign affairs.

economies were necessary, and these had to be found somewhere. Credits could hardly be reduced for operations along the Rhine and in Morocco, so it was the Syrian budget which would get the chop.⁴⁴

Thus when General Gouraud stood before the Finance Committee, he faced a hostile audience who expected to him to justify French Syrian policy. The questions posed by the Finance Committee were quite blunt:

1>What are the agreements by virtue of which France is in Syria?

2>What advantages do these agreements give to France?

3>What are the obligations which represent the *quid pro quo*?

In response, the High Commissioner pointed out that the Sykes-Picot Agreement with the British in 1916 had reserved Syria as a sphere of French action. This was affirmed by the directives of Field Marshal Allenby giving France control of the coastal regions after the Armistice, and finally confirmed by the Allied Powers who awarded the Mandate of Syria to France on 23 April 1920 during the Conference of San Remo.

The principal advantage which France derived from her control of Syria was the consolidation of her influence in the Levant. The Mandatory Power would as a matter of course have economic paramountcy which would open the region to the activities of French capital and prove extremely profitable.

⁴⁴ CCIL, 'Comité lyonnais . . . , Réunion du 23 novembre 1920,' 3.

General Gouraud presented Syria as a natural partner for the French economy:

First, he claimed that the majority of Syrians felt friendship for France; that a 'notable proportion' spoke French; and that their currency was at parity with the French franc.⁴⁵

Second, Syria imported all types of manufactured goods, for example, luxury articles and construction materials which France and other European countries were in a position to provide.

Third, Syria produced and would continue to produce enormous quantities of cereals and cotton necessary for French industry, goods in which France had been in deficit up till now. To this, Gouraud added silk, wool, fruit, oil and pastoral products.

Fourth, her occupation of Syria gave France control of the coastal ports, Alexandretta in particular, which served as economic outlets for a great hinterland extending as far as Mesopotamia and the oil of Mosul.

Fifth, what was perhaps a more political gain, but with potential economic consequences: France, that great Muslim Power, derived benefit by holding Damascus and Aleppo, important centres of Islam.

Gouraud averred that the expenses France would incur in undertaking this task were primarily those of administration and

⁴⁵ When the Allies occupied Syria in 1918, General Allenby decreed that the Ottoman paper pound be replaced by the Egyptian paper pound. Therefore the French had to pay the expenses of their troops in Syria in Egyptian pounds which they bought with a greatly weakened franc. This meant in effect the doubling of their expenses. Therefore from May, 1920, a specially created French financial institution, the Banque de Syrie, was given the right to issue a Syrian currency which would be tied to the franc. Gouraud was somewhat disingenuous in his response, because in this transition to the new order, the expenses of the French occupation were still being calculated in Egyptian pounds whilst being paid with a steadily falling franc. See: 'Memorandum de l'exposé verbal fait le 13 Novembre 1920 à M. le Président du Conseil par le Général Gouraud Haut Commissaire en Syrie et Cilicie': l>'Budget,' 4. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 2377. More generally, Ahmad Samman, *Le régime monétaire de la Syrie* (Paris: Librairie L. Rodstein, 1935), 23-29.

control. These could be reduced to a minimum by limiting personnel on the civil side whilst relying on lower-paid native military units, members of the so-called Syrian Legion, as well as native irregular troops drawn from bedouin and Circassians. To him, this was a small price to pay for the opportunity to participate in such a profitable adventure.

As can be seen from the above exposé, when the chief French official in Syria was pressed by the parsimonious members of the parliamentary finance committee to set out good reasons as to why France should undertake the burdensome and extremely expensive occupation of Syria, he made the barest nod to sentiment, and placed primary emphasis on how the Syrian enterprise could be made profitable for France. First there was the Syrian purchase of French manufactures, but here France would be in competition with the rest of Europe. Second were the undoubted profits to be made from the transit of products shipped from the Syrian hinterland--particularly petroleum. Finally and most important, Gouraud saw Syria as the source of those raw materials so necessary for powerful sectors of French industry, and the well-being of the French citizen--silk, wool, vegetable oil, but above all, cotton and cereals.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ One can contrast this optimistic evaluation of the economic worth of Syria offered by the chief political representative of France in the Levant at the beginning of his mission with the more realistic attitude of one of his leading technical experts. Edouard Achard pointed out that Syria had 'a clearly agricultural character' precisely because the extent of her metal-bearing ores was unknown whilst deficiencies in her system of communications, her means of transport, and her labour force prevented any mines from being exploited. Edouard-C. Achard, 'Actualités syriennes: l'irrigation,' *AF*, XXIV, 222, May 1924, 200.

In this euphoric assessment, General Gouraud merely echoed the opinion of a study mission sent to Syria in the spring and summer of 1919 under the auspices of the University of Lyon, the Chambers of Commerce of Lyon and Marseille, and the Paris-based Comité d'Orient.⁴⁷ This mission sprang from the desire of the economic section of the Congrès français de la Syrie held in Marseille at the beginning of January, 1919 to obtain an inventory of Syria and its assets. Upon its return, its director Paul Huvelin, produced a report with the frank title of *'Que vaut la Syrie?'* ('What is Syria worth?'). Published in *L'Asie Française*, the principal organ promoting French colonialism in Asia, this account of the bounties which Syria offered to France was designed to counter those doubters who thought that Syria was not worth very much.

As we have seen, propagandists for a French political presence in the Levant emphasised the strong historical links between the past, the present and the future in order to affirm the inalienable right of France to be there. So too did those who sought economic justification for the Mandate. They sought to portray French policies as ones designed to revivify a land, once so fecund in Roman times, which had languished for hundreds of years under the Ottoman yoke. In short, the 'granary of Rome' was soon to become the granary of France.

⁴⁷ For an account of this mission, see 1>'Une mission française en Syrie,' *AF*, XX, 185, September-October, 1920, 309-12; 2>Dominique Chevalier, 'Lyon et la Syrie en 1919: les bases d'une intervention' *Revue Historique*, CCXXIV, 1960, 309-310; 3>Michel Seurat, 'Le Rôle de Lyon dans l'installation du mandat français en Syrie: Intérêts économiques et culturels, luttes d'opinion (1915-1925),' Institut français de Damas: *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales [BEO]*, XXXI, 1979, 141-43.

The propaganda extolling the future of Syria and her agriculture under French rule was buttressed by 'statistics' purporting to show the penury of the present contrasted with the promise of the future. Those showing past production were supposedly the most accurate that could be obtained, usually either German compilations from Ottoman sources or French abridgements of these same sources.⁴⁸ This information was supplemented by estimates of current production gathered from 'knowledgeable' local observers. As for the future, the prognostications varied from attempted estimates based on projections from current to future agricultural capacity to wild guesses founded more on hope than reality.

Following Ruppin, Huvelin gave estimates of current Syrian wheat production in a 'normal' year (i.e. one with sufficient rainfall and no locust depredations) at 1,000,000 tonnes. Using the same source, he gave normal barley production as 500,000 tonnes.⁴⁹ He himself calculated that it might be possible to boost Syrian wheat output to some 3,000,000 tonnes and that of barley to some 2,000,000 tonnes.⁵⁰ As for cotton whose pre-war production was infinitesimal (an average

⁴⁸ The principal German source used was the report prepared by Dr. Arthur Ruppin, an agent of the Jewish Colonisation Association in his 'Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet'. Supplement to *Tropenpflanzer*, 35, 1916 (Berlin: Kolonial-Wirtschaftliches Komitee Verlag, 1917). This work was prepared at the invitation of the Ottoman governor of Syria, Jemal Pasha, and Ruppin had access to Ottoman sources. An English translation, considerably abridged, was published under the title *Syria: An Economic Survey*, translated and abridged by Nellie Straus (New York: The Provisional Zionist Committee, 1918), 96 pp.

The principal Ottoman source was *Résumé de la statistique agricole de la Turquie d'Asie et d'Afrique*, année 1325/1910 (Constantinople, 1912).

⁴⁹ Ruppin, *Syrien . . .*, 35, 38; *Idem, Syria . . .*, 17; Huvelin, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Huvelin, 9-10.

of some 1,500 tonnes produced mostly in the Idlib-Dana region), French experts predicted a future harvest of from 80-100,000 tonnes.⁵¹

The cereal production figures which Ruppin gave as indicative of a 'normal' year appear to be quite an exaggeration. Ottoman statistics for 1325 M/1909-10 for the *vilayets* of Aleppo, Beirut, Syria, and the 'independent' *sanjaq* of Zor gave a total production of 546,714 tonnes of wheat and 259,910 tonnes of barley. This area was somewhat larger than either Mandate or independent Syria since it included portions of what became later southern Turkey, northern Palestine, and northern Transjordan. Counterbalancing this increase in size was the fact that 1325/1909-10 was a year 'when the harvest was unusually poor, not more than 2/3 of what it usually is.'⁵² So perhaps these figures rather than those given by Ruppin are a more accurate measure of the cereal production of Syria in the years before the Great War.

The predictions made by Huvelin had no basis in reality, either for the time they were made or for the foreseeable future. The year 1939

⁵¹ For the pre-war figure, see Achard: 'Etudes . . .,' 55; Huvelin, 11; Lower figure for future production extrapolated from information given in Achard, 'Etudes . . .,' 20, 47, 48; higher figure from Huvelin, 11.

⁵² Figures converted from those given in Justin McCarthy, compiler, *The Arab World, Turkey, and the Balkans (1878-1914): A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), Tables XIV.4 and XIV.6, 266 and 268. Figures given in kiles and kiyyes., viz.

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Weight per kile</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Weight per kile</i>
	(kiles)	(kiyyes)	(kiles)	(kiyyes)
Aleppo	1,698,747	23	771,516	17
Beirut	1,576,037	25	460,622	17
Syria	2,055,872	23	987,470	19
Zor	145,000	22	190,500	15
	1 kile=36.37 litres		1 kiyye=1.28 kg	

McCarthy took this information from a book of Ottoman agricultural statistics: *Ormen ve Maden ve Ziraat Nezareti, Kalem-i Mahsus Muduriyeti Istatistik Subesi, 1325 Senesi Asya ve Afrika-yi Osmani Ziraat Istatistigi* (Istanbul, 1327 M.). Quote from Ruppin, *Syria . . .*, 15.

which saw the best cereal crop of the peacetime Mandate presented production figures of 685,000 tonnes for wheat and 480,000 tonnes for barley. These figures were only made possible by the burgeoning cultivation of the vast and rich lands beyond the Euphrates (the so-called 'Jazira'). That million tonne mark for wheat which Huvelin considered 'normal' was only passed in 1956, and his half million tonne mark for barley in 1954. The target which Huvelin sought for wheat was only reached in 1992 (3,045,000 tonnes), some seventy years after Huvelin made his projection. A barley harvest of 2,836,000 tonnes only came in the fantastic crop year 1988. This was a 'one-off' and was 45% greater than the next highest production figure, attained in 1980.⁵³

In a similar vein, the projections for cotton output which Huvelin and Achard drew up were not achieved under French rule. Nonetheless foundations were laid during that period which enabled Syria to reach the goal by 1950, and to far exceed it in the years that followed.

However inaccurate their statistics, the experts were agreed that Syria was worth quite a lot, and that her agriculture had golden potential. Nonetheless they were equally certain that much needed to be done in order to reach this objective. Huvelin, for example, was well aware that variations in the weather pattern caused great fluctuations in production, and that the annual harvest was often barely able to

⁵³ 1939 production figures: 'Le développement agricole en Syrie et au Liban,' 1-2. MAE--Nantes, F.B., Carton 370. The production figures for independent Syria can be found in Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract of Syria*, various years.

satisfy the needs of the local population in normal years, much less able to provide quantities to export abroad. He believed that the only way for Syria to triple her wheat harvest, quadruple her barley harvest, and transform herself into a net exporter of cereals was through expansion of the cultivated area onto hitherto virgin soil rather than by an increase in yields which might be quite problematic and take considerable time.⁵⁴

Even after such a brief visit, Huvelin realised that such an enhancement could occur only after the improvement of 'physical, legal, and fiscal security' through the imposition of an 'ordered political, administrative, and judicial régime'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless it was not Huvelin who set out what such a régime would entail in order to achieve agricultural development, but one of his colleagues on the study mission of 1919, Edouard Achard.

1.7>Edouard Achard and his ideas

Edouard Achard was delegated by the Marseille Chamber of Commerce to participate in the study mission because of his skills as an engineer-agronomist with great experience in the production of colonial crops, especially cotton. General Gouraud retained him for his expertise, and he later became Counsellor for Agriculture to the High Commission with particular responsibility for agricultural policy in the State of Syria, the most important of the statelets into which the

⁵⁴ Huvelin, 9.

⁵⁵ *Loc. cit.*

mandated territory came to be divided.⁵⁶ He stayed in Syria until the early 1930's and was universally acclaimed as a man with sound and sensible ideas on the subject of Syrian agriculture. During his period of service, he was perhaps the person who had the most influence on agricultural policy, not only for the State of Syria, but for all French-controlled territory in the Levant. He earned this respect because he saw himself as an agronomist, an objective expert, and within the constraint of political realities propounded those policies which in his opinion were best suited to further agricultural development in Syria.

He first set forth his ideas in reports he prepared in October, 1919 after his return from Syria.⁵⁷ Whilst voluminous, these were but a preliminary survey, and his astute observations were tempered by his ignorance of the Levant. Six years later, he returned to the subject, having refined his ideas after extensive field experience in the Mandated territories. In several reports written to expound his ideas, he set out a carefully-conceived programme for the regeneration of Syrian agriculture.

⁵⁶ Hourani, *Syria . . .*, 172-73 outlines the various changes in the political and territorial structure of the Mandated states between 1920 and 1942.

⁵⁷ There were three of them, but they did not see the light of day until the summer of 1922, and included slight revisions to take account of changing political circumstances, viz. 1>'Notes sur la Cilicie'; and 2>'Notes sur la Syrie,' Documents économiques, politiques et scientifiques, 4. Supplement to *AF*, XXII, 204, July-August, 1922, 67-93 and 94-113; 3>'Etudes . . .,' 19-62. In the first two studies, Achard dealt more generally with agriculture in Cilicia and Syria whereas in the third he focused his attention on the cotton problem. He made two agricultural inventories of Syria in 1920 and early 1922, viz. 1>'Notes sur les valeurs agricoles de la Syrie et la zone d'influence économique française en Turquie,' Beirut, 1920 (probably sometime in the autumn), CCIL, Fonds Musées--Tissus 93c 1*1, Dossier Syrie--Divers, 1920; 2>'Notes agricoles sur la Syrie,' 20 January 1922 (rough draft of a lecture he gave on that date). MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 2377.

From the very beginning, Achard heaped scorn upon those who held a rosy vision of past Syrian agricultural history and its potential for the future. He pointed out that if indeed the great Arab general Amr b. al-As, the conqueror of Egypt for Islam, had said that 'When God gave out benefits to the world, he gave nine-tenths to Syria, leaving the last tenth to be shared among all other regions', this was spoken like a true son of the desert for whom Syria, or at least parts of it, seemed to be Paradise on Earth. Those modern authors who adopted this dictum as their own were merely perpetuating an error, albeit a flattering one. For Syria was an agricultural country more by necessity than by right because she had few goods other than her crops to export as a means of paying the expenses of her imports. In examining closely what was produced, one saw that in the case of crops whose growth required human intervention (as opposed to those 'spontaneous' crops like licorice root which merely required harvesting by man), the quantities produced were representative neither of the extent of the country nor of the fertility of its soil, nor even of an intense productive effort. In this regard, one could hardly place Syria in the same league with the United States, New Zealand, Canada, the Argentine, or Indochina where a population relatively small compared to the amount of territory inhabited produced and exported enormous quantities of food crops each year.

If Syria did possess in reality nine-tenths of the bounties of the earth--a claim which the discovery of the New World, a pole of

attraction for many Syrian immigrants, had invalidated for centuries--her inhabitants should exploit far more of them than they did at present.

For example, Syria was pre-eminently a producer of cereals. If so, why then did she have to import them from abroad in the period before the War in order to feed her population? Achard felt that she should be able to produce enough grain, not only to supply her own population, but to supply Europe as well in competition with the great grain-exporting countries of the New World. Yet in order to reach this goal, how many reforms must be introduced!!⁵⁸

In outlining his own reform programme, Achard focused on four areas where he believed change was necessary for Syrian agriculture to move into the modern world. These were agrarian relations between landlord and cultivator; the labour force which he deemed insufficient for Syrian needs; the expansion of production to include valuable export crops; and a programme of irrigation to facilitate this expansion.

1.8>Ideas of Achard--agrarian relations⁵⁹

In looking at the Syrian countryside for the first time, Achard was struck by the existence of great *latifundia*. Like Akram Hawrani, some thirty years later, Achard believed the most important obstacle hindering the development of Syrian agriculture was a system of land

⁵⁸ Achard, 'Notes sur la Syrie,' 94-95.

⁵⁹ Achard formulated his ideas on the subject of land tenure and agrarian relations in Syria in three reports, *viz.* 1>'Notes sur la Syrie,' 100-103; 2a>'Propriété rural et condition du cultivateur en Syrie,' dated 6 March 1925, but probably written earlier. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 389; 2b>an expanded version of this report: 'Les Problèmes de l'agriculture syrienne: le problème agraire,' 19 December 1925, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571.

tenure which had led to the creation of such great estates.⁶⁰ In his opinion, the dissolution of these vast properties was the *sine qua non* for any agricultural progress in Syria. For their owners were mere parasites, eager to exploit their tenants through usury, binding them with the iron fetters of debt. For these great proprietors, what was important was not the precise amount of land they owned--indeed most had only the vaguest idea of the full extent of their domains--but the number of villages they controlled. A large number of tenants meant more opportunities for the extension of credit which enabled the landlord to increase his power--and their misery.

Achard observed that most of the great proprietors did nothing to increase the value of their lands through improvements in technique. Indeed they did not even allow those members of their families who had studied modern agronomy in Europe to apply these skills on their own holdings.

Achard also pointed out that the credit system which the Ottoman government had put in place to foster progress in the agriculture of the empire had proved beneficial to the pockets of the landlords whilst falling well short of helping the peasant. The Ottomans had set up an agricultural bank in 1887 in order to give low interest loans to cultivators and encourage them to improve their properties. Unfortunately, it was underfunded and its loan procedures so complicated that the peasant preferred to turn to his landlord or to

⁶⁰ Although Achard must have been aware that many of these estates had been created as recently as the chaotic period following the Great War, nowhere does he allude to this.

local merchants for funds. Moreover the various branches of the agricultural bank proved susceptible to local pressures, and local landlords borrowed from it only to re-lend the money to their tenants at a much higher rate.⁶¹

Faced with a situation in which he was ever the loser, the peasant had little incentive to improve production since its fruits would go largely to swell the coffers of avaricious landlords or usurious merchants. For their part, the great families had little incentive to change their methods of operation, weighed down as they were by the dead hand of tradition--whilst making a comfortable living off of it.

Although Achard believed in the importance of changing the agrarian system, he realised that this would occur only over a long period of time. This was due to the inescapable fact that the Mandatory authorities would be unable to confiscate lands directly from the great proprietors because this would result in 'regrettable political repercussions', i.e. a full-scale rebellion on the part of landlords robbed of their heritage. This could in no way be counterbalanced by the support of the peasant masses because the French had no means of bypassing the master to get to the serf who, in any case, still considered him as his lord. Therefore the only way in which the French could

⁶¹ For the Ottoman Agricultural Bank and its deficiencies, see 1>Achard, 'Propriété rurale. . .,' 5-6; 2>*Idem*, 'Les Problèmes . . .le problème agraire,' 5; 3>Nadra Moutran, *La Syrie de demain* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1916), 295-97; 4>Charles Pavie, *Etat d'Alep: renseignements agricoles* (n.p., n.d. [Aleppo, 1924?]), 100-02; 4>Mohammed Thomé, 'Le Rôle du crédit dans le développement économique de la Syrie depuis la première guerre mondiale jusqu'à nos jours,' Thesis, University of Geneva (Madrid: Ediciones Castilla, S.A., 1953), 68-70.

achieve the break-up of the large estates was for the state to purchase those parts held legally, and distribute the lands so acquired to the cultivators. Outright seizure would prove legitimate only in the case of properties which landlords had obtained through unlawful machinations.

Achard was well aware that this method of altering agrarian structures could be carried out only in direct proportion to the amount of money allocated to mount these operations. This expense would rise even higher because the government would have to give the peasants the initial capital to operate their new holdings. For a certain period these lands would have to remain inalienable to protect the new owners from the grip of the moneylender, and therefore could not be used as collateral to obtain bank loans.

Moreover if the authorities decided to broach the idea of dismembering the great estates, they would soon come up against the obstacle that the exact extent of these properties was hardly known, based as they were, not on a precise survey of their boundaries, but often only with vague reference to certain natural features. Therefore precise and non-acrimonious division of these lands could only be undertaken after the institution of an accurate cadastral survey using the most modern techniques.

For Achard, the problems were how to accomplish this 'revolution' in tenurial relations. Since the French could not impose it by fiat, they had to use indirect methods whose application merely required time and a great deal of money. Since the latter was in short

supply, Achard proposed that the changes be implemented in stages with the least expensive (and least controversial) to be completed first. In his eyes, there was a certain logical order to the choices to be made: First would come the division of what he called 'collective' property, i.e. lands where each member of the village community had a share of the whole rather than a specific plot (so-called '*musha*' tenure); next, the partition of lands held in common by a single family; then the dismemberment of State Domain. Finally, after all these measures had taken place would come the dissolution of the great *latifundia*. This whole process would be underpinned by the cadastral survey which would provide those titles so necessary for the creation of a class of peasant smallholders which Achard saw as the ultimate goal.

The measures which Achard advocated were designed to make Syrian agriculture more productive by changing the social structure in the countryside. Moreover the permanent alteration of these arrangements to the benefit of the peasant smallholder would encourage an increase in the rural population. Achard believed that such an expansion in the number of cultivators was a *sine qua non* for agricultural regeneration under Syrian conditions.

1.9> Ideas of Achard--rural population⁶²

Achard observed that in a country like Syria, climate was such that in only one year out of three was it possible to export cereals; in the other two production was either barely sufficient for local needs or cereal imports were required. In such a situation profits were insufficient to generate the capital needed to fund the introduction and maintenance of machinery necessary to bring into production the vast uncultivated regions which undoubtedly existed. Therefore in order to avoid the vast debts which mechanisation would incur, the Syrian landowner perforce had to rely on manpower instead of horsepower.

Achard felt that the system of sharecropping or *métayage* which was practised in Syria had developed in response to the necessity of making such a labour-intensive system work to the advantage of the proprietor. Whilst his profits might be less than if he had worked the land with wage labour, his charges would also be less, and he could continue his exploitation of the soil during both good years and bad. Moreover his tenant would become bound to him through an indissoluble economic link.

⁶² Achard expressed his ideas on the relationship between agricultural productivity and the size of the rural population in four essays: 1>'Notes sur la Syrie,' 98, 101; 2>'Les Problèmes de l'agriculture syrienne: l'exploitation du sol et la main d'oeuvre,' *Bulletin économique mensuel des Pays sous Mandat français* [Bull. EHC], December, 1925, 101-07; also found, dated 27 January 1926 in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571; 3>'Culture du coton et main d'oeuvre agricole en Syrie,' *Bulletin de l'Union des Agriculteurs d'Egypte*, XXIII, 159, March 1925, 73-81; 4>'Le Main d'oeuvre agricole dans l'Etat des Alaouites,' *Bulletin de l'Union Economique de Syrie* [Bull. UES], II, 1, 31 March 1923, 23-25.

Achard asserted that a great increase in the agricultural population would be necessary for this system of cultivation to be effective in promoting the prosperity of the country. Therefore he called for the Mandatory authorities to encourage at all costs 'the prolific tendencies of the Syrian race'.

In his opinion, the constitution of smallholdings would help to achieve this object. The chance to become a smallholder would stem the current of urban and overseas migration from rural areas which could not support their inhabitants adequately. Moreover, the exploitation of new lands would provide an area of settlement for some of the minority refugee populations who had fled to Syria and engulfed the cities in the chaos at the end of the Great War. Finally, the formation of such small family-owned units in the countryside would furnish the Syrian peasant with sufficient economic security to enable him to rear a large family.

Achard proposed that financial resources of the states, commercial credit, and loans from the agricultural bank be used to furnish the necessary funds to provide for the family unit. He believed that legal measures should be enacted to give guarantees of immunity from expropriation for debt; and to bar the subdivision of the new holdings in case of inheritance or sale. He also felt that Improvements in rural health care which would encourage family growth by lowering the rate of infant mortality were a necessary complement to these financial and legal measures.

Finally, Achard emphasised that the smallholdings should be large enough to support a single family, but small enough so that the children would be forced to migrate to new centres of production in the countryside. As a result, the expansion of the rural population would proceed hand-in-hand with the extension of the cultivated area.

Achard believed that programmes designed to bring physical improvements to Syrian agriculture could succeed only after the number of cultivators had increased significantly, and the state had taken steps to alter agrarian relations to their benefit. Nevertheless this sequence was an ideal which would take many years to come to fruition, and action was needed to design and implement such schemes in the here and now.

1.10>Ideas of Achard--expansion of production through irrigation⁶³

It was because of his great experience in the raising of those 'colonial' crops so desired by the French market that the Marseille Chamber of Commerce had first sent Achard to Syria. One of the reports which he produced after his return from the study mission of 1919, 'Etudes sur la Cilicie et la Syrie: le coton en Cilicie et en Syrie' set the seal on his reputation for expertise in the matter of cotton production. General Gouraud retained his services precisely because

⁶³ Achard developed his ideas on the expansion of production through irrigation in two articles: 1>'Actualités syriennes . . .,' 200-06; 2>'Les Irrigations dans l'Etat de Syrie,' *Bulletin économique mensuel des Pays sous Mandat français*, July-August, 1926, 819-832 and September-October, 1926, 1076-1090. This essay is also to be found in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571 under a slightly different title: 'Les Irrigations dans l'Etat de Syrie: leur état actuel et leur avenir,' 10 August 1926.

he felt that Achard would be able to devise a programme which would have a direct effect on the production of cotton and other vital commodities.

Therefore, in addition to his ruminations on the problems of land tenure and population, Achard turned his mind, to ways and means for the direct improvement of agriculture under Syrian climatic conditions. Like other observers⁶⁴, he found the remedy in irrigation.

Achard pointed out that a major obstacle to Syrian agricultural production was the variation in natural water reserves over time and that as a result, the existence of regularly available supplies was an absolute prerequisite for the flourishing of crops. Because rainfall was so inconsistent, the inhabitants of Syria had used various methods throughout history to tap the water available from rivers, springs, and permeable rock formations. It was these networks so laboriously created which had made parts of Syria so fecund in the past. Even after what Achard judged to be four centuries of Ottoman neglect, the ingenuity which maintained the fertility of the Ghuta of Damascus and the gardens surrounding Homs and Hama still retained a capacity to astound. Therefore the regeneration and the extension of irrigation was the key to the expansion of production.

⁶⁴ For example, HC General Gouraud who invited Georges Carle, an agricultural engineer and cotton expert, to come to Syria in the spring of 1922 in order to examine the irrigation possibilities. He published his findings the following year, and his report strongly promoted the use of waterworks to expand production. See Georges Carle, 'L'Hydraulique agricole et industrielle en Syrie,' *La Géographie*, XXXIX, 5, May, 1923, 564-602. His report was also published separately by the Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales (Paris, 1923).

The question was how to launch a programme which was cost-effective. Achard believed that it could be divided into two parts: First was the ongoing one of continuous improvement and extension of the many private irrigation networks currently in use; second, a planned and rational development of the water resources contained in the rivers which passed through Syrian territory. These had not been properly exploited for many generations, if ever.

The first part of this irrigation programme was to be accomplished by implementing certain simple and inexpensive measures: training the peasant how to make more efficient use of the water currently available to him whilst making better use of groundwater by drilling more wells and restoring the extensive *qanat* systems to be found on the desert fringes of Syria, many of which had long fallen into desuetude. Although measures of this type were certainly important, it was difficult to gauge their effect on increasing production. Therefore Achard believed that the taming of rivers which now flowed unchecked to the sea was of far greater importance.

In choosing from the inventory of resources available, he focused on the rivers of western Syria as proving more immediately useful. He placed a particular emphasis on the development of the Orontes, both in its upper course through the restoration of the storage capacities of Lake Homs and in its middle course through the drainage of the Ghab Valley between Qala't Shayzar and Qarqur. He felt that utilisation of the waters of the Orontes offered several obvious advantages: First, these districts were located well within the zone of settled agriculture and

experienced cultivators. Moreover, there was a very large labour force available in the Jabal Ansariya to the west of the Orontes basin. This was of the greatest importance since Achard had already established⁶⁵ that any exploitation of the soil would be labour intensive rather than capital intensive under the system of *métayage* then prevalent in Syria. Finally it was obvious that any irrigation scheme could only pay for itself if it produced high-value commodities, principally cotton, for shipment abroad. The location of the Orontes region near the ports of Tripoli and Beirut and contiguous to the principal sections of the DHP gave it an advantage over less favoured districts.

A case in point was to be found in those lands adjoining the river Euphrates. Here the potential was enormous, but most of the region lay deep within the desert zone where the existence of a nomadic population with large herds would make it difficult for large agricultural schemes to function. The corollary to this was the presence of a small sedentary population whose density was unlikely to increase in the near future. Moreover these territories were located far from the ports of western Syria, and facilities for the transport of any commodities grown were practically non-existent.

In sum, Achard saw irrigation as a sort of lever with which he, like Archimedes, could move the world, the world of agriculture, out of a past within which it lay embedded like a fossil, into a vibrant and productive future. The establishment of such schemes posed

⁶⁵ In his essay 'Les Problèmes de l'agriculture syrienne: l'exploitation du sol et la main d'oeuvre.'

problems, but these problems, which were largely technical, seemed far easier to solve than those presented by landlord-tenant relations and population scarcity. In fact, he believed the potentials for profit was such that landlords would be more than happy to support irrigation projects on their lands, even to the extent of being prepared to bear some of the costs.

Overall Achard believed that changes in land tenure, an increase in the rural population, and the physical extension and qualitative improvement of production through irrigation were three aspects of the same question: At that time, agriculture was the only wealth Syria possessed. She had no known mineral resources, and her traditional status as an entrepôt was much diminished by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire which had led its successor states to erect customs barriers in order to protect their own interests. Therefore for him the problem faced was how best to nourish Syrian agricultural potential in order to support her commerce and stabilise her budget whilst augmenting those revenues and resources needed for unfettered development.⁶⁶

1.11>The Influence of Achard on agricultural policy

The ideas which Achard presented so cogently were important because in one form or another, official attitudes and policies towards the development of agriculture during the time of the Mandate reflected

⁶⁶ Achard, 'Actualités syriennes . . .,' 201.

them. For example, in 1940 which was the very end of peacetime administration, HC Gabriel Puaux sent a number of reports to the Quai d'Orsay on 'French achievements in the Levant'.⁶⁷ In essence, these were a summary of those projects which the Mandatary considered its most important accomplishments in Syria and the Lebanon after some twenty years of stewardship. The programmes in the area of rural regeneration were rather different in their emphases and in their proportions than those which Achard had advocated some fifteen years previously, but the influence of his ideas could still be discerned. The differences were the result of certain adaptations which reality had forced upon his successors. The reasons for these adjustments illustrate the various problems which hampered French administration in Syria.

An important example of this was the relationship between the cadastral survey and the physical improvements made to Syrian agriculture over the twenty years of the Mandate. Although the authorities listed the cadastral survey first in their list of accomplishments, in fact they placed far more emphasis on projects for the physical amelioration of the Syrian countryside. The compilers of

⁶⁷ MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 370, covering letter dated 14 Dec. 1940, his final day in office, and thus truly the last day of the 'normal' Mandate administration. Among other items are nine notes on various aspects of agricultural development of which four are extant, *viz.* 1>'L'Oeuvre du mandat dans le domaine agricole' (n.d.); 2>'Le Développement agricole en Syrie et au Liban' (n.d.); 3>'Les Irrigations dans la région de Homs' (19 April 1939); 4>'Aménagements hydrauliques au Djebel Druze,' (n.d.). In the carton there is also an undated report entitled 'Réalizations françaises au Levant' which was probably written in the spring of 1940 for publication in a brochure (references to photographs to be inserted). The section on 'agricultural renovation' is to be found on pages 7-10.

these reports described the work of the cadastral survey as a 'gigantic task' demanding 'years of effort' from both the technical and legal points of view. They asserted this because cadastration was not only a matter of survey, mapping, delimitation, and demarcation, but also one of adjudicating extremely complicated property disputes caused by the imprecision of previous Ottoman legislation and the overlapping of a variety of communal property rights.

Over nearly twenty years, some 3,250,000 hectares comprising the richest agricultural regions were cadastred. This was slightly over half of a cultivable/cultivated area of 6,114,000 and 16% of a total area of 20,250,000 hectares. Whilst this figure might appear somewhat derisory, given the difficulties encountered and the money available, all in all the technical results were quite respectable.⁶⁸

Unfortunately the social ones were less so. Achard had seen cadastration as a tool which could be used to reform the system of land tenure, and spread the benefits of the physical improvements to the poorest cultivator. Yet in the reports of 1940 there was nary a mention of this larger goal. For the Mandatory administration, cadastration had

⁶⁸ For the figures of cultivable/cultivated area and total area, see Régie des travaux du cadastre et d'amélioration foncière des Etats de Syrie et du Liban, 'Statistiques relatives: 1>à la superficie des Etats de Syrie et du Liban après la dernière rectification de la frontière syro-irakienne; 2>au dénombrement de la population,' December, 1934, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 388, 2. These statistics are for the entire territory of the Mandate: the Republic of Syria including the *Sanjaq* of Alexandretta, the Republic of Lebanon, the Government of Latakia, and the Government of the Jabal Druz. Note that the area of cultivated/cultivable land was approximate, and excluded desert, forest, and mountain land as well as those areas which it was not possible to bring under production or which required important engineering works as a prerequisite for doing so.

become a task which was complete in and of itself with no further consequences for agrarian relations.

The writers of these reports extolled what they believed to be the other major accomplishment of agricultural regeneration carried out by their compatriots. This was the construction of irrigation systems in order to expand cultivation onto virgin territory. The goal was to improve the standard of living and enrich the country by using these lands to grow crops of high value: fruit and olive trees, market garden crops, and industrial crops such as cotton.

The principal irrigation project centred around the repair and elevation of the ancient dam at the northern end of Lake Homs/Qattina; and the construction of a main irrigation canal, 56 kilometres of secondary canals, and 250 kilometres of tertiary canals. These feats of engineering were designed to extend cultivation over some 15,000 hectares of the fertile plateaux which extended along the course of the Orontes between Homs and Rastan, with further work opening up another 7,000 hectares between Rastan and Hama to agriculture. Thus considerable progress was made towards the goal which Achard had propounded: to bring under the plough these lands in the heart of Syria, and to transform it into the granary it once had been in the days of the Romans.

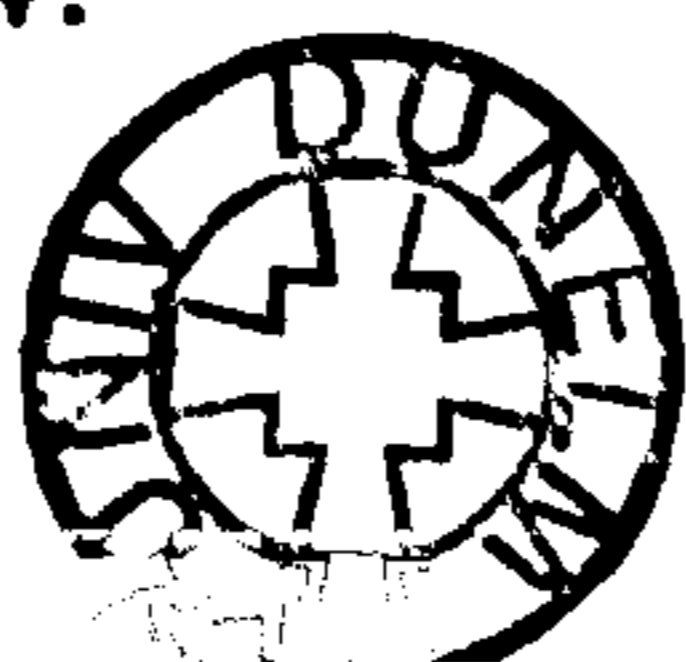
The writers pointed out that efforts made to extend the dry-farmed lands deeper into the transitional zone complemented the programme of irrigation. These too were another facet of the regenerative measures which Achard had advocated. Here the

authorities followed tried and true techniques of the past--renewing wells and cisterns and digging new ones. The reports said that it was an effort such as this which had opened up the great area of the Jazira to productive agriculture, a task facilitated by a more effective policing of the desert in order to control nomad depredations.

These economic improvements were complemented by what was described as a 'humanitarian undertaking', but which in its economic consequences carried out certain ideas adumbrated by Achard. This action was the settlement of Christian minority refugee groups on lands which were underpopulated but fertile. The authors asserted that it was only through the exercise of this right of asylum that the High Jazira had been brought into production.⁶⁹

The authorities of 1940 painted their work of agricultural regeneration as the least spectacular, but the most solid accomplishment of the Mandate. There were certain other improvements carried out during the Mandate which rounded out the more direct measures which Achard believed necessary to improve production, whilst reflecting certain long-standing preoccupations of French entrepreneurs. These were the enhancement of the communications network within the Mandated territories--the roads,

⁶⁹ In fact a bit of an exaggeration. In 1939, the population of the fertile High Jazira was some 166,000 souls, of whom some 81,000 were Muslim Kurds, 42,000 Arab Muslims, 40,000 Christians (of whom 8000 were Assyrians settled along the western Khabur), the balance being Yezidis, Jews, and Chechens, See MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1367. Dossier 'Répartition de la population de la Haute Djezireh--avril 1939'. Another copy of this list, undated, is in Carton 504.



railroads, and ports so necessary to ship agricultural products to markets both within Syria and abroad.⁷⁰

The amount of asphalt all-weather road increased from none in 1920 to 3,000 kilometres in 1940 with an additional 7,000 kilometres of improved tracks. The principal rail effort was applied to the former Baghdadbahn, first driving it eastward to Tal Ziwan, 10 kilometres beyond Nusaybin, and then south-east for 72 kilometres to the Iraqi frontier whence it was linked to Mosul. The French authorities compared this to the 'rail miracle of the American Far West' in that it facilitated the opening of the Jazira to cultivation by providing a more efficient means of sending its harvest to market. The final link in this transportation chain was the development and improvement of three ports whence Syrian produce could be exported abroad: Latakia, Tripoli, and Beirut.

The improvements to the ports of Latakia and Tripoli were quite modest. The new harbour of Latakia was an expansion of the little fishing port which lay on the site of the ancient Laodicea ad Mare. This was built to serve the Alaouite State and by extension Aleppo and north Syria. There were docks for sailing boats and small cargo ships, and a roadstead for the discharge of larger ones. The port of Tripoli was enlarged, and a special facility built for the shipment of oil coming through the pipeline from Iraq which had its terminus there.

⁷⁰ For the improvements made in the communications network within Syria during the Mandate, see 1>'Réalizations . . .', 1-7; 2>'Les Voies de communications et les moyens de transport au Levant'; and for more detailed analyses 3> 'Les Installations portuaires'; 4>'Les Voies ferrées.' All in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 370.

The major effort of port renovation was directed toward the port of Beirut, the principal outlet for the Levant states, and the chief rival of Haifa in the eastern Mediterranean. The original port built between 1890-95 had long outgrown its facilities. It was necessary to deepen and extend the harbour, lengthen the quays, and build new ones so that ships were no longer forced to undergo the long and costly process of discharging their cargoes onto lighters to be transhipped ashore.

Thus one could say that by 1940, the Mandatory authorities had implemented part of the programme of infrastructural improvements which Achard had sketched so many years before, and in certain areas had moved well beyond him. Nevertheless there were certain gaps in this achievement, particularly with regard to the reform of agrarian relations in the countryside, but also in the field of irrigation, where despite much-vaunted French expertise, certain projects were never realised. One can impute these lacunae to a concatenation of factors which would have limited the attainments of any programme *for la mise en valeur*.

1.12>Factors limiting the French achievement

These factors can be grouped into two categories. To begin with, there were those related to certain shortcomings peculiar to the French Mandatory system and its servants, *viz.*

I>The ideological biases held by Achard and his colleagues, biases which were compounded by deficiencies in their understanding of Syrian reality.

II>The methods proposed and used to implement the reforms.

III>The financial constraints which hampered the implementation of all projects.

IV>The close links between economics and politics where problems in one sphere often served as an excuse and an explanation for problems within the other.

V>The nature of the French administration responsible for the programmes--a bureaucratic machine with all its inherent strengths and weaknesses--and one which had created a labyrinth of jurisdictions in which to operate.

VI>The problem of time and timing: France was in Syria for only twenty years, and during part of this period, the world was sunk in one of the greatest economic crises ever known.

Beyond these particular constraints lay those which were rather more nebulous, and thus more difficult to comprehend, *viz.*

A>The very nature of the mandate system, which encouraged attitudes of ambivalence among those who might otherwise have promoted agricultural schemes.

B>The character of French imperialism which often brought little economic and social improvement to indigenous populations, even in those colonial territories which were under the French flag for thrice as long as Syria.

C>the question whether one could really have expected greater economic accomplishments from any colonial or mandatory enterprise.

The particular constraints. Among the particular constraints, one must list **first** what one might describe as the 'ideological' biases of Achard and his colleagues, attitudes which conditioned their response to the situation as they found it in Syria. Their behaviour was affected equally by a failure to understand the

peculiarities of Syria as opposed to North Africa or French West Africa where many of them had seen previous service. Whilst one can laud Achard as an extremely astute observer and an undoubted expert on colonial agriculture, one must realise that he was in no way an expert on Syria. Moreover he carried with him the baggage of certain prejudices which were not applicable to Syrian conditions.

One of the most important of these was his preoccupation with and predilection for the destruction of large landed property in favour of private peasant smallholdings. This idea was buttressed by his belief that whilst, in principle, the knowledge and financial resources possessed by large landowners were certainly conducive to the employment of the most modern agricultural techniques, the capacity for production of individual farm units was less for large holdings than it was for small ones. This obsession with the creation of individual peasant plots blinded him to the essentially communal nature of agriculture in a land where the interests of the individual cultivator were carefully balanced against those of the social group within which he functioned. It also led him to ignore the essentially patrimonial relationship between landlord and tenant, although it must be said that during the period of the Mandate, the element of exploitation in this bond was coming more to the fore in certain regions.

This misperception was symbolic of a deeper failing: his inability to fully understand the complex patterns woven into Syrian agricultural life. For example, he did understand that the relationship between the two partners in a sharecropping contract was a symbiotic one, but

believed, rightly, that the dominance of the landlord when combined with his desire to recover his capital outlay meant that in practice the cultivator got the worst of the bargain. Yet he did not seem to be aware that there were various forms of *métayage* prevalent in Syria whose distinctions derived from the fertility of the district involved and the type of agriculture practised.

A **second** constraint was that Achard and his colleagues determined to use only indirect and legalistic methods to accomplish the reforms he had suggested. A prime example of this was the rôle he proposed for the cadastral survey. Achard believed that because many of the newly cadastred properties were grossly undervalued, they should be appraised and their taxes increased.. The funds thus obtained would be used to guarantee a loan which would then be employed to establish smallholdings and to acquire property from large landlords. Such methods of acquisition were designed to accomplish their object with a minimum of social disruption. This delicate approach to what was indeed a *bouleversement* in social relations was conditioned by the political weakness of the French in a land where they were hardly loved and where their only clients were among minorities who were largely concentrated in Lebanon, a region where *latifundia* were the exception rather than the rule. In Syria, the French could not afford to antagonise the notables, many of whom were large landholders, through acts deemed to be ones of spoliation. Such a policy was deemed necessary because of political expediency, but one also suspects that there was a natural bourgeois antipathy for

procedures deemed to smack of depredation, a repugnance reinforced by the recent horrors of the Bolshevik Revolution where such policies were widely applied.

It goes without saying that indirect methods were insufficient to enforce change in agrarian relations. Economic realities and social traditions proved too strong for such elegant manoeuvres.

The application of policies of gradualism in order to effect change was also conditioned by a **third** constraint, one which was continuously present during the Mandate, that of finance. France was unwilling and unable to pay for the various improvements she proposed to carry out in her mandated territories due to her own rather parlous financial situation in the interwar period. Even if she had possessed vast reserves of cash, she was unwilling to dispense them to equip a territory for which she did not have the ultimate responsibility, and for which the plan was eventual accession to independence.

Indeed those who devised the mandate concept did not expect the responsible Power to use its own resources to develop those of its ward without being reimbursed for its outlay by the beneficiary. Thus Article 15 of the Mandate Charter for Syria and Lebanon provided that upon independence, the three parties would come to an agreement under which the tutees would reimburse the tutor the money she had spent on their behalf. This expenditure was defined to include the costs of administration, of the development of natural resources, and of such permanent structures as roads and ports. The French soon realised that any such an agreement had no chance of being honoured due to

the poverty of the territories under Mandate, and to the fact that no Syrian leader would ever agree to remunerate the Mandatary for any substantial sum. Thus France had one more reason to spend as little as possible.⁷¹

The impact of this capital insufficiency on development projects in the French Mandated territories was highlighted by what occurred in the British Mandate of Palestine. Britain found herself in a similar situation after the Great War, unable to supply cash from her own coffers to bring improvements to her new charge. Yet this was never required because the financial penury of the Mandatary was compensated by the ability of Zionist organisations to pour money into Palestine in order to create a modern infrastructure and develop the territory.

The price paid for this Zionist investment was European Jewish immigration: In effect, what the British did in Palestine was to permit the creation of a colony of foreign settlers who brought their skills and their capital to bear in their new home. For their part, the French did not allow the immigration of colonists with capital because to do so

⁷¹ For the discussion of this question which took place at the time of the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936, see République Française, Ministère des Finances [MF], 1>Letter from HC de Martel to MAE, 12 May 1936 to which is attached 2>Procès-verbal: 'Réunion aux Affaires Etrangères au sujet de la créance de la France sur la Syrie,' 7 May 1936. Dossier: Syrie: Finances des Etats--Créance de la France sur les Etats Syriens sous Mandat français (1926-36). Carton B 32.937--F³⁰ 2044. Even this minimum was subject to lively criticism, e.g. from the Socialist Deputy Sixte-Quentin. See his article 'Le Gouffre Syrien,' *La Populaire*, 15 March 1931 to be found in the same dossier. By contrast, HC de Martel pointed out in his own note that since the expenses of France in the Levant were aimed at maintaining her prestige among the local population, to demand their remuneration to the last franc would destroy the image of generosity which she sought to present.

would be counter to the spirit of the Mandate. As a result many worthy projects could not be carried out for want of funds. The British did permit such immigration, and great changes did occur, but at what cost!⁷²

This brings up a **fourth** constraint which blocked much of the process of *la mise en valeur*. the close intertwining of politics and economics during the Mandate. On the one hand, the French sought to focus on economic development in a vain attempt to divert Syrian preoccupations with the slow pace of political evolution, and to prove to their wards that this tutelage which they hated actually brought them some benefit. Yet on the other, these same administrators found it extremely difficult to propose a coherent programme of infrastructural amelioration. The reasons for this contradiction lay in the fact that whereas the French were continually engrossed by politics, that is to say by the management of the various local governments they had spawned as well as by an endless duel with their opponents among the Syrian élite, they seemed to have focused only intermittently on economic questions.

The French view certainly was that political stability was necessary for economic improvement. Until the signing of the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936, 'political stability' was understood to mean political quiescence with puppet régimes of technicians and political yes-men who would interest themselves solely in economic problems,

⁷² See the comments in Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 208.

leaving political questions to be solved by their French advisors. The Alaouite State was a typical example of such a régime, and during the 1920's, it was one of the regions with the most success in attracting foreign capital, principally for investment in cotton.

After the treaty of 1936, a unitary Syrian state comprising the political entities previously known as the State of Syria, the Government of Latakia, and the Government of the Jabal Druz was set up.⁷³ The new 'republic' was now controlled by Syrian nationalist politicians guided by French officials, and was apparently set on the road to independence. For French officials writing then, the economic viability of the new state was dependent on the ability of its administration to contract loans which in turn was still intimately linked to the maintenance of a 'stable and definitive régime'.⁷⁴

To reverse this argument, one could say that if the French had been able to carry out a massive programme of equipment of the country for success in the modern world, this would have led to a more harmonious relationship with Syrian nationalists, i.e.

economic development-->political stability

Nevertheless this proposition too was flawed by the indubitable fact that the conflict between the French and their opponents had very little to do with economics, and everything to do with politics.

⁷³ The difference between the 'state' of Syria and the two 'governments' of Latakia and Jabal Druz lay in their administrative organisation. Syria had Syrian ministers and a largely Syrian administration who ruled with the advice of French counsellors. Both Latakia and the Jabal Druz had French governors, and administrations mostly run by Frenchmen because the French considered these two regions to be less politically evolved.

⁷⁴ See the comment in de Hautecloque, 'L'avenir économique . . .,' 22.

When one probes deeper into the question as to why there were so few concerted programmes for agricultural expansion, one comes upon a **fifth** constraint: the cumbersome administration which France imposed on Syria. This was a régime whose various elements were often more interested in enlarging their own arenas of action vis-à-vis bureaucratic rivals than in uniting in support of policies whose results would be beneficial to the country whose interests they were supposedly there to further. Moreover when the various arms of this bureaucratic hydra *were* able to agree upon a project, they were often afraid to commit themselves to its implementation before it was proven to be absolutely viable. This meant years of studies, and postponements, and more studies, and in the end, nothing done at all. The failure to exploit the Ghab-Asharna region is a classic case in point.⁷⁵

It was only in a crisis situation, when a single powerful person pressed for a particular programme that moves were made towards its implementation. In Syria, this figure was inevitably the High Commissioner who was sometimes seconded by a powerful subordinate, anxious to see his own plan brought to fruition. Two examples of such a situation were the first project to drain the Ghab for

⁷⁵ A long-serving (and anonymous) French official levelled bitter criticisms at the administrative organisation of the Mandate which, in his opinion, led to ignorance and sloth. He felt that the recent creation of a Counsellor for Economic Affairs merely added another toothless official and bureaucratic layer, and called for an economic czar with the power and tools (such as a statistical bureau) to deal coherently with current affairs whilst planning for the future. Needless to say, his advice went unheeded. 'Note', February, 1930. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 808.

cotton cultivation in 1923-25 where failure was due to lack of finance, and the decision in 1934 to build the Homs Dam, and extend the irrigated area in the Homs-Hama region.

Such intervention would occur only for very important projects, ones which would benefit the entire Mandated territory. The smaller ones were the responsibility of the different statelets into which the Mandate was divided. This points to the other aspect of the administrative problem: The fact that each of these political entities was theoretically independent of its fellows with its own separate administration seconded by French advisors in each department. As a result of what was a bureaucratic dream, but an administrative nightmare, it was impossible to have a co-ordinated agricultural policy for all the territories under Mandate. It was impossible because having created this maze of jurisdictions, the French were forced to respect them--although those officials involved in shaping various aspects of economic policy often complained *sotto voce* about the shackles thus imposed.⁷⁶

Moreover having fostered 'independent' governments with separate budgets, each responsible for projects within its own purview, the advisors could hardly force action, however recalcitrant their

⁷⁶ For example, Charles Pavie, Director of the Agricultural and Economic Services in the Alaouite State noted how the political organisation of the Mandated territories prevented the implementation of a co-ordinated cotton policy. Charles Pavie, *Le Coton dans le Gouvernement de Lattaquié* (Aleppo: Imprimerie Maronite, n.d. [1931?]), 17. In 1928, a hard-headed official of the Ministry of Finance noted the pernicious effects of these political divisions for administrative and financial efficiency in general: 'Les finances des Etats de Levant placés sous mandat français,' 9 November 1928. MF, Carton B 32.936--F³⁰ 2043.

puppets. Often as not, these tools proved less than pliable, whether because of indolence and/or incompetence, or as a subtle way of demonstrating independence from the foreign counsellors with their hectoring admonitions.

Finally one comes to a **sixth** constraint, one which seems so trivial, but assumed an enormous importance. This is the problem of time and timing. France was in the Levant for only some twenty years whereas in her other colonies or protectorates, she ruled for double or triple the length. As a result of this, there was much less time to accomplish the development of infrastructure and the exploitation of resources. Moreover the period of French rule in the Levant was cut in two by the world economic crisis of the nineteen thirties. In 1929-1930, it appeared that the Mandated territories were finally poised for 'takeoff' after having gone through some ten years of disorganisation and bureaucratic indecision. Cotton cultivation and irrigation were two carefully nurtured plants which seemed about to bear fruit. The coming of the Great Depression put paid to all these plans, and when Syria emerged from it some five years later, it did so into a different world. Thus both time and timing when taken with the other constraints had a significant effect on the evolution of economic policy.

The general constraints. The trammels of ideology, method, finance, politics, bureaucracy, and time certainly limited those policies of the French administration whose object was to improve rural life and production in Syria. These particular constraints were in many

ways peculiar to the Syrian situation, and not replicated exactly elsewhere. Others were much more nebulous because they stemmed from more general considerations: the type of system under which conquered territories were awarded after the Great War; the very character of the French imperial enterprise; and, more generally, the capacity of any kind of colonial or mandatory system to carry out coherent schemes for economic betterment.

In order to understand the **first** general constraint, one must look at the mandate system itself, and more particularly at the relation of this system to Syria and the historical rôle which France had conceived for herself there. The victorious Allied Powers decided to create 'mandates' after the Great War in deference to the principles of national self-determination espoused by Woodrow Wilson, and in embarrassment at their own cynicism after the Bolsheviks exposed the secret treaties dividing up the spoils of the Ottoman Empire. Observers drew an unflattering parallel between the altruistic proposals of the American president and the greed displayed by Britain and France in their carve-up of the Ottoman lands in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Therefore after the war, the Great Powers agreed to curb their appetites by ruling their new acquisitions not as master, but as tutor under supervision of the newly created League of Nations. Not only were the ruling Powers to be accountable to an international body for their behaviour, but their rôle was conceived as one of bringing their wards to economic and political maturity which would eventually lead to

independence and a seat in the League as an adult member of the family of nations.⁷⁷

Problems did not arise with the mandates which had been German colonial possessions in Africa and the Pacific. These 'B' and 'C' mandates were so undeveloped politically and economically as to differ little from neighbouring colonial territories. They could be administered along the same lines with little protest from their inhabitants and the international community.

Unfortunately Syria and the other territories of the former Ottoman Empire were not in this category. They were 'A' Mandates because the framers of the mandate system considered their inhabitants to be much more highly evolved in both political and economic terms. As a result, their tutors could not treat each of them as a mere colony to be milked in the interests of the occupying power, but were compelled to seek a balance between their own needs, the needs of the tutee, and the needs of the 'senior tutor', the international community.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the several sources of the mandate idea, see 1>Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 18-19; 54, fn 35; and in particular, 2>Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq, 1910-28* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 49-69.

⁷⁸ As enshrined in the famous Article 11 of the Mandate Charter which provided for the principle of 'economic equality' in the Mandated territory for all members of the League of Nations. This meant that there could be no tariff discrimination, no fiscal or commercial favouritism, no bias in employment, and perfect equality of treatment for ships and airlines. This 'Open Door' principle was a difficult charge to carry out in itself, particularly because it had to be balanced against the interests of the tutee, and those of the Mandatary. For some of the problems encountered, see **Letter:** HC de Martel to MAE, 17 November 1933: 'Les Etats sous Mandat et le principe de l'égalité économique.' MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 863.

In the case of Syria, France had traditional interests and clients which the other Great Powers had recognised before the coming of the War.⁷⁹ In defence of these interests, she had brutally rejected and ejected the Sharifian régime which claimed to be the voice of the Syrian people. As a result, her tutelage was not welcomed by a large proportion of that people. The soundings taken by the King-Crane Commission indicated that most preferred no mandate. If that was not feasible, they would accept an American Mandate; if that too proved impossible, a British; but in no case did they desire a French one.⁸⁰

Thus when France entered Syria, she did so by force of arms and was faced by reactions which ranged in general from sullen acquiescence to outright revolt. She really only had support from certain traditionally Francophile elements: Maronite and other Uniate Christians; minorities such as the Armenians and the Circassians; and certain members of the commercial and landed élite who saw it to be in their own interest to co-operate with the new masters.

When one combined such a delicate political situation with the restrictions imposed by the mandate concept, it was no wonder that the French authorities were forced to tread lightly in propounding certain policies. The proposals espoused by Albert Sarraut in *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* could never have been applied in their

⁷⁹ For the relationship between French and British interests in the Levant, see 1>Khalidi, *passim*, 2>Shorrocks, *French imperialism . . .*, 114-37.

⁸⁰ For the soundings of Syrian public opinion regarding a possible Mandatary which were made by the King-Crane Commission, see Harry N. Howard, *An American Inquiry in the Middle East: The King-Crane Commission* (Beirut: Khayats, 1963), 200-203.

full vigour to Syria because Syria was not a colony created for the benefit of France. Since it was not so, and since eventually, in what was hopefully a far-distant future, Syria would be emancipated from French tutelage and become an independent nation, there was a great deal of hesitation on the part of the Mandatory Power as well as on the part of private citizens and organisations of that Power as to how much capital should and could be invested. On the one hand, many in the colonial party easily blurred the distinction between the familiar concept of 'colony' and the new and strange one of 'mandate'. Yet at the same time, they were reluctant to place money in Syrian projects because they knew that any investment would only be realised over the long term. They feared that they might draw no profits before France departed, and that these might prove precarious in an independent Syria.

Moreover hardened imperialists were not particularly enamoured of that new and ridiculous principle of 'equality of economic opportunity among all member states of the League of Nations'. They did not want a 'level playing field', but one which was steeply tilted in their favour, and whether in colony or mandate they expected to get it.

Such qualms ensured that many good projects never got off the ground, and that both France and Syria suffered because no one was willing to take risks. Nevertheless the consequences of this caution were less than they might have been because the settlement of the Ottoman Public Debt in 1933 released funds which were used to finance the Homs-Hama irrigation project, the expansion of the port of Beirut

and other large capital-intensive projects. The happy result was that at independence, Syria found herself endowed with a good infrastructure, and without external debt to hamper her freedom of action.

Beyond the mandate system and the relationship it engendered between France and Syria lay the **second** general constraint which hobbled the abilities of France to carry out successful development policies in her Syrian Mandate. This revolved around certain peculiar characteristics of French imperialism. France was not particularly successful in promoting *la mise en valeur* of her colonial possessions except in areas such as Morocco and Indochina where French *colons* found it quite profitable to invest in productive export-oriented enterprises.⁸¹ One reason for this might stem from the French approach to imperial administration, an approach rooted in certain inherent predispositions.

One can make a start at understanding this by focusing on certain ideas put forth by a noted French colonial thinker in comparing French and British policies towards their African possessions.⁸² In tropical Africa, where climate made it difficult for the white colonist to

⁸¹ The forms and results of French imperial investment is a vast and complicated subject. Generally, see 1>Marseille, *passim*, 2>Cornevin, *passim*. For Morocco, see 1>Will D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), *passim*, 2>Paul Pascon, *Le Haouz de Marrakesh, II* (Tangier: Editions Marocaines et Internationales, 1977), *passim* [English edition of II only: *Capitalism and Agriculture in the Haouz of Marrakesh* (London: KPI, 1986)]. For Indochina, see Charles Robequain, *L'Evolution économique de l'Indochine française*, (Paris: Paul Hartmann, Editeur, 1939), *passim*.

⁸² Henri Labouret, *Paysans d'Afrique occidentale*, 3rd ed., (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1941), 7-9. In presenting this theory, he cites some of the ideas of one of his colleagues, Georges Hardy, former director of the Ecole Coloniale, and expert on African education.

settle permanently, agriculture was left to an indigenous population who over many centuries had become expert at wringing the best out of the soil through a social and agricultural system peculiarly suited to local conditions. Under European influence, the African cultivators had turned to the production of certain high-value export crops such as cocoa and ground-nuts (peanuts). The prosperity thus engendered had completely transformed the local economies and by extension the societies which depended on them.

What was the reaction of the two imperial powers, France and Britain when faced by the transformation which they had provoked in these societies by their demand for certain crops? Due to their Common Law tradition, the British were tolerant of customary law despite its many contradictions. Therefore they adopted a policy of 'Indirect Rule' which meant that local peoples were to be allowed to attain modernity within the framework of their own culture and their own institutions. One result of this policy was that the British undertook the study of the languages and cultures of various African peoples in order to refine this system. They focused particularly on the problems of interaction between European and African civilisations in an effort to facilitate the task of modernisation.

France, on the other hand, engaged in a quite different approach. The French were raised in the classical tradition, which expressed itself through Roman law embodied in prescriptive codes. As a result, the French administrator tended to legislate in the abstract and to let systems of expectations overrule facts. He was interested in

formulating an arrangement that would be pre-established rather than relying on an organisation which would evolve spontaneously according to the situation, i.e. basing colonial law upon principles of absolute value. These tendencies led inexorably to centralisation, uniformity, and finally to assimilation. Therefore if local peoples would eventually become Frenchmen, it was hardly useful to learn about cultures which in any case were destined to be submerged beneath the tide of Gallic civilisation.

Yet if administrators, enticed by the 'policy of quantity' to demand still greater production from the cultivator, scoffed at those who sought to learn more about him, they were deluding themselves. It was certainly no mistake to explore the culture of the being who was the basic unit of production, especially since administrators, chained to their desks, were dependent on chiefs, interpreters, and political informants as their links with the native population. Yet one could hardly describe such intermediaries as disinterested since often they were responsible for the very problems they were set to solve, and sought to dissimulate their rôles whilst they increased their influence. As a result, French ethnographers, scorned by those in power and left to their own devices, did not study those matters--legal concepts, land tenure, economic organisation and production--which administrators might have found useful, but rather focused their attention on subjects--religion, kinship, games--which most interested them personally.

One could perhaps describe the desire for assimilation of colonial peoples through imposition of a bureaucratic uniformity as an

attempt to apply the Jacobin ideal of the brotherhood of man. Unfortunately most of the inhabitants of the French Empire were possessed of no fraternal feelings towards France or towards each other. Those Frenchmen who recognised this, adumbrated an opposing model, one which called for colonial autonomy with each territory being allowed to develop along its own particular lines whilst its inhabitants were encouraged to maintain their own culture and institutions. According to this idea, the French were to 'associate' indigenous peoples in the task of exploiting their resources to the fullest possible extent. Yet this partnership was never considered to be one between equals, but rather one between tutor and tutee.⁸³

One can employ these two strands of thought in order to gain some understanding of some of the difficulties which the French created for themselves in the Levant. To begin with, when the French first entered Syria, they did so with certain preconceptions as to what Syria was and what she could become. These ideas were not based on any reality, but on faulty information which was either imparted by clients and other mediators or derived from a hasty and often inadequate inspection of the prize. All of this merely served to feed the many hopes and delusions engendered by years of scheming for possession.

These basic misunderstandings were reinforced by the experience of those who had previously served in French North Africa

⁸³ For an analysis of the theory of 'association', see Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 106-53 and 165-76.

and had been transferred hastily to Syria. These men had a legalistic view of agrarian structure, a view which was not modified by much study of facts on the ground.⁸⁴ Along with these Arab experts came those such as Edouard Achard with no expertise in Syria, but with definite solutions to the agrarian problem which were based on ideology as well as on experience elsewhere.

Thus a programme of agrarian reform was laid out based on “a pre-established order” rather than being tailored around a “spontaneous organisation” which sprang from the needs of the countryside. The professed ideal was an agrarian society of peasant smallholders more suited to France than to Syria, and the methods used to achieve this, such as the cadastral survey, employed concepts of bounded private property which were entirely alien to the Syrian peasant and the Syrian land system although well-suited to the French one.⁸⁵

The administration which was responsible for bringing about these changes was formed from bureaucratic cadres who sought to impose their will through legal decrees which tended to address the form rather than the substance of the problems. As a result, there were

⁸⁴ For an example of this genre of analysis, see Haut Commissariat de la République française en Syrie et au Liban, *Rapport général sur des études foncières effectuées en Syrie et au Liban* (Beirut: Les Services fonciers, 1921).

⁸⁵ See the comments by Jacques Weulersse on the ‘artificial operation’ of the cadastral survey ‘superimposed on soil which knows it not’. Jacques Weulersse, *Le Pays des Alaouites* (Tours: Arrault & C^{ie}, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), 217-18.

constant complaints when the decrees failed to achieve their desired object.⁸⁶

The multiplication of states brought a surge in the number of French administrators assigned to guide them. Heroically, these men tried to make government in the Mandated territories function according to some bureaucratic ideal which constantly ran up against what they considered to be the slothful Syrian reality.

It was unfortunate that, during the 1930's, when men like Richard Thoumin, Jean Gaulmier, Jacques Weulersse, and in particular, André Latron were producing excellent ethnographic/geographical studies of the land and its inhabitants, their insights were totally ignored by the bureaucrats in Syria just as the insights of their colleagues in French West Africa were ignored by the bureaucrats there. It is a sad commentary on the relationship between bureaucrats and intellectuals in the Mandated territories to note that nowhere in the archives is there reference to the work they produced.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ An example of this line of action is contained in a letter from the HC *per interim* (p.i.) to his special representative in Damascus dated 14 March 1927 complaining about the failure to apply certain decrees concerning the division of *musha'* and State Domain lands which had been issued exactly one year previously. The decrees embodied ideas of Achard which he had expressed in his report on 'Les problèmes de l'Agriculture syrienne: le problème agraire' of 19 December 1925. The writer emphasised process and the process was taking too long, but the solution he proposed was merely an administrative reorganisation which would place the local Department of Land Tenure of the State of Syria under the Ministry of Agriculture, thus concentrating all land questions under one roof. Unfortunately, adding another layer of bureaucracy was hardly likely to bring about 'the greatest possible activity in carrying out agrarian reform', but rather the reverse. **Letter:** HC p.i. (P. de Reffye) to Envoy Extraordinary, Damascus, 14 March 1927. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571.

⁸⁷ Although to be fair one must say that there is much evidence of the respect in which administrators held C. Duraffourd, guiding hand behind the cadastral survey, and the greatest expert on land tenure in the Levant.

Therefore despite much optimistic talk in the beginning from the French side about a happy alliance between the 'evolved' Syrians and their French tutors; despite the creation of elaborate systems of indirect rule with Syrian politicians under the 'guide' of French advisors, the reality proved quite different. It was not fraternal association, but bureaucratic domination which became the norm, and the French did not hesitate to express disdain for their Syrian 'partners', even the most exalted among them.⁸⁸

Examination of these characteristics of French imperialism, and their generally quite negative effect on French development policies in the Mandated territories in the Levant leads naturally to consideration of the influence of any system of colonial rule or mandatory tutelage on such policies. This is indeed a **third** general constraint, but one which moves to a level of analysis well beyond an examination of the significance of particular imperial systems.

In considering this factor, it is necessary to determine whether a distinction should be made between a colony and a mandate. In the first, the ruling power was there under its own auspices and

⁸⁸ An example of such contempt occurred during a meeting of HC Ponsot and his most important collaborators to finalise the contract between the Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques and the Levant states which hopefully would result in a plan for the development of their water resources. When the Secretary General read the preamble of the draft agreement which specifically named the President of Lebanon as one of the parties to the contract, the Delegate for Lebanon made the remark that the President was 'irresponsible' and therefore should not figure in it by name. To this, his colleague from Damascus added, 'This observation applies equally to Shaykh Taj al-Din [al-Hasani, puppet Prime Minister of Syria].' 'Deuxième réunion des Délégués,' 1ère séance, 1 May 1929, 13-14. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 373--Services Techniques.

theoretically could remain forever. In the second, an international body entrusted the mandatary with the tutelage of a certain territory with the object of guiding it towards independence in the foreseeable future under the watchful eye of an international 'board of control'.

In essence the difference between the two was one of obligation: In the colony, the ruling power had an obligation to itself, and the possession existed only to increase the well-being of its master in whatever form this might take. In the mandate, the obligation of the tutor was towards its tutee and, to a lesser degree, towards the international community.⁸⁹

When it came to 'development' or 'exploitation' which might be considered opposite sides of the same coin, one would expect to see a contrast in the treatment of a colony and a mandated territory. In the former, it would be in the self-interest of the owner to increase the productive capacity of its possession whilst in the latter, the tutor would be much less interested in capitalising programmes of economic improvement because this investment might well be lost.

There was certainly a dearth of investment in the French Mandated territories in the Levant for the various reasons cited above. As for the French Empire, it appears that the exploitation of the resources of its different components depended on the opportunities available. For example, when the French entered Indochina, they found a clearly wealthy region which offered numerous opportunities for

⁸⁹ For example, with regard to matters subsumed under Article 11 which revolved around the 'principle of economic equality', i.e. an 'Open Door' policy. See fn 78 *supra*.

productive investment. As a result, this particular colony attracted substantial private capital, and funds were placed in banking, mining and rubber plantations to name but three sectors.

If Indochina (and North Africa) attracted considerable capital placed in mining, banks, plantations, and transport, the French African colonies were another case entirely. In this regard, one can cite the experience of Professor Auguste Chevalier, founder and editor of the well-known journal *Revue de Botanique appliquée et d'agriculture coloniale*, and an imperialist of the old school. He made a tour of the countryside in Sénégal during 1947 after having first visited it at the end of the nineteenth century. In the intervening fifty years (!) nothing had changed: The huts were as miserable as they had ever been and the peasants still in rags. He asked himself, "Whatever became of the fifty million gold francs gained from the sale of peanuts?"⁹⁰

Obviously those fifty million gold francs had been spent somewhere, but not in Sénégal. And why not? Precisely because Sénégal and other black African colonies were not very good investments viewed from a strictly economic standpoint. In tropical Africa, it did not require much capital to introduce a crop like groundnuts which adapted easily to the milieu and was not difficult for local peasants to learn how to cultivate profitably. Nevertheless the profits went not to the cultivators, but to the foreign exporters who re-invested them elsewhere. The usual method was for a trading company

⁹⁰ For this vignette and other similar ones, see Jean Suret-Canale, *Afrique noire: l'ère coloniale, 1900-1945* (Paris: Edition Sociales, 1962), 200.

to set up posts in the bush supplied with cheap goods--Manchester cottons, German lamps, Venetian glass beads--desired by the peasant. The cultivator would bring his crop there, and exchange it for cash which he would promptly spend on these trifles. The company, which was closely associated with shipping firms and banks, would dispose of the crop at an enormous profit to itself and a relatively small one to the producer. Thus when Henri Labouret spoke of the 'extraordinary fortune' which groundnuts brought to the Senegalese peasant, he meant a fortune which was extraordinary only when compared with what he had received in the past.⁹¹

Moreover much of the private investment in the Empire was built upon a base of public investment in infrastructure. Initially as in the Ottoman Empire, railroads were built by private capital enjoying a state guarantee. The economic crisis of the nineteen thirties saw a massive increase in infrastructural improvements with the inauguration of a series of loans which were contracted by the colonies and guaranteed by the French State. Expansion of ports, roads, and railroads were designed to make the export-oriented economies of the colonies more profitable by facilitating the shipment of their primary products overseas. Yet in doing so, this policy burdened them with heavy debt charges. In French West Africa, which had the highest debt, 25% of ordinary revenue was given over to debt service; in Indochina, with the second-highest debt, the service amounted to 20% of such income.

⁹¹ Labouret, 8; also Cornevin, 293-94..

Thus investments were made in the colonies, but public debt was also created so perhaps one can say that the blessings achieved were mixed.⁹²

Yet profit was often not the main reason for acquiring lands overseas in the first instance. The desire for imperial prestige; the competitive drive to emulate a hated rival, all acted as spurs to colonial conquest. This was so, even if such coveted areas as the vast desert regions of French West Africa were economically useless.⁹³

This was certainly true in the case of the French occupation of Syria. Despite rapturous assessments of its productive potential and the existence of powerful economic interests stemming from activities of the various concessions, one could well say that, on balance, factors of cultural ascendancy and imperial rivalry were far more potent motivations.

Speaking generally, the economic development of a mandated territory tended to be more problematic than that of a colony. If the colony offered opportunities for profit, metropolitan capitalists were more than happy to place their money there. Moreover in a colony, public investment acted as a 'crutch' for private investment and eventually took upon itself the responsibility for improvements of infrastructure through the medium of the state-supported loan.

⁹² For a discussion of French colonial investment strategies, see Marseille, 113-119; Thobie *et al.*, 141-54; 232-34.

⁹³ For a discussion of the causes of European imperialism before the Great War, see D.K. Fieldhouse, "Imperialism": an historiographical revision,' *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, XIV, 2, 1961, 187-209.

The economic improvement of mandated territories was more of a puzzle. In such territories, the mandatary also tended to rely on the private sector as the engine of progress, at least initially. Unfortunately, despite much rhetoric about such concepts as *la mise en valeur*, hard-nosed capitalists assessed a temporary mandate as too great a risk for the investment of large sums unless, as in Palestine, those capitalists had an ideological incentive to place their funds there.

Therefore how did a mandate get developed, or did it? In Syria, at least, economic development through private initiative was in essence, a failure. Capitalists and the administrators who supported them used economic criteria to gauge the viability of proposed projects. As a result, they tended to consider only those schemes with the clearest potential for successful investment, and even these were deemed too risky because the temporary nature of the Mandate hardly guaranteed a sure return.

The abdication of private capital placed the onus for development squarely upon the shoulders of the mandatory power. As tutor, it was already faced with a number of unavoidable expenses--administration, personnel, troop maintenance--which despite Article 15 of the Mandate Charter proved impossible to recover. Therefore the mandatary did not particularly wish to use its own funds to equip a territory from which it would eventually depart.

The world economic crisis of the nineteen thirties should have put paid to all efforts of development in a mandated territory such as Syria. For the tutee was economically prostrate, and the tutor was

unwilling to guarantee a loan which its ward might never repay. Yet despite such an unfavourable prognosis, the decision was made to embark on a programme to furnish the mandated territories with important additions to their infrastructure--among which was a major irrigation project. This decision came from administrators, not capitalists, because the judgements made were as much political as economic. These officials believed that whilst the schemes proposed were beneficial in and of themselves, they were also part of what the High Commissioner at that time chose to call the 'politics of prestige'. By visibly promoting such improvements, France felt she could justify her tutelage in the eyes of her clients and, what was more essential, in the eyes of those who chafed under her supervision. Fortuitously, money became available after the extinction of the Ottoman Debt to fund this double commitment. and enabled France to depart from Syria with a respectable record of achievement in the economic realm, if not the political one.

The next three chapters will examine certain aspects of the *oeuvre* of France in her Mandated territories. An analysis of the structure of agrarian relations, the expansion of production, and the development of irrigation will elucidate the nature of the marriage between agriculture and politics in modern Syria.

CHAPTER II

THE MANDATE--II: THE STRUCTURE OF AGRARIAN RELATIONS

During the period of the French Mandate, the ties which bound the triad of the peasant who cultivated the land, the notable who controlled the bulk of it, and the central authorities who ruled over all underwent certain changes which were generally mere modifications of an existing order rather than that wholesale transformation which Achard believed to be an absolute prerequisite for agricultural regeneration in Syria. The failure to implement a more major agrarian metamorphosis was in part ideological because most of those who propounded and implemented agrarian policy under the Mandate were mesmerised by the idea of the independent peasant smallholder. It was also due to the fact that the pernicious influence of the great Syrian *latifundia* on the life of the peasant and agricultural progress in general appeared obvious to French observers. Nonetheless the French soon came to realise that any attempt on their part to dissolve these great estates by force, would undermine their own position since the notable landlords helped them control the countryside. As a result of these preoccupations, Achard and his colleagues failed to look farther for other rural structures, and did not grasp the primordial importance of the village community and the collective agricultural disciplines of which it was a reflexion.

II. 1 > *Musha*'cultivation--a definition

Achard and other French observers believed that great estates controlled by mostly absentee notable proprietors were the salient features of the Syrian landscape. In their eyes, the dissolution of these holdings was the culmination of a process which would bring a web of peasant-owned properties to the countryside.¹ Whilst they recognised the existence of what they called 'collective property' (*propriété collective*), their infatuation with the contradictions between the reality of *latifundia* and the ideal of individual smallholdings tended to blind them to the importance played by the rural community and the form of exploitation which sprang from it.

This was particularly characteristic of the web of villages which flourished in the grain-producing plains between the mountains and the desert. Unlike those legal categories of land tenure which received their final definition in the Ottoman Land Code of 1274/1858, the *musha*' system for village cohesion was not imposed from outside, but had grown up in response to a precarious agricultural situation. In regions where farming was risky due to the wild fluctuation in the amount of rainfall received and the physical insecurity of life on the edge of the cultivated zone, it only made sense for individuals to band together in tight knit groups for mutual support in the face of hazards known and

¹ For this process, see Chapter I *supra* and this chapter *infra*.

unknown. A form of landholding which encouraged and reinforced communal disciplines could only strengthen this solidarity.

Such landholding arrangements were enshrined in no legal code², and were subsumed under the term *musha'*³, a word whose

² Although if one considers it a form of 'co-ownership,' *sharikat mulk* is related to an important Islamic legal concept. See A.I. Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) and comments in Yaakov Firestone, 'The land-equalizing *musha'* village: a reassessment' in Gilbar (ed.), *Ottoman Palestine . . .*, 103-05. For the use of *sharika* contracts in the Levant during Ottoman and Mandatory times, see *Idem*, 'Production and trade in an Islamic context: *Sharika* contracts in the transitional economy of northern Samaria, 1853-1943,' Part I, *IJMES*, VI, April, 1975, 185-209; Part II, *IJMES*, VI, July, 1975, 308-25.

³ The first serious field research on traditional forms of landholding in Syria was started in the early 1930's when the pattern had already undergone many modifications. For *musha'* tenure as for other aspects of rural life in Syria, see first and foremost, 1>André Latron, *La Vie rurale en Syrie et au Liban: étude d'économie sociale*, Mémoires de L'Institut français de Damas (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), esp. Chaps. VI and VII, 182-240, and map between 176 and 177, and his remarks in 2>'En Syrie et au Liban: village communautaire et structure sociale', *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, VI, 27, May, 1934, 225-234; 3>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, esp. 96-109 and map on 98; and his comments in 4>*Le Pays . . .*, 357-62. Of these two authors, Latron is to be preferred because he focuses on rural life in Syria whilst Weulersse looks at Syria and the Middle East which leads him to make some misleading generalisations from that Syrian case of which he was most familiar. See also 5>Anon. [C. Duraffourd], 'Notice sur le démembrement et l'aménagement des terres "mouchaa" possédées dans l'indivision collective' (extract of a larger study on Syrian communal villages), 1935. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 864. This brochure prepared for the 1936 Damascus Fair discusses *musha'* tenure and the goals of the Cadastral Survey. For a study of landholding in a specific region where *musha'* tenure is present, see 6>Anon. [Jean Gaulmier], 'Notes sur la propriété foncière dans la Syrie centrale', *AF*, XXXIII, 309, April, 1933, 130-37.

The most recent and thorough studies of this phenomenon are to be found in the articles of Yaakov Firestone: 7>'Land equalization and factor scarcities: Holding size and the burden of impositions in Imperial central Russia and the late Ottoman Levant,' *The Journal of Economic History*, XLI, 4, December 1981, 813-33; 8>'The land-equalizing . . .,' 91-129.

For other discussions of *musha'* tenure in Syria, see 9>Owen, *The Middle East . . .*, 35 and 256-259; 10>Paul J. Klat, 'Musha holdings and land fragmentation in Syria', *MEEP*, 1957, 12-23; 11>Lewis, *Nomads . . .*, 63 and fn 12, 221-22. For a comparative view, see 12>A. Granott, *The Land System in Palestine: History and Structure* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), Ch. IX, 213-248; 13>F. Arin, 'Essai sur les démembrements de la propriété foncière en droit musulman,' *Revue du Monde Musulman*, XXVI, 1914, 277-317.

principal definition is 'common, public, joint' from a root meaning among other things 'to spread, diffuse'.⁴ The idea behind this method of agricultural exploitation was to promote solidarity by ensuring that each member of the village community had absolutely equal rights in the various types of land cultivated by that entity. The absentee landlord had legal control over the land either as *multazim* or as holder of a *sened tapu* whilst the peasants merely had rights of usufruct (*tasarruf*) over it. Yet the cultivated area was not held by the community *per se* because Islamic law 'does not recognise juristic persons'.⁵ Rather its members owned the land in undivided shares as co-proprietors.⁶ In order to ensure absolute equality, the co-owners invested a council of elders with the task of re-allotting the cultivated land among the members of the community every so often, distributing parcels to each person with share-rights. The land to be distributed was divided into a certain number of large sections (*mawqi'*, pl.

⁴ For the definitions, see Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (J. Milton Cowan, ed.), 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), 581-82.

⁵ Indeed, 'not even the public treasury (*bayt al-mal*) is construed as an institution, [*sic*] its owner is the Muslim community, i.e. the sum total of individual Muslims.' Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 125.

⁶ Latron states this clearly: *La Vie . . .*, 188 and 189. For a discussion of the distinction between co-ownership and collective possession, see Firestone, 'The land-equalizing . . .', 99-102. The analogy in English common law is between a 'joint tenancy' and a 'tenancy in common'. In the former, each owner has an interest in the whole, without having any specific share in the property (in Bracton's felicitous formulation: *totum tenet et nihil tenet*, i.e. each joint tenant 'holds everything and yet holds nothing'). Since the owners do not have a specific part in the property, when each dies, his rights in the whole pass to his co-proprietors (the 'right of survivorship'--*ius accrescendi*) with the last being able to pass it on. In the latter, co-owners hold in undivided *shares* which they can do with what they will, i.e. there is no

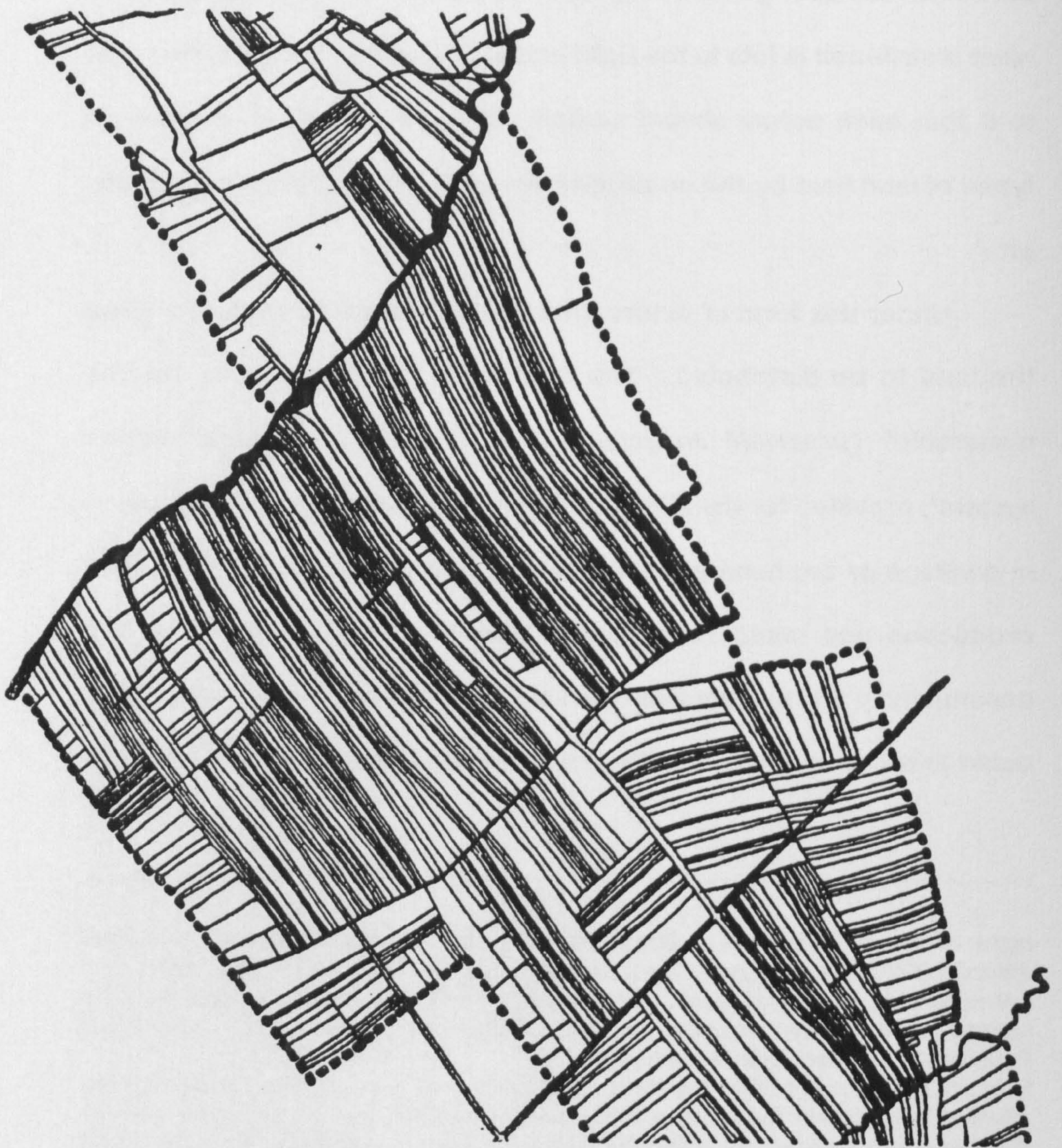
mawaqi'), as agronomically homogeneous as possible. These sections were then subdivided into subsections (*sahm*, pl. *asham*), each having a particular soil quality and being rigorously equal in value. Finally these were distributed in lots to the right holders. In doing so, the elders saw to it that each parcel should contain an equal portion of the various types of land held by the co-proprietors, e.g. well-watered, hilly, stony, etc.⁷

Under this form of tenure, there were two methods of allocating the land to be distributed. The first which Weulersse calls 'musha' ownership' (*propriété mouchaa*) and Firestone, the 'open-ended system', provided for the allotment to be based on the number of males in a village or the number of teams they possessed, i.e. by what each production unit could contribute in way of labour or capital to the community.⁸ The system was open-ended in the sense that newcomers could join the community with their assets and become a recognised

right of survivorship. K.J. Gray and P.D. Symes, *Real Property and Real People: Principles of Land Law* (London: Butterworths, 1981), 233-238.

⁷ Weulersse, *Paysans* . . .99; For another, slightly different description of a village in the Hawran, see Achard, 'Propriété rurale . . .,' 9-12; 'Les Problèmes . . .le problème agraire,' 7-9.

⁸ In Palestine, at least, the first allocation unit was called *dhukur* (from *dhakar*, pl. *dhukur* meaning a male person) whilst the second was named *faddan* (from *faddan*, pl. *fadadin*, 'yoke of oxen'). By extension the word *faddan* came to mean 1>the amount of land which a team could plough in one day; 2>the amount of land worked by one team in one year. In a further extension of this meaning, the term came to indicate that 'agrarian cell', the units of land of varying types, which together comprised the fundamental elements of each agricultural community. In this way, the capital unit came to define the production unit; For the *dhukur* system, see 1>Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' 819; 2>*Idem*, 'The land-equalizing . . .,' 9-10; 3>Weulersse, *Paysans* . . ., 99 (although he does not use any term for it). For the *faddan* system, see 1>Latron, *La Vie* . . ., 11-12, 14-18; 2>Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' 814-19.



part of it. Indeed new settlers might be given land in a community only if they were able to bring with them a plough team to put it into production.⁹ Moreover for this system to function properly, there had to be plenty of land available for occupation, i.e. in frontier districts of new settlement.¹⁰

Weulersse names the second allocation method '*musha*' tenure' (*tenure mouchaa*) and Firestone, the 'quantified share system'. In the villages which employed it there were a fixed number of shares, and each right-holder could transmit his interest to another person through succession, gift, or sale.¹¹ Over time, the Islamic laws of inheritance led to an infinite division of the original right so that in many cases the

←---**Fig. 5. Part of the cadastral survey map (scale 1: 30,000) of the village of Maallaqa (Biqā'), showing the characteristic division of the lands in a *musha*' village: Fields in parallel strips, many of more than 1 km. in length. Source: Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), Fig. 20, 105.**

⁹ As an illustration of the value of a team, see the story related by Philip G. Baldensperger about a stranger who was given land in a village because he brought with him a yoke of oxen whilst a villager was thrown out of his own house to make way for the newcomer because he was not a cultivator and had no team. He was only welcomed back into the community when he went to Ramla, bought a pair of beasts and promised to become a regular cultivator. For this vignette, see Philip G. Baldensperger, 'The immovable East,' *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, XXXVIII, July, 1906, 193-94 and Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' 815.

¹⁰ For the 'open-ended' system of allocation and its implications, see 1>Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 14-15, 183-89; 2>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 99-100; 3>Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' 815; 4>*Idem*, 'The land equalizing. . .,' 93-94; 4>Owen, 256.

¹¹ Arts. 54-55 of the 1858 Land Code made *miri* lands legally transmissible to children of both sexes or if there were no children, to the parents of the former occupier. Aristarchi Bey, 100-10; Young, VI, 60-61. The right of transmission was modified in the years following the promulgation of this code to include all other possible relatives. See Klat, 'The origins . . .,' 60. 'Land tenure in Syria and the Lebanon and its economic and social effects with some suggestions for reform,' B.Litt. thesis, Oxford University, 1948, 32 and 34, fn 27.

portion belonging to any one person could only be expressed fractionally. Physically, the lots came to be divided over time into long, slivers of land, the width of a furrow and several kilometres in length with one end terminating at the village. The shape was dictated by the fact that each cultivator had to be given equal access to his lands from the village, whilst the movement of the plough imposed a rectilinear shape. Moreover such an arrangement facilitated the merger of several parcels into more manageable plots since in practice, the land was worked by family groups. The parts belonging to each individual were consolidated and given en bloc to the production unit with the amount handed out being determined by the number of right-holders.¹²

Although each plot was worked by the family to whom it was assigned, the cultivators did not enjoy full freedom of action because they had to submit to a discipline imposed by the community through the mechanism of its council of elders. Thus each farmer in common with his fellows had to follow the same rotation with planting, weeding and harvesting taking place at appointed times.¹³

To further ensure equality of treatment, these lots were changed periodically. André Latron believed that the timing of these re-allotments was a function of the crop rotation cycle with three years as a norm.¹⁴ Thus the cycle length of *musha* tenure generally coincided

¹² For the 'quantified share' system and its implications, see 1>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 101-04; 2>Firestone, 'The land equalizing . . .', 94; 3>Owen, 256-57.

¹³ For the disciplines of cultivation, see 1>Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 232-234; 2>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 100.

¹⁴ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 188.

with that of cereals farmed in those less well-watered districts which comprised the great plains of inner Syria. Nevertheless there were variations: Achard observed that in the Hawran, for example, *musha'* lands were re-divided every four or five years. During the 1930's, his colleagues pointed out that in the area around Homs, the land was reallocated every year whilst in the Aleppo region where the climate was better (probably the area around Jabal Samaan NW of Aleppo was meant), the redistributions were carried out every three years.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that the lands held under *musha'* did not include dwellings or those plots surrounding the village planted with gardens or fruit trees, but solely comprised more outlying areas sown in cereals. There was a reason for this: Cereals were the staple food crop of these regions, and therefore each family/cultivating unit had to obtain an equal harvest for the preservation of social harmony within the village. Since cereals were an annual crop, easy to cultivate, and one which did not require an overwhelming amount of investment in time and technique, redistribution of cereal lands was not counterproductive.

In these regions, gardens and fruit trees generally took up a much smaller proportion of village lands. Those parcels which immediately surrounded the village agglomeration were *mulk*, the freehold property of individuals and their families, and required a much

¹⁵ Achard, 'Propriété rurale. . .', 12; 'Les Problèmes . . . le problème agraire,' 9. République Française, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE), *Rapport à la Société des Nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban*, 1934 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1935), 103.

greater investment both in time and in care in order to yield a bountiful harvest. Therefore a periodic re-allotment of orchards and gardens would have hardly been fair to those who had laboured so long to bring them into production.¹⁶

In contrast, the tracts held under *musha'* tenure and cultivated in cereals were *miri* land. These expanses belonged to the entire community of Muslims and were held in their name by the State acting as their representative. Since the cultivator who worked this land did not have ownership, but merely the right of usufruct (*tasarruf*), he had less incentive to improve it. Thus *miri* was suited for cereals, not only agronomically, but because cereals were a crop where it was difficult for any sort of possible peasant initiative to have much effect. The most needed improvements--better strains, fertiliser, mechanisation--were beyond the means of the humble cultivator, and could only be introduced as a result of either government policy or through the enterprise of interested capitalists. Although *musha'* cultivation did of course produce food for the peasants and their families, its function was pre-eminently social--to strengthen the village community. Therefore, those inefficiencies perceived by Western observers¹⁷ were not really important.¹⁸

¹⁶ Perhaps the *legal* category had originally been based on an established fact.

¹⁷ For example, 1>G.F. Walpole, 'Land settlement in Trans-Jordan,' Paper delivered at the Conference on Middle East Agricultural Development, 10 February 1944, in Middle East Supply Centre, *The Proceedings of the Conference on Middle East Agricultural Development*, Cairo, February 7th-10th, 1944 (Agricultural Report No. 6), 158; 2>Doreen Warriner 'Land tenure in the Fertile Crescent (Palestine, Transjordan, Syria and the Lebanon,

Nevertheless proof that villagers were not adverse to rewarding enterprise carried out on *musha'* lands was to be found in their attitude toward those small, odd-shaped, often rocky parcels which occurred here and there among the *musha'* properties. Because these were deemed uncultivable, he who undertook to put effort into their improvement was given full rights over them as a sort of 'payment' for his labours, and the properties were exempt from any future re-allotment.¹⁹

II.2> *Musha'* cultivation--origins and function

The origins of this system of landholding are obscure, and much debated. There are roughly two schools of thought concerning this problem: The first derives *musha'* cultivation from the peculiar nature of beduin society whilst the second sees it as the product of a purely peasant consciousness. Upon close analysis these tend to be variations on a single theme. This theme is that *musha'* cultivation formed the basis of landholding on the plains of inner Syria due to the need for communal solidarity in face of those rigours of climate, physical, and fiscal insecurity to be found on a hostile frontier.

Iraq), '8. Report prepared for the Middle East Supply Centre, 1944, FO 922, Middle East Supply Centre (1941-45), 258\AP/858\43-44; also found in Issawi (ed.), *EHME*, 76; 3> *Idem*, *Land and Poverty in the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1948), 19-20; 4> Klat, 'Musha holdings . . .,' 19.

¹⁸ Owen draws attention to this point. Owen, 258.

¹⁹ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 100 and Plate V, fig. 1.

The first school of thought believes *musha'* to be a development from the egalitarianism of the beduin tribe, in which every member had equal right to the use of the lands upon which his community pastured their animals. Its argument holds that when tribesmen settled, this principle was carried over into the agricultural lands they occupied. The fact that this was usually a gradual process with nomads often cultivating and pasturing at the same time gave logic to this argument. So too did the fact that many cultivators could trace their near ancestry to some tribe and still had bonds of 'brotherhood' (*khuwa*) with a tribal protector who expected 'gifts' in return. The fact that *musha'* existed in villages composed of recently settled beduin or in those with close blood ties to the pastoralists seemed to confirm the links between the communal organisation and that of the nomads. As an example, Jean Gaulmier cites the village of Helfaya, 22 km NW of Hama, of one thousand divided into twelve 'tribes' (*fakhd*-in fact tribal subdivision) which practised an annual division of land. To him, the existence of such a village practising *musha'* makes 'it seem incontestable that one finds oneself here in the presence of vestiges of beduin organisations and customs.'²⁰

Latron²¹ tends to lean towards this view and feels that *musha'* was a mode of social organisation which could only have been imposed

²⁰ Two of the principal proponents of the argument linking *musha'* to beduin social organisation are Doreen Warriner and Jean Gaulmier: 1>Warriner, 'Land tenure . . .,' 6-8; Issawi (ed.), EHME, 75-76; 2> *Idem*, *Land and Poverty* . . ., 18-20; 3>Anon [Gaulmier], 131-32.

²¹ Latron, *La Vie* . . ., 184, 242-43.

over lands which were virgin whether because they were empty to begin with or because the original inhabitants had been chased away. He draws an analogy with similar systems to be found scattered over Europe, notably in the great northern plains and in the Slav regions. Here there were identical land maps showing a division into parcels accompanied by the same customs, and characterised by the same evolution.²² He believes that the village community to be found on the vast stretches of the Syrian interior owed its origins to the 'sedentarisation of social groups in open plain' just as villages of analogous organisation had their origins in ancient communities settled on the steppe-like plains of northern and eastern Europe.²³

Weulersse too admits that there was a certain correspondence in structure and discipline between the plains of eastern Europe and the Middle East, but points out that the mechanism of 'social parts'²⁴ so

²² *Ibid.*, 184, fn 1. In the Russian case, Latron is probably thinking of the *mir* or peasant commune. The existence of communes was very ancient going back perhaps to the Kievan period (9th through 11th centuries) and beyond. These communes were responsible for the management of common lands and land not in use. In addition, they allocated the tax burden among their members and collected the money due. Nevertheless each member held his lands separately; a certain amount of periodic land redistribution took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it was not until the eighteenth century that this practice became widespread. With the introduction of new taxes in the eighteenth century, the equalisation of properties was a sure method of evenly distributing the payments among members of the commune. For a very clear explanation of the Russian case, see Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), ch. 24, 504-35 *passim*. For analogies between the Russian and Levantine cases, see Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' *passim*.

²³ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 241-42.

²⁴ i.e. quantified shares. For these, see Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 184 and in particular Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 101.

intrinsic a part of the latter system did not appear to exist in Europe.²⁵ Nevertheless he thinks that one can attribute the resemblance between the two agrarian systems to the existence of similar agrarian economies based on wheat production and communal cropping.

The second school holds that *musha'*, rather than stemming from beduin social organisation, derived from the 'operational necessities' of agricultural life on a precarious frontier. Here unsettled conditions and the simultaneous pursuit of farming and sheep herding promoted communal solidarity as well as a two (or three) field system to accommodate both grazing and cultivation. In the well-known formulation of Jacques Weulersse 'the mechanism of *musha'* is indeed too complex and reveals too profound a peasant touch to attribute it to the invention of semi-nomads.'²⁶

Whether *musha'* tenure had its origins in beduin social structure; stemmed from the demands of agriculture on a precarious frontier; or derived in some mix of the two is a matter which ultimately can never be determined. Indeed an exact knowledge of its origins is not important. What is important is that whatever the composition of the group, peasants cultivating the transitional zone or beduin wandering in the desert, each was confronted with the necessity for social cohesion in a world buffeted by the rigours of climate and physical insecurity. Among beduin this resulted in the common sharing of

²⁵ In fact, not true. See Blum, 515-17.

²⁶ Two proponents of close ties between *musha'* and peasant agriculture are Jacques Weulersse and Norman Lewis. 1>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 107-08; 2>*Idem, Le Pays . . .*, 358-59; 3>Lewis, *Nomads . . .*, 63 and 221-22, fn 12.

pastureland and of herds between members of the group; among peasants, each villager had rights to a portion of shared cropland, and the parcels of land were redistributed every so often in order to ensure a measure of equality and maintain social harmony in the face of danger. Thus among both beduin and peasants, similar operational problems gave birth to similar solutions.

Arrangements designed to reinforce communal solidarity were particularly important in the plains of inner Syria where pre-modern communities were often dependent on their own resources for survival. In such a subsistence economy, particularly one which functioned within an area of marginal agricultural production, it was vital to spread both contributions and burdens equally among all production units. Moreover, in a precarious economic situation, an adequate food supply was perhaps the highest priority, and maldistribution led to cleavages and conflicts within the community.

Agriculture within this transitional zone, where rainfall was both inadequate (200-400 mm) and erratic, very rarely achieved a surplus. Most of what was produced was either used for sustenance; went as seed to be sowed for the next crop; or was allocated for payments to those outside the village--landlords, the government, or beduin 'protectors'. If there was a surplus, it might be traded with the beduin for pastoral products or sold on the market. Nonetheless in market transactions, the peasant had the worst of it since he was forced to sell right after harvest when prices were low in order to pay pressing debts whilst the middleman or speculator (often the same thing) could afford

to wait until prices rose later in the year. The peasant who was kept in misery by the rapacity of landlords, the exactions of the government and the exigencies of the market had good reason to maintain communal solidarity with his fellows.²⁷

When circumstances did enable the cultivators to become more efficient producers with an assured oversupply of food, despite the gouging of the middleman, this did not necessarily mean that the peasant used the excess to participate in a market in order to obtain desired goods for himself. He might so participate as occurred in the Hawran during the 1860's and 1870's, but on the other hand, he might choose more leisure over the chance to increase production which could be exchanged for benefits. For example, the inauguration of the Homs Dam project in the early 1940's gave the peasants an assured supply of water which enabled them to expand the range of crops and expand their total yields by dividing and echeloning the amount of water allocated to them throughout the agricultural year. Yet they did not choose to intensify cultivation, but instead preferred to have the same output as before with considerably more free time for themselves.²⁸

²⁷ For a discussion of disposal of the wheat surplus under the difficult conditions of the early nineteen thirties, see L., 'Le commerce du blé au Liban et en Syrie,' *AF*, XXXIII, 312, July-August, 1933, 227-33, and *infra* Chapter III.

²⁸ For this, see Chap. IV *infra* and André Gibert, 'Notes sur la géographie du Proche Orient: 1>L'Irrigation de la plaine de Homs et ses problèmes,' *Revue de Géographie de Lyon [RGL]*, XXIV, 1949, 154, 156. In reporting this fact, Gibert commented that this 'reserve' was due both to factual reasons (lack of finance, fertiliser, etc.), and to those of a psychological order (the ignorance and lassitude of the cultivators). This particular defect he felt could be remedied by 'education'. In doing so, he follows Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), 163-64 in believing that the possibility of producing a surplus

If *musha'* tenure developed out of the necessity for communal solidarity amidst a hostile physical environment where surpluses were few and far between, it was also predicated on the need for security on a frontier where there was a constant threat of Beduin raids. For example, when Salamiya was settled in the 1840's, it was held as *musha'* land and divided into two large blocs, one of which was left fallow whilst the other was apportioned into strips and worked. One of the reasons for grouping all the cultivated parcels in a single bloc was to ensure that the villagers would sow and reap well within shouting distance, and could render mutual aid should need arise.²⁹

Another aspect of communal solidarity was the maintenance of cohesion in face of demands from the taxmen. In the years before the enactment of the 1858 Land Code with its provision for registration of title, taxes were collected from village communities *en bloc* with village leaders being responsible for the deliverance of the assessed sum to the government agent. It was important that the amounts collected from individual village production units be done on an equitable basis in order to ensure that communal solidarity be preserved. *Musha'* cultivation was a mechanism for equalising such contributions.³⁰

necessarily leads one to do so. In criticising this argument, Martin Orans asks, 'Why should the food producers who have increased their efficiency produce more rather than work less?' Martin Orans, 'Surplus,' *Human Organization*, XXV, 1 Spring, 1966, 24-32. Quotation on 27.

²⁹ Lewis, *Nomads . . .*, 62-63.

³⁰ For an extensive analysis of the 'fiscal hypothesis', see Firestone, 'Land equalization . . .,' 824-29. Also Martha Mundy, 'Shareholders and the state: representing the village in the late 19th century land registers of the southern Hawran,' in Thomas Philipp (ed.), *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century: The Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1992), 217-38.

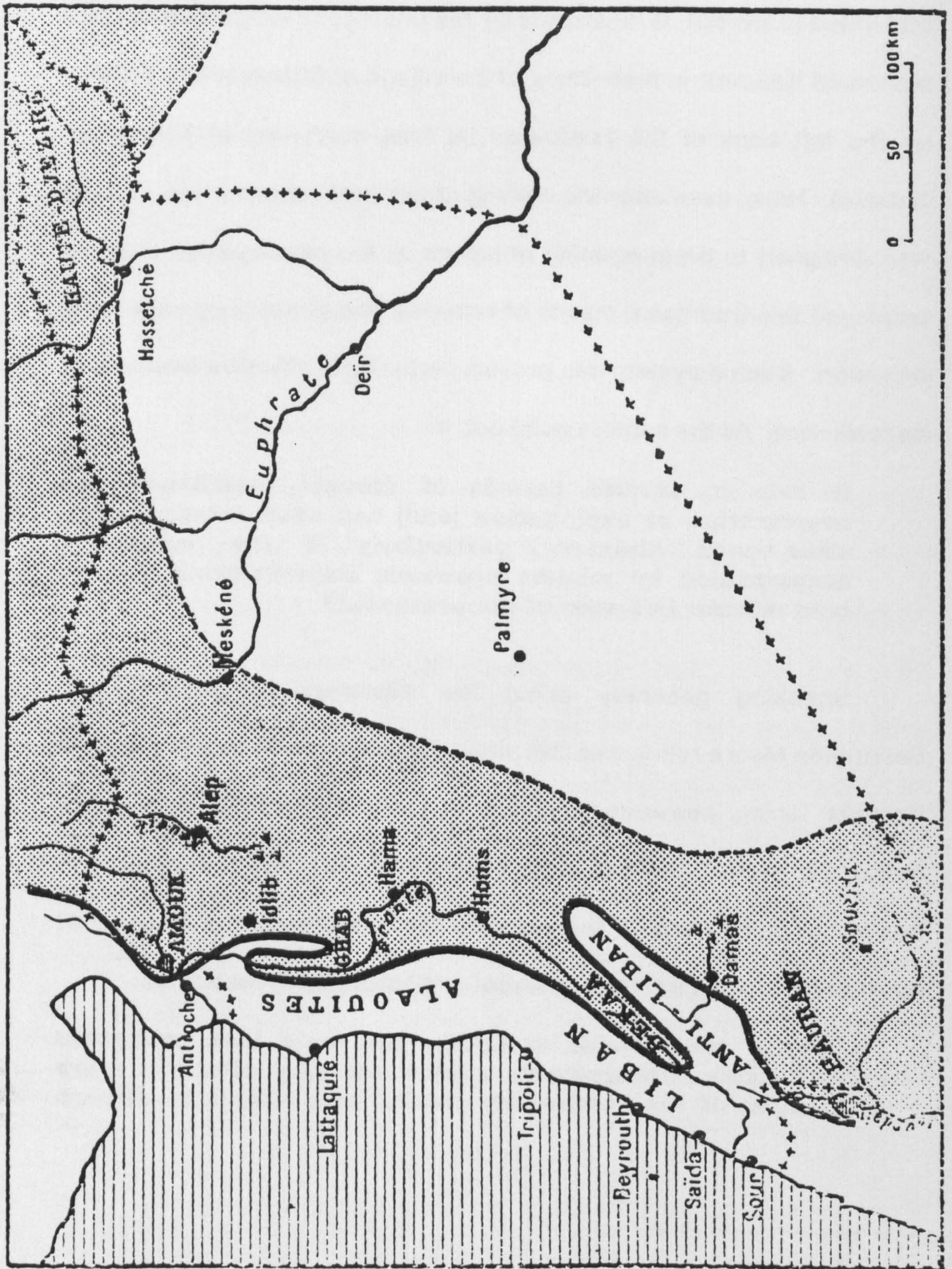
That *musha'* cultivation was the result of the need for communal solidarity within the transitional zone, and that this pattern has continued to persist is illustrated by the findings of Helga Seeden and Muhamed Kaddour in their study of the village of Shams al-Din Tannira on the left bank of the Euphrates 60 kms northwest of Tabqa (al-Thawra). Here, even after the coming of the land reform which in itself was designed to bring equality of tenure to the countryside, villagers employed this traditional means of ensuring and preserving communal cohesion. Such a system has proved particularly effective because of its resilience. As the authors point out, it

is able to survive periods of drought, pestilence and overtaxation or exploitation [and] can even reassert itself after such disasters, particularly if the period is accompanied by relative economic improvements due to land reforms in favour of the peasants.³¹

Speaking generally about the dilemmas of peasant life, Barrington Moore reinforces this view. He emphasises that the natural hazards facing peasants, coupled in some cases with a need to respond to certain methods of tax collection on the part of the overlord, has led in many parts of the world to the development of systems of land tenure which tend toward an equal distribution of resources.

Despite considerable variation, the main idea connected with these arrangements stands out very clearly: every member of the community should have access to enough

³¹ Helga Seeden and Muhamed Kaddour, 'Space, structures and land in Shams ed-Din Tannira on the Euphrates: An ethnoarchaeological perspective,' in Khalidi (ed.), 504-05.



resources to be able to perform obligations to the community carrying on a collective struggle for survival.³²

II.3> *Musha'* cultivation--locus and extent

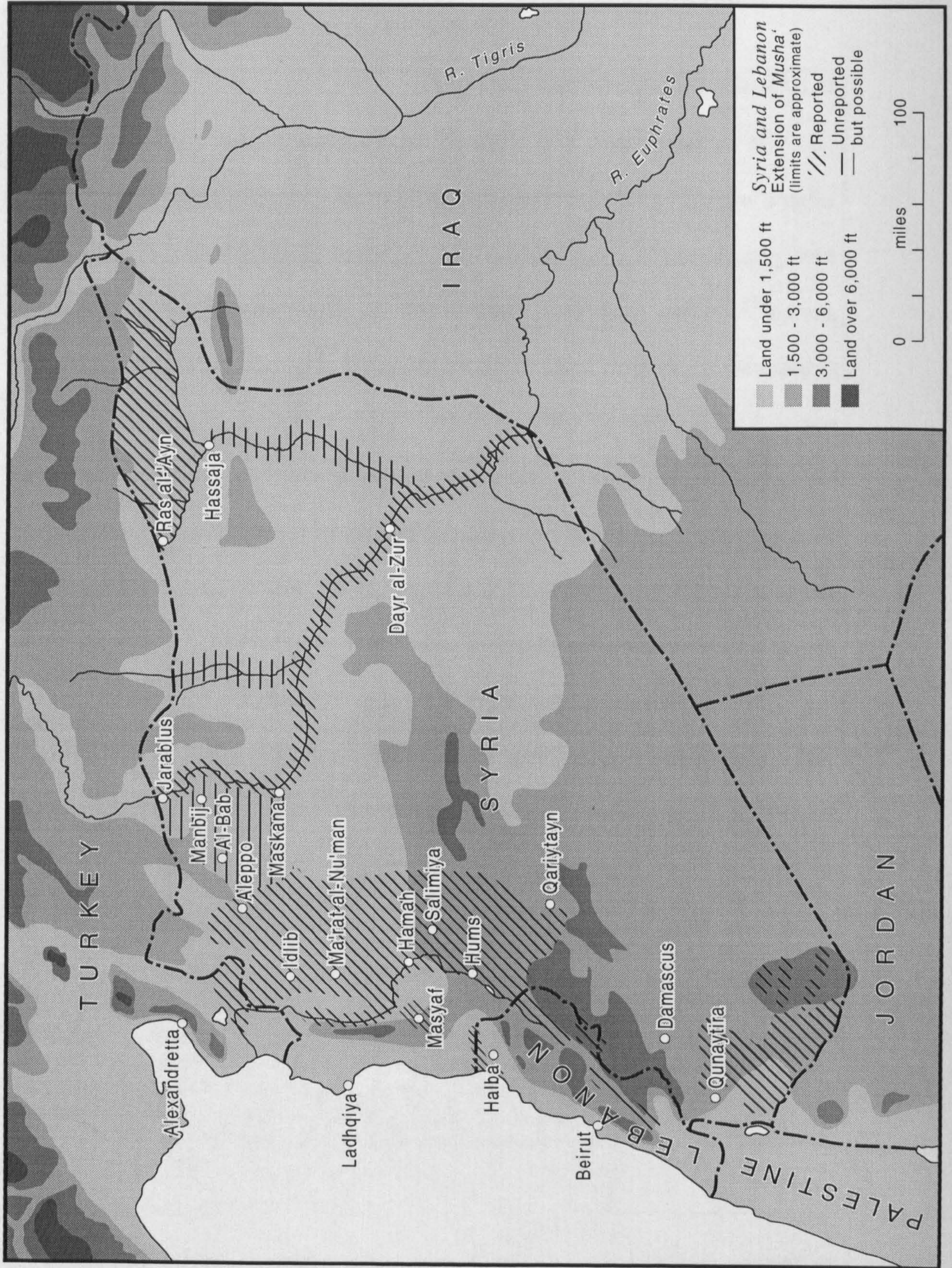
It is important but difficult to determine the regions in Syria where *musha'* holdings were located. Both Latron and Weulersse after him presented a map purporting to show the location of these two zones.³³ The fact that, according to their maps, *musha'* tenure appeared to stretch from the Hawran right around to the Jazira did not mean that it actually did so, either in the nineteen thirties when they were writing or even in the past, however distant. Instead the maps illustrated the *possible* extension of this form of tenure according to the criteria which their compilers laid down for it: wheat-growing plains along a moving frontier of settlement.

Under the Mandate when the most important analyses of *musha'* were made, the actual extension of this form of landholding was quite iable: It is possible to give a somewhat schematic account of the various locales which held it at one time or another, moving from southwest Syria around the Fertile Crescent towards the northeast:

<---Fig. 6. Extension of *musha'* in the Levant according to Jacques Weulersse. Eastern limits are approximate. *Source:* Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), Fig. 16, 98. There is a similar, but somewhat cruder map in André Latron, *La Vie rurale en Syrie et au Liban: étude d'économie sociale*, Mémoires de L'Institut français de Damas (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), Map II facing 176.

³² Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 497.

³³ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, Map II facing 176; Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, Fig. 16, 98.



TURKEY

IRAQ

JORDAN

SYRIA

PALESTINE

Alexandretta

Ladhqiya

Halba

Beirut

Damascus

Qunaytira

Jarablus

Mambij

Al-Bab

Aleppo

Maskana

Idlib

Maitat-al-Nu'man

Hamah

Salimiya

Hums

Masyaf

Qariyayn

Dayr al-Zur

Ras al-Ayn

Hassaja

R. Tigris

R. Euphrates

A>Hawran. Observers agreed that the Hawran was the *locus classicus* of this form of cultivation. Achard writing in 1925 said that *musha* ‘included the greater part of the cultivable lands’. Moreover the land was still redistributed at that time.³⁴ Eliahu Epstein writing in 1936 says that it was to be found ‘in many districts’ especially on what he termed ‘leased’ (*affermé*) land.³⁵

From the description of its operation given by Achard, it appears that *musha* here was of the quantified-share type. The Hawran epitomised the conditions necessary for this form of tenure: It had been the premier grain-producing area of Syria since the middle of the nineteenth century, and was a frontier zone where communal solidarity was all-important in the face of the rigours of life on the edge of the desert. Such cohesion was all the more necessary to sustain the cultivators in face of that economic depression and political turbulence which characterised this region during the late Ottoman period.

←---**Fig. 7. Syria and Lebanon: Extension of *musha* cultivation.** *Source of base map: Stephen H. Longrigg, Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). Source of information on *musha*: author.*

³⁴ Achard, ‘Propriété rurale . . .,’ 9, 12. ; ‘Les Problèmes . . .le problème agraire,’ 7, 9.

³⁵ Eliahu Epstein, ‘Le Hauran et ses habitants,’ *AF*, XXXVI, 343, September-October, 1936, 247; *Idem*, ‘Notes from a paper on the present conditions in the Hauran,’ *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, XXIII, Part IV, October, 1936, 600. In fact, his ‘lease’ was probably a share tenancy (*muzara’a*) since leasing for a money rent was comparatively rare in Syria except for land bearing gardens or orchards. For the *muzara’a*, see *infra*. For leases, see Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 73-77. Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali says that the ‘most prevalent method [of tenure] in Hauran is the leasing of land for a specified quantity of grain’. Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali, *Khitat al-Sham*, III (Damascus, 1925), 214-216 in Issawi (ed.), *FCDEH*, 331.

B>Jabal Druz. The Jabal Druz also had a form of what might be termed *musha'* tenure. The land here was held in common and redistributed among the peasants every three years. Nevertheless in a society where leading families exercised preponderant power over their dependents, the lords claimed a right to the best third of the land and had it cultivated for them by the peasants.

Whether one could consider the system of land tenure practised in the Jabal Druz as true *musha'* is questionable. Whilst communal solidarity among the peasants was determined by their ties to the land and the rights each held in it, at the level of the Druze community, solidarity was expressed by the ties of obligation and dependence between the Druze peasants and their lords.

In the revolt of 1889-90, it was peasant solidarity which proved the operative factor. Their resentment at what was to them an unjust land distribution arrangement led to the creation of a 'commune' (*'ammiya*), and to demands for an allocation which the cultivators themselves would control.

The rebellion of 1925 was another matter. It was animated by the grievances of the entire Druze community in the face of what they saw as unwarranted interference by an alien power. The revolt occurred even though this power appeared to take the side of the cultivator against his lords, abolishing the system of triennial reallootments in favour of a policy in which he who planted a plot with vines was given

title to it. In this case, communal solidarity overrode the interest of a particular status group.³⁶

Moreover with the end of the revolt in 1926, the Mandatory authorities began to take measures to bring an end to *musha'* tenure. Over the next ten years progress was made in the individuation of properties with the consolidation of strips and the definitive abolition of periodic re-allocation. Impetus towards individuation was given by the introduction of fruit tree cultivation, and the Druze lords, the large landowners who had previously favoured redistribution, now became keen to hold onto the land which they had planted with orchards. Moreover since much of this land was mortgaged to the Agricultural Bank, redistribution became much more difficult than in the past.³⁷

C>Biqā'. A third region where *musha'* tenure was prevalent was the Biqā'. It was here that the initial attempts were made by the Cadastral Survey to consolidate the tiny slivers of land into more workable blocs. In the Biqā', *musha'* had become 'stabilised', i.e. the

³⁶ For the events of 1890, see Introduction *supra*. For the changes in tenure as one factor contributing to the revolt of 1925-27, see for example, 1>MAE, *Rapport provisoire* . . . 1925, 13; 2>Elizabeth P. MacCallum, *The Nationalist Crusade in Syria* (New York: The Foreign Policy Association, 1928), 111-112; 3>Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 156-57.

³⁷ MAE, *Rapport* . . . 1929, 89; 1930, 117; 1931, 116; 1932, 120; 1933, 114; 1934, 126; 1935, 126; 1937, 114; 1938, 118-19. Since the Jabal Druz had been the centre of the most serious challenge to French rule in Syria, the Mandatory authorities certainly encouraged the transformation of Druze lords, leaders of their community, into large landlords who were preoccupied with the aggrandizement of their estates and more likely to be supporters of the French who allowed them to do this.

lots were no longer re-apportioned.³⁸ Communal disciplines of cultivation were maintained, but the plots were well on their way to becoming properties held in individual possession worked by family production units.³⁹

D>Damascus. No observer mentions the Damascus region as being one which hosted *musha'*. Perhaps this was because the Ghuta had been densely settled for a long time and most of the land with its orchards and gardens would have been *mulk*.

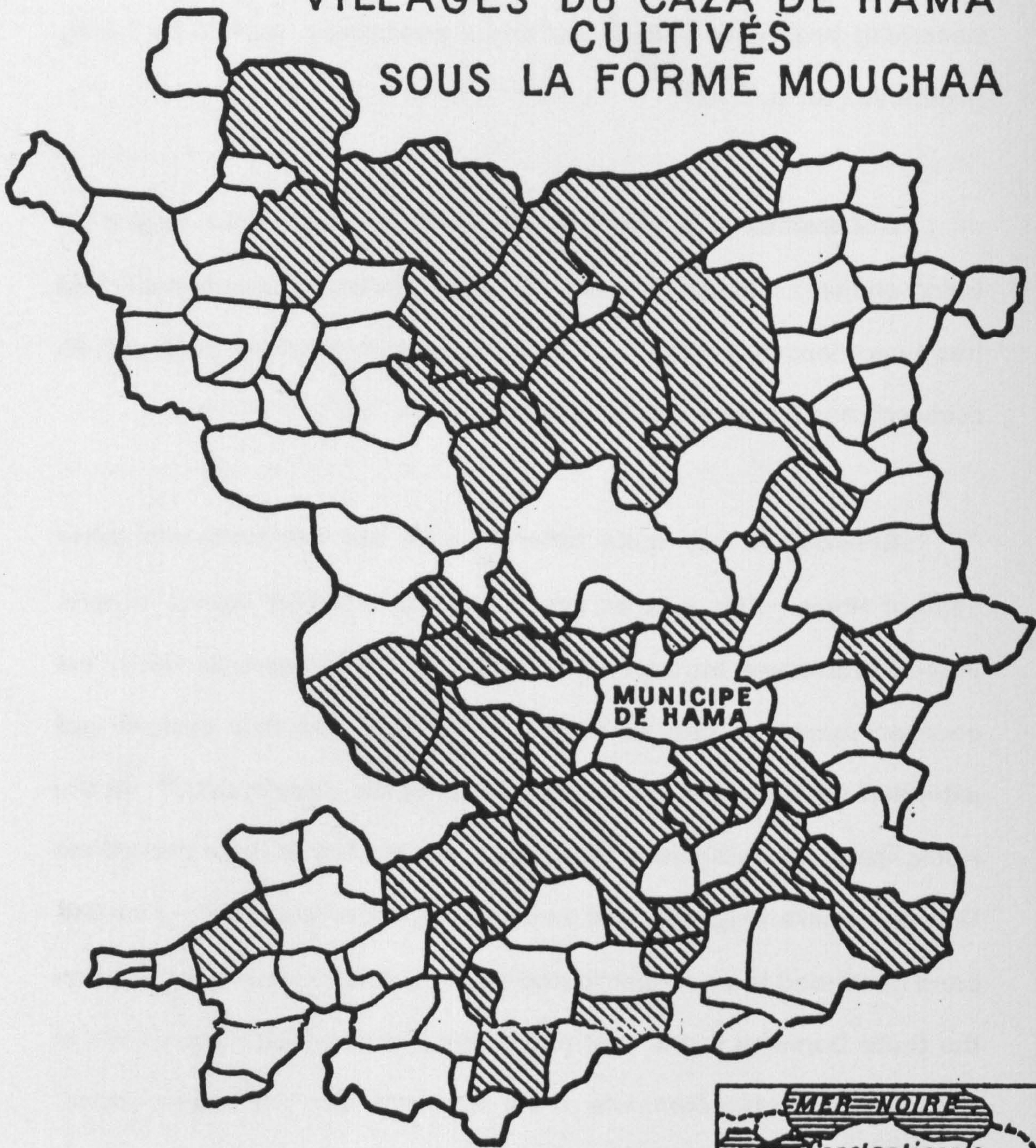
E>Homs. It was quite different with the *liwal muhafaza* (after 1936) of Homs. This was an area of well-established *musha'* tenure. Indeed Weulersse attributes the ability of the villagers to resist the encroachments of city notables to the fact that this system had extended such deep roots into the fabric of the countryside.⁴⁰ In the Homs *qada'*, the stabilised form of *musha'* existed in the valley of the Orontes where irrigated land had much greater economic potential. Land continued to be re-distributed by the quantified shares method on the State Domains to the east (Qariatayn *qada'*) which formed 69% of the *liwa* and on the *latifundia* of the city notables. The 'open ended'

³⁸ For a discussion of the process and result of 'stabilisation', see 1>Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 190-94; 2>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 104-06; 3>Firestone, 'The land-equalizing . . .', 94.

³⁹ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 183-98, *passim*; Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 104, 108, 189-91.

⁴⁰ Jacques Weulersse, *L'Oronte: étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et Cie, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), 71.

VILLAGES DU CAZA DE HAMA
CULTIVÉS
SOUS LA FORME MOUCHAA



Villages cultivés sous la forme
Mouchaa (en tout ou en partie)

"ASIE FRANÇAISE"



method had practically disappeared except perhaps on the confines of the desert where there was extensive unoccupied land.⁴¹

F>Hama. In the *liwal muhafaza* (after 1936) of Hama to the north, *musha'* tenure existed, but to a lesser extent. A study by Jean Gaulmier of the land tenure system of Hama *qada'* which was done in 1933 clearly demonstrated the grip of the notables on the villages of the *qada'* and the inability of the *musha'* system to resist them. The notables owned 109 out of the 114 villages and parts of two others. The inhabitants of 33 out of the 114 villages in the *qada'* practised *musha'* cultivation. Notables had complete ownership of 29 of these villages, and part ownership of two others. Of these 33 *musha'* villages, only two, the large and long-established Greek Orthodox village of Kafr Buhum and the Sunni Arab village of Surana were wholly-owned by their inhabitants.⁴²

Weulersse, citing a census made by the Cadastral Survey in 1935, says that half the cultivated land was held in *musha'*.⁴³ Is it that the 33 (out of 114) villages cited by Gaulmier as being *musha'* (i.e. 29%) worked fifty percent of the land? It seems improbable on the face of it,

<---Fig. 8 Villages in the *qada'* of Hama cultivated under *musha'* in 1933.
Source: Anon. [Jean Gaulmier], 'Notes sur la propriété foncière dans la Syrie centrale,' *L'Asie Française*, XXXIII, 309 April, 1933, 134.

⁴¹ Anwar Naaman, 'Précisions sur la structure agraire dans la région de Homs-Hama (Syrie),' *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes Français*, March-April, 1950, 53-59.

⁴² Anon. [Gaulmier], 131-32, 134.

⁴³ Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, 358, fn 1.

but a look at the map of the *musha'* villages included in Gaulmier's account reveals that a large proportion of these villages were in fact quite large .

Thus in the Hama region, where the power of the notables had attained its greatest extent, the communal form of tenure was much reduced both in scope and in power. Moreover the peasants were utterly miserable and continued to be so for many years after the end of the Mandate. Bernard Orgels, a Belgian researcher who studied Syrian agriculture in the late nineteen fifties concluded his study of a village in the Hama region by stating that 'Poverty reigned everywhere. No radios, no newspapers, no gathering places as in other *muhafazas*, no bus line passing through the village where everything is misery and filth.'⁴⁴

F1>Salamiya. In Salamiya district, the eastern *qada'* of this *liwa*, there existed a stabilised form of *musha'* tenure. Here the village land was divided into two or more blocs with at least half in fallow whilst the other was split into cultivated strips. Each landholder had one or more strips in each bloc, and the cropped land which was located in one sector or in two contiguous ones was worked under a communal discipline. The practice of reallocating the strips was followed less here than elsewhere, and in any case the last partition took place before the First World War.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bernard Orgels, 'Contribution à l'étude des problèmes agricoles de la Syrie,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Brussels), 4, 1960, 73.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *Nomads . . .*, 63.

G>Ghab and 'Amuq. Both Latron and Weulersse stated that there was *musha'* tenure on the plains of the Ghab and the 'Amuq, continuations of the Biqua' where it was possible (in theory at least) to replicate the conditions of the interior plains.⁴⁶ Weulersse notes that a typical village in the Ghab might be situated on the slope of the Jabal Ansayria, and work two kinds of properties, each under the appropriate form of tenure. The peasants would cultivate lands situated on the incline as individual holdings whilst holding those on the Orontes plain as *musha'* under its communal disciplines.

H>'Akkar. Perhaps the peasants of the 'Akkar plain, north and east of Tripoli, once held their properties in *musha'*. There is a tradition among them that the *beys*, the lords of the region 'deprived' them of these rights long ago.⁴⁷

I>Aleppo. In the *vilayet/muhafaza* (after 1936) of Aleppo where there was a range of climate, *musha'* tenure tended to vary according to region. One can divide the areas of the *vilayet* into three climatic zones: The region *northwest* of the city of Aleppo (*qada'* of Jabal Samaan) is a quite well-watered area with rainfall of some 400 mm *per annum*. The band of territory stretching *southwest-northeast* of Aleppo

⁴⁶ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 183; Weulersse., *Le Pays . . .*, 372 and 373, Fig. 150; *Paysans . . .*, 108.

⁴⁷ Michael Gilson, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1996), 13.

(*qada's* of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, Idlib, Aleppo City, Bab, Manbij, and Jarablus) receives 300-400 mm. Finally in the area *east-southeast* of the *vilayet* (the *qada'* of Maskana) one finds the driest area with some 200-300 mm. of rain.

In the *qada's* located in the better watered areas in the western part of the *vilayet*--the so-called *Ma'mura* or 'settled' zone), various observers noted the existence of *musha'* tenure:

I.1>Ma'arrat al-Nu'man. In Ma'arrat al-Nu'man *qada'* located in the southwest corner of the *vilayet*, Achard stated that the cadastre which was completed in 1924 found that 60 out of its 139 villages were held under *musha'* tenure.⁴⁸

I.2>Idlib. *Musha'* tenure continued north and east into Idlib *qada'*. Louise Sweet, who studied the village of Tal Tuqan in 1954,⁴⁹ noted that like all others 'in the part east of the Aleppo-Damascus highway', this community followed the two-field system (as in Salamiya), with the south and east sides left fallow whilst the north and west sides were cultivated. As in Salamiya, the lands were held in stabilised *musha'* tenure with the peasants having strips in each of thirty-two subdivisions, each differing in soil type and quality. The shares were limited to thirty-six, and were measured in *faddans*. When

⁴⁸ Achard 'Propriété rurale . . .', 9; 'Les Problèmes . . .le problème agraire,' 7.

⁴⁹ This village lay sixty-five kilometres south of Aleppo on the southern edge of the al-Matakh swamp into which flowed the river Quwayk.

she wrote there was no redistribution, although there had apparently been one sometime in the past.⁵⁰

I.3>Jabal Samaan. In the area of Jabal Samaan *qada'* French officials in the 1930's, as mentioned above, commented that here *musha'* tenure had re-distributions every three years in contrast to the annual allocations to be found in the *muhafaza* of Homs.⁵¹

I.4>Jarablus, Bab, Manbij, and Maskana. In the areas east of Aleppo stretching to the Euphrates, and contained within the *qada's* of Jarablus, Bab, Manbij, and Maskana the evidence for *musha'* tenure is scanty, although Latron notes that the village of Safira, 25 km. southeast of Aleppo on the Aleppo-Maskana road, was the largest *musha'* village in Syria with an area of 18,000 hectares.⁵² Its vast size was perhaps due to the fact that it was located on the edge of the desert zone.

There appear to be no other reports of the existence of *musha'* villages in this zone which was re-settled starting in the late 1870's. This does not mean that they did not exist for in this pre-eminent frontier zone, so similar in this way to the Hawran, communal cohesion

⁵⁰ Louise E. Sweet, *Tell Toqaan: A Syrian Village*, Anthropological Papers, Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 14 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960), 50, 64. Note that she does not employ *musha'* to describe the general organisation of landholding in 'her' village. She only mentions it in connexion with certain odd-shaped plots located on shallow stony soil which could not be worked communally, and had individual owners. She states (64) that these plots were 'named *ard musha'* 'formerly'. This leads one to believe that these were examples of those parcels which Latron says were taken out of *musha'* allocation and given to those individuals who made an effort to cultivate them as their own property. See Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 190.

⁵¹ *Supra*, 140 and fn 15.

⁵² Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 184 and fn 2 and Plate II, 192-93.

was absolutely necessary when faced with the rigours of pioneering in a hostile environment. Here the problem was not the threat of beduin raids for the beduin tribes in the area were small and weak. Moreover much of the land in the *qada's* of Manbij, Bab, and Maskana had been acquired by Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid who provided units of gendarmerie to protect the settlers on his land.⁵³ It was simply that in a region where agriculture was problematic, the peasant community was forced to stick together in order to make a success of their new venture. There was no better way to maintain this cohesion than to organise the villages around the principle of *musha'*.

J>Euphrates valley. In their study of the village of Shams al-Din Tannira, Helga Seeden and Muhamed Kaddour have demonstrated that *musha'* tenure was and is prevalent in the valley of the Euphrates, in villages along both its banks.⁵⁴ Here they find evidence of *musha'* in village lands whose owners continued to follow this pattern even after the imposition of the land reform in 1964. The authors give a description of the mechanism used to carry out this process which is similar to those furnished by Achard and other observers writing during the Mandate. That such a pattern should persist even after the

⁵³ 270,000 hectares and 333 villages in the area between the Euphrates and Bab; 175,000 hectares and 234 villages in the region south of Aleppo. For these figures and a discussion of the *Sultaniya* lands in the area east of Aleppo, see Lewis, *Nomads . . .*, 53-54 and Map 3, 16.

⁵⁴ The Euphrates valley was the most densely populated part of eastern Syria. Moussly says that during the 1940's there were 104 villages with 57,000 inhabitants on its left bank and 115 villages with a population of 139,700 on its right one. Moussly, 219.

institution of a measure hailed as the panacea for most of the ills which beset the countryside certainly demonstrates its efficacy in the eyes of the cultivators.⁵⁵

K>Jazira. It is unlikely that *musha'* tenure was to be found east of the Euphrates in the vast lands of the Jazira with the exception perhaps of the valleys of the Balikh and the western Khabur. In this region there were few peasants and fewer villages, and these were concentrated in the river valleys.⁵⁶ Many of its inhabitants were refugees with no agricultural tradition. Others were beduin with little incentive to settle on the land. Moreover when it was developed for agriculture in the nineteen thirties, but particularly after the Second World War, the dearth of cultivators led to the introduction of machine-driven cultivation of vast areas where Aleppine entrepreneurs could achieve economies of scale on the Australian or American model. Therefore this was capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive cultivation.

K.1>Bec de Canard. In the Jazira, there was one exception to the general absence of *musha'* cultivation. This was the so-called 'Bec de Canard', that part of the High Jazira in the far northeast (administratively the *muhafaza* of Jazira) where officials of the Cadastral Survey recorded the existence of what was obviously

⁵⁵ Seeden and Kaddour, 501-03.

⁵⁶ For example, in the valley of the Khabur during the 1940's, the population was evaluated at some 41,500 souls inhabiting 102 villages. Moussly, 227.

*musha'*⁵⁷ This was a zone of new tillage on a frontier between desert and sown and between Arab and Kurd. The law of the strongest ruled as tribal shaykhs and city notables put forth dubious land claims based on ancient *sened tapus* and presumed rights of pasturage. Therefore there was a real need for peasant solidarity, and the cultivators worked their lands under communal discipline using a biennial rotation. This was an open-ended *musha'* system based on the *faddan*. When the maximum surface which it seemed possible to cultivate was attained, the holdings were stabilised. First the land was divided into sections, one planted and one fallow. Then the owner of each team was given the same number of parcels in each section so that each had equal number of homologous plots.

The writer of the Cadastral report stated that the system which he found used to divide the lands of the High Jazira 'seemed similar to what had already been observed in other regions of Syria, for example, the Aleppo region'. It certainly seems to be the same as the system which Lewis noted in Salamiya, and Sweet noted in Tal Tuqan and neighbouring districts of the *Ma'mura*.

Even such a schematic survey as this shows that during the Mandate period, the areas where one would expect *musha'* tenure held it to a greater or lesser extent: i.e. the interior plains on the edge of the

⁵⁷ Régie des travaux de cadastre et d'amélioration foncière des Etats de Syrie et du Liban. République Syrienne, Mohafazat de Djezireh: 'Rapport général de reconnaissance foncière de la Djezireh,' 7 April 1941, 30-31. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 413.

cultivated zone whose basic crop was dry-farmed cereals. Nonetheless, having said this, one must make an important caveat: Latron points out that whilst in general there were two zones, one of individually-owned properties and one of communal properties, within each zone were examples of the other form of property. Weulersse seconds this by noting the following:

L>**Masyaf qada'**. In this district of the Jabal Ansayria, there existed certain villages which were held under open-ended *musha'* tenure with annual redistributions.⁵⁸

Whether *musha'* cultivation sprang from beduin society or the exigencies of peasant life, its disciplines embodied the cohesion necessary for the success of a village community settled in the transitional zone. Yet this particular method of organising the agrarian process did not remain in stasis, but was subjected to a natural mutation over time by two processes which held an equal place in the evolution of the countryside. The first was the creation of *latifundia* controlled by absentee landlords whilst the second was the gradual stabilisation and ultimate individuation of the *musha'* properties themselves.

⁵⁸ Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, 358, fn 4.

II.4>Peasant and landlord: the web of obligation

The classifications of land defined by certain legal categories (*mulk, miri*, etc.) whose roots stretched back to the first centuries of the Islamic era were important in theory, but in reality did not affect the relationship between the village community and its land because they were not germane to the daily round of the peasant and his family. Far more important from the cultivator's point of view was the pattern of domination existing in the countryside, because it was this which determined who controlled the farmlands and their revenue at any given moment. *Latifundia* had to some degree long been part of the Syrian agricultural scene. Some notables had obtained control over large estates before the promulgation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, whilst others did so in the period between 1858 and 1914. Such acquisitions reached a crescendo during the Great War and the first years of peace when a certain degree of administrative anarchy enabled speculators, enriched by the profits of war to acquire vast landed properties. This was particularly the case in the Bika', in 'Akkar, and particularly in the districts of Homs and Hama 'where a few families acquired almost all the cultivable area in the surrounding plains'.⁵⁹

The opportunity to gain control over vast properties had been facilitated by the Land Code. First, it had enabled tribal shaykhs to be transformed into large landlords by the stroke of a pen with the

⁵⁹ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 212-13; Klat, 'Land tenure . . .', 55-56.

registration of communal grazing lands of the tribe in their own names as leaders and representatives of their communities. For example, in 1875, the grazing lands of the Fadl tribe in the Jawlan were registered in the name of several tribal leaders.

Another way in which shaykhs were turned into landlords stemmed from the deliberate Ottoman policy of awarding them income from a certain number of villages as an inducement to settle with their tribes. The village lands were then registered in their names, but the intended result usually did not occur. Few tribesmen deigned to settle on the land, and therefore the new 'landlords' were forced to employ villagers to work their lands as share tenants. In this manner did the Ottoman award of twenty villages around Aleppo to Jad'an b. Muhayd of the Fid'an tribe in 1865 convert this shaykh into a proprietor.⁶⁰

A second method of acquiring estates was for a city notable from one of the great families to obtain land within a village community. His title was rendered more secure after the promulgation of the Land Code because the holding of a title in the form of a *sened tapu* rendered possession legitimate in the eyes of the law. Moreover the period from the end of the 1870's to the beginning of the century saw a

⁶⁰ For a discussion of this process, see Dawn Chatty, 'From camel to truck: A study of the pastoral economy of the Al-Fadl and the Al-Hassana in the Beqaa valley of Lebanon,' Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974, 68-69. This process of sedentarisation continued under the Mandate. For a contemporary account, see A. de Boucheman, 'La sédentarisation des nomades du désert de Syrie,' *AF*, XXXIV, 320, May, 1934, 140-43. Also Philip H. Khoury, 'The tribal shaykh, French tribal policy, and the nationalist movement in Syria between two world wars,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, XVIII, 2, April, 1982, 180-93.

fall in agricultural prices which brought economic depression to the countryside. Since the peasant was devoid of financial resources to tide him over the bad years, this long crisis pushed him ever more firmly into the arms of the notable/moneylender.⁶¹

This relationship between notable and cultivator was heavily weighted in favour of the former who was endowed with clear political and social primacy. Weulersse speaks of the 'brutal divide' between town and country, between proprietor and peasant, each living in a world alien to the other. For him, the city and its representatives are "encysted" in a countryside which they dominate and exploit.⁶² In this relationship, the lord was paramount because it was he who controlled the land, and he who initiated the various types of production contract and set the terms. The economic supremacy of the lord was reinforced by an entrenched political and social authority which stemmed from the support of whatever administration held sway in Damascus or Aleppo. As an *agha*⁶³ or wealthy urban merchant his status was so far superior

⁶¹ For a general discussion of this process, see Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 114-116; with reference to the Hama region, Anon. [Gaulmier], 133-134.

⁶² Weulersse elaborated this idea in 1>'La primauté des cités dans l'économie syrienne,' Union Géographique Internationale, *Comptes-rendus du Congrès International de Géographie* (Amsterdam, 1938), II, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), 233-39; 2>*Paysans . . .*, 85-89 and 113-21.

⁶³ In Ottoman Syria, the *aghawat* (pl. of *agha*) were originally commanders of central government troops sent to garrison Damascus and other cities. Since over the years, they came to control bodies of what were in essence paramilitary troops, they were able to establish their own political and economic predominance both within the cities and over various districts of the countryside. So much so that the peasants came to use the appellation 'agha' for the notables who came to control rural properties. The great notable and landowning 'Azm family of Damascus and Hama is a case in point. For the *aghawat* and their rôle in Ottoman Damascus, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag

to that of the humble cultivator that the latter was hesitant to dispute his will, particularly when that will was expressed through the intermediary of an overseer (*wakil*), one who held the authority of the master and could make the life of the peasant a misery should he not comply.⁶⁴

If such predominance was characteristic of the city notable in his relations with the countryside, it became equally true for the tribal shaykh. For the acquisition of what had been property common to the tribe now set him apart from his fellows as it transformed into a great landlord one who hitherto had been merely a *primus inter pares*.

In order to gain an understanding of this pattern of domination and the changes which flowed from it, one must begin by looking at the primary economic relationship and the ties of dependence which it created: After the enactment of the Ottoman Land Law of 1858, many of the *multazims* who had held the cultivated lands as a tax farm from the Ottoman government gradually became transmuted into landlords who held a *sened tapu* which gave them title to those same lands. Whether tax farmer or title-holding proprietor, the notable was interested first and foremost in income to support the extravagance necessary to assert his own status. He did not care by what method it was produced, and so was unlikely to disturb those communal systems

Wiesbaden GMBH, 1985), 108, 110-114. For a history of the 'Azm family, see *Ibid.*, 136-44. For the use of the appellation 'agha' by the peasants, see Weulersse, 1>'La primauté . . .', 237; 2>*Paysans . . .*, 113

⁶⁴ For the *wakil*, and his rôle, see 1>Klat, 'Land tenure . . .', 108-112; 2>Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 83-84 for his economic function; 3>'Abdallah Hanna, *al-Qadiya al-zira'iyah wa'l-harikat al-fallahiyah fi Suriya wa Lubnan, 1920-1945* (Beirut; Dar al-Farabi, 1978), 386; and 4>Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, fn 2 on 364, 366 for their social rôle.

of tenure which had proved themselves over time. Therefore the links which the lord made with his peasants were superimposed upon those which they had forged among themselves. The bases of these ties were different forms of oral production contracts. Such contracts varied a great deal since they were determined by the quality of the land and the type of crop. At this most basic level, there was a delicate balance between the needs of proprietor and cultivator, a balance which had evolved from hard experience over the centuries into mechanisms which extracted the maximum amount for the lord consonant with the well-being of the peasant-producer.⁶⁵

The most basic relationship between landlord and tenant was the *muzar'a* contract. This was an agreement of *métayage* or sharecropping which in its Middle Eastern guise was broadly defined as an association in which one of the partners furnished the land whilst the other supplied the labour with the results of this labour being divided between them.⁶⁶ In fact the production contracts between landlord and *métayer* (*muzari*) were quite various, each one reflecting the revenue-bearing capacities of the plot concerned. Since the domains taken over were in areas of ancient exploitation, labour-intensive, and following accustomed routines, the landlord was forced to make contracts with numerous small existing production units and was unable to impose uniform economies of scale, even if he might have so

⁶⁵ Achard draws attention to this valuable point in his report on Syria written after his first visit in 1919. Achard, 'Notes sur la Syrie,' 101.

⁶⁶ For this contract, see Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 48-58; Klat, 'Land tenure . . .,' 119-25.

TABLE II.1
TYPES OF MUZAR'A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN LANDLORD AND TENANT IN SYRIA,
SHOWING CROPSHARE; WHAT EACH PARTNER SUPPLIED; HOW EXPENSES WERE SPLIT; AND
WHO PAID THE TAXES DUE

<i>Contract</i>	<i>Cropshare</i>		<i>What supplied</i>			<i>Expenses</i>		<i>Tax paid</i>	
	Landlord	Tenant	Landlord	Tenant	Work	Landlord	Tenant	Landlord	Tenant
Muraba'	75	25	Land/House	Work	All	All Land tax		All Land tax	
			Beasts/Seed			All Tithe		All Tithe	
Hamawiya	50	50	Land/House	Work	50	All Land Tax		All Land Tax	
			50 Beasts	50 Beasts	50	50 Tithe		50 Tithe	50 Tithe
			50 Seed	50 Seed					
Halabiya	50	50	Land/House/Seed	Beasts/Work	50	All Land Tax		All Land Tax	
						50 Tithe		50 Tithe	50 Tithe
Khums	20	80	Land/House	Beasts/Seed/Work	All	All Land Tax		All Land Tax	
						50 Tithe		50 Tithe	50 Tithe

Note: Tithe paid at a rate of 12.5%. This table serves as only a rough guide because there were variations even within a single region. At one extreme was the *muraba'* (quarter share) partnership where the landlord had the most power over his tenants: He supplied the land and all the capital, bore all the expenses of production, paid all the taxes, and in return took 75% of the crop. At the other was the *khums* (fifth share) partnership where the landlord supplied only the land and house whilst paying the land tax and half the tithe. For his part, the tenant supplied all the capital, bore all the expenses of production, paid half the tithe, and in return for assuming most of the risk, took 80% of the crop. In the *hamawiya* and *halabiya* partnerships, the capital, expenses, and proceeds were more or less split 50/50.

Sources: 1>'Abdallah Hanna, *al-qadiya al-zira'iya wa'l-harikat al-fallahiya fi suriya wa lubnan*, 1920-1945 (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1978), 51-52; 2>Anon [Jean Gaulmier], 'Notes sur la propriété foncière dans la Syrie centrale, *L'Asie Française*, XXXIII, 309, April, 1933, 135 modified by information in 3>André Latron, *La Vie rurale en Syrie et au Liban: étude d'économie sociale*, Mémoires de l'Institut français de Damas (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), 53.

wished. The main principle behind these contracts was to keep a careful balance between the needs of the tenant and those of his lord. This was particularly important because so many of the territories concerned were in regions of marginal production, and a particularly greedy landlord could drive away his tenants and by doing so kill the goose who laid the golden egg. Thus in drier areas, the tenant farmed a much bigger area and was allowed to keep a larger proportion of the crop, up to 70-80%, whilst in more fertile areas, the peasant and landlord took a more equal share of the production and its expenses.⁶⁷

Subsumed under the *muzar'a* were a number of subtypes: First came the *sharika muraba'* (quarter partnership) where the landlord supplied everything and paid all the taxes and expenses, and in return took 75% of the crop. Then came two more egalitarian contracts, the *sharika halabiya* (Aleppo partnership) and *sharika hamawiya* (Hama partnership) where the capital supplied by each partner, the expenses, and the proceeds were more or less split fifty/fifty. Finally came the *sharika khums* (fifth partnership) where the landlord supplied only the land and the house, whilst paying the land tax for his tenant. He allowed the tenant to take 80% in return for his capital input of beasts and seed.

Within these broad subtypes, there appeared variations even within a single region, depending on the amount and regularity of rainfall; the fertility of the soil; whether there was sufficient water for

⁶⁷ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 50.

irrigation; the availability of manpower to work the land; and finally the power of the landlords over the peasants. These factors taken together determined what each partner brought to the association and what each got out of it.

Latron states that in northern Syria, the *hamawiya* contract was so-called because it was used for the richer lands around Hama and Salamiya, but was not to be found around Aleppo. By contrast, the *halabiya* contract was employed in the less fertile regions around Aleppo [S and SE. of Aleppo must be meant]. In Hama and Salamiya, this contract was adopted only for tenancy agreements with very poor peasants.⁶⁸

Gaulmier, for his part, notes something entirely different for the Hama district. He remarks that there the *khums* contract was that most frequently to be found, and included some seventy percent of the agreements made.⁶⁹ It is possible to attribute the difference in the comments of Latron and Gaulmier to the fact that perhaps the *hamawiya* contract was used for that part of the Hama district situated in the valley of the Orontes whilst the *halabiya* or *khums* contracts were employed in those areas which were either in the marshy Asharna valley or in the drier portions to the east of the river.

For his part, Klat offers a comparison of production contracts from three areas⁷⁰:

⁶⁸ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 51.

⁶⁹ Anon. [Gaulmier], 135.

⁷⁰ Klat, 'Land tenure . . .,' 120-121.

In the Jazira, landlords received 10% of the crop when they supplied the land only; 25% when they supplied land and seed; and 2/3 when they supplied land, seed and plough animals.⁷¹

In Aleppo, by contrast, the landlord received 20% if he furnished the land alone; and 50%, if he furnished land and seed (a type of *halabiya* contract).

In Damascus, the lord received 25% if he provided the land; and 50% if he provided land and half the seed.

This schema illustrates clearly, the changing balance of power between proprietor and tenant. In the Jazira, the landlord was forced to give more to attract tenants, who in their turn, needed more with which to support their families. Yet if the landlord supplied everything, in return he took the lion's share. The extreme nature of these terms of contract reflected the difficulties facing both the cultivator and the landlord. Here there were few peasants, few towns, and rainfall was erratic. Because conditions were difficult, the peasants had to work more land and receive more capital support in order to cultivate successfully. For his part, the landlord needed cultivators, but he also had to put out more capital expense which was demonstrated by the great value put on the supply of a plough team which was probably brought from some distance away. Nonetheless the relationship

⁷¹ Note that Klat's presentation is a schematic one. In fact, in the Bec de Canard at least there were numerous variations ranging from 15-50% to the landlord although the average worked out at between 15 and 22% with the *muzari'* supplying work, seed, and beasts whilst the landlord paid the taxes. This was a form of *khums* contract. See Régie des travaux du cadastre . . . , 'Rapport général de reconnaissance foncière . . . ,' 28-29.

between the two partners was inherently unequal, and he who controlled the capital could demand more of the proceeds in return.⁷²

In Aleppo, where the climate was somewhat better,⁷³ and the peasants more plentiful, the landlord could afford to offer less. Finally in Damascus whose Ghuta' was famed for its fertility, the landlord took the most from his tenants, secure in the knowledge that he could easily attract others. He knew that he could get more revenue because the rich soil would yield more for him whilst supplying the peasants with enough for their own needs.

Moreover Klat notes that irrigated lands were always worth more to the lord--in general double. For example, in Mishirfa in the plain of Homs, the share of the lord who supplied land alone went from 20% for unirrigated properties (the same as around Aleppo) whilst it rose to 42.5% on irrigated ones. In the Homs region as a whole, sometimes the landlord's share rose to 60%. Out of his portion, he was expected to pay for any water charges and to maintain the irrigation system.

⁷² Given the importance of machinery in the development of the Jazira after the Second World War, it is interesting to note Klat's comments on the effect the introduction of such machines had on contracts in western Syria and the Lebanon. He says that the usual procedure was for the tenants to hire the machines from their landlords in return for a specified portion of the produce. In Mishirfa, in the Homs region, the landlord received an extra 10% on top of his usual share for the machines he loaned to his cultivators. On the other hand, some owners who were eager to encourage the peasants to mechanise their procedures charged a cash rent so small that it hardly covered either the operating expenses or the depreciation cost of the machines. Klat, 'Land tenure . . .', 121.

⁷³ Klat did not specify any particular part of the *vilayet*, but one can assume that he was not speaking of the drier eastern *qada's*. For example, during the nineteen thirties, peasants were bussed into the *qada's* of Bab and Manbij for the harvest.

In Damascus, it was a different story. Here where there was abundant water in contrast to the more arid region around Homs, there was no distinction between irrigated and unirrigated land in terms of the portions kept by the two associates.⁷⁴

The most extreme form of contract was the *muraba'* where the landlord furnished everything to his tenant, house, beasts and seed, and in return took seventy-five percent of the production. The fact that the common word for the tenant cultivator in Syria was *murabi'* bears mute witness to the misery of a large part of the peasantry in the face of the exactions of their masters.⁷⁵

In complete contrast, was a specialised contract known as the *mugharasa* which was most likely to be applied to *mulk* property. An agreement of this type was made in cases where the proprietor wished to create an orchard, a task which would take a number of years and would involve close supervision by his tenant. In order to persuade him to do this, the landlord was forced to offer incentives. For example, in one form of contract, the owner retained control of the land, but the two partners divided the trees among themselves in various proportions after they reached full maturity. The length of this type of contract depended upon the type of tree involved: four to six years for vines; three to five for mulberry trees; seven to eight for fig trees, and ten to twelve for olive trees. There were various stipulations attached to the *mugharasa*, some quite draconian: During the life of the contract, the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁷⁵ Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, 225.

peasant was neither allowed to pick half of the fruits nor to cede his rights to any third party. In essence he was considered merely a simple *muzar'i* with the rights of one. He received ownership of his portion of the trees, only when the partnership contract terminated. His possession only lasted so long as the trees remained alive, for if they died, the former *mugharasi* was not allowed to plant new ones. Finally, if the plantation failed, it was possible for the peasant to receive nothing, not even an indemnity for his time and expenses.

On the other hand, the contract might be extended beyond the original date set for its termination. This could occur if the trees did not reach sufficient maturity in the time allotted or if the two partners agreed that a prolongation was in their best interests even after they had divided the produce of their original association. All in all, it was possible for the *mugharasa* to be quite complex; although the proprietor retained the upper hand, the odds were more in favour of the tenant because his co-operation was vital in bringing the enterprise to a fruitful conclusion.⁷⁶

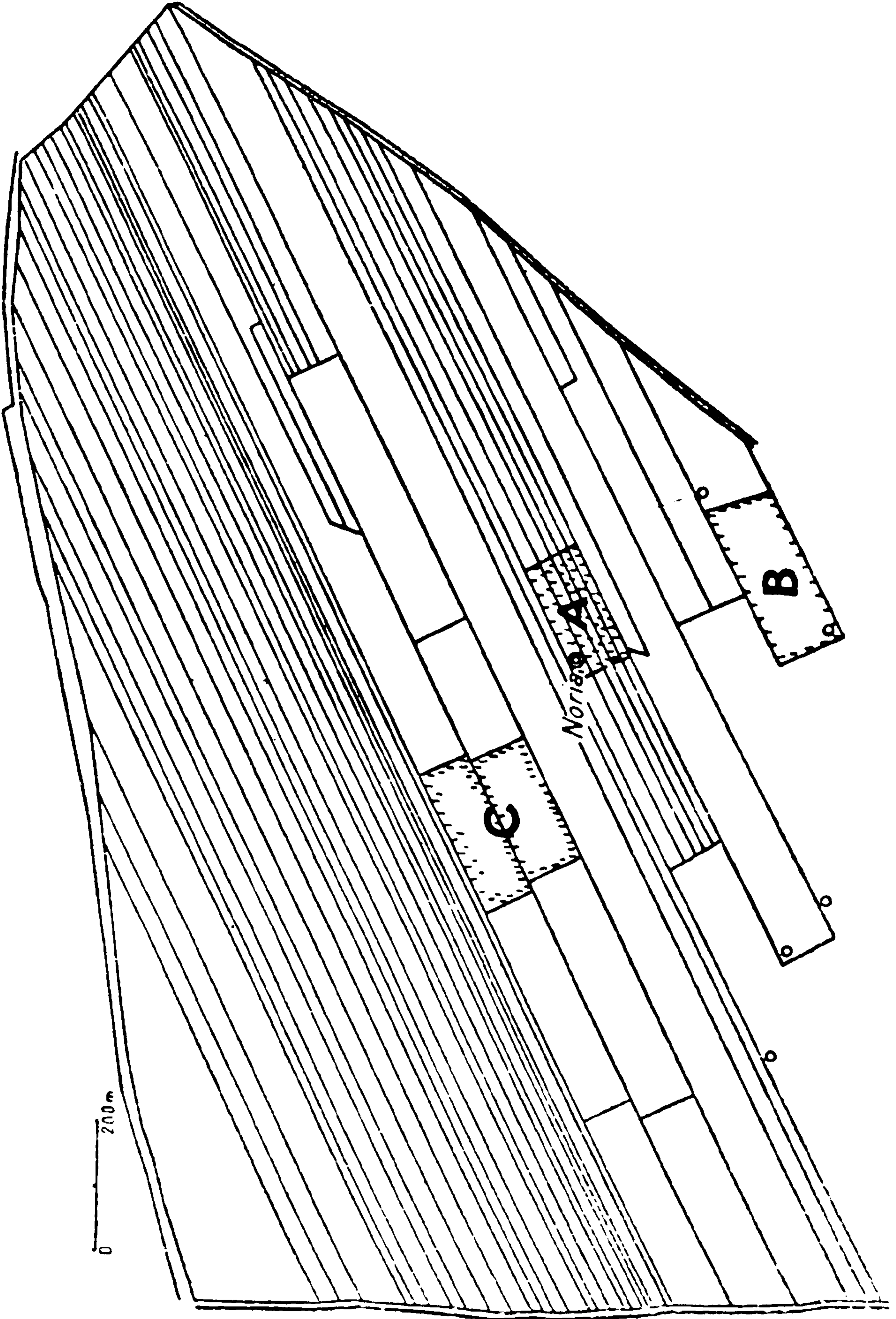
Nevertheless even a production contract such as the *mugharasa* which was most favourable to the cultivator left the landlord with an overwhelming preponderance of power. The supremacy of the notable in all its different aspects gradually gnawed at the independence of what may well once have been a self-sufficient peasant community.

⁷⁶ For an extended discussion of the *mugharasa* contract, see 1>Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 65-72; 2>Klat, 'Land tenure . . .', 128-33. This is also set out in the Ottoman Land Code, Arts. 25-29 although no mention is made of the *mugharasa per se*. Aristarchi Bey, I, 74-77; Young, VI, 52-53.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, the lord, whatever his origins, found it ever easier to spread his tentacles in the countryside, acquire property, and disrupt the solidarity of the village community should he so desire.

For if a communal form of tenure was the most efficient way to conduct an agricultural enterprise under the conditions prevalent in Syria, it would seem on the face of it that it would be foolish for the notable to tamper with this system. This was certainly true for the tax farmer who wished to extract the maximum amount of return in the quickest possible time. Whilst perhaps less so for the holder of the *malikane*, it was not really worth his while in the parlous conditions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to meddle with a system which had proved its worth over the years.

During this period powerful notables could not expand their properties legally because there was no Land Code with provisions for property registration and reception of title. Nonetheless this is not to say that lords did not see themselves as 'possessing' villages whose inhabitants they dominated and whose lands they controlled. In the 'Akkar, for example, the great landowners or 'beys' had been lords of the land since the eighteenth century when as outsiders--Kurds--from a distant region, they came to this unruly march at the behest of the Ottomans who appointed them *multazims*. They imposed themselves upon the villages by a combination of 'external force and imperial fiat',



0 200m

Noris

C

A

B

and over time 'their' villages became bound to them through 'shared narratives of the past, residence, and property'.⁷⁷

In the Levant, peasant villages had probably always been protected/dominated (which are, after all, two sides of the same coin) by the powerful, whether these were pashas, beys, or tribal shaykhs.⁷⁸ It was simply that from the middle of the nineteenth century, the situation in the countryside began to change. Rural districts gradually became more secure and the line of cultivation began to spread into areas untouched since the sixteenth century. An agricultural commodity, Syrian grain, became an export of value to the European market. Finally, the enactment of the 1858 Land Law, however imprecise its terms or inefficient its enforcement, gave the landholder a written and registered title which for the first time granted him secure 'ownership' of his properties. All of these factors presented the proprietor with an incentive and an opportunity both to increase his holdings and intrude into the communal arrangements practised by the villages.

<---Fig. 9. Part of the cadastral survey map of the village of Tal Aran (*qada'* of Jabal Samaan). This is a stabilised village which shows the first signs of individuation carried out in order to plant orchards. In section A, surrounding a *noria*, neighbouring parcels are simply rented. In sections B and C, individuation has become fully effective illustrated by the appearance of rectangular plots which break the normal *musha'* pattern of fields in parallel strips. *Source*: Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), Fig. 21, 106.

⁷⁷ Gilsean, *Lords . . .*, 12-13. See his comments on the meaning of ownership in *Idem*, 'A modern feudality? Land and labour in North Lebanon, 1858-1950,' in Khalidi (ed.), 455.

⁷⁸ Firestone elaborates on this point. 'The land-equalizing . . .,' 111-15.

One must not think that the incentive for change flowed only one way. The villagers too were open to new ideas: This generally took the form of moving away from a rotation cycle dominated by cereals into a more variegated pattern of cultivation by introducing vines and fruit trees into the village economy.⁷⁹ This process involved an attenuation of the communal spirit: Groups and individuals began to sense that their proper interests were more important than those of the village of which they were a part, and so chafed at the agricultural routines which bound them to their fellows. They sought to grasp new opportunities, not least a chance at profit, by enlarging the scope of their enterprises. Since these fruit trees took a long time to grow and bear a crop and required much care while doing so, he who planted them was unwilling to see the plot into which he had invested so much of his future allocated to anyone else as would happen under the *musha'* system. His right as a member of the community to a certain proportion of the common land now became less important than ownership of a particular piece of property within it. This meant a creeping death to the principle of periodic reallocation, the bedrock upon which rested *musha'* cultivation. Thus the agricultural lands surrounding such a 'stabilised' village would begin to take a somewhat motheaten look: Instead of the long uniform croplines divided into quarters and sections so characteristic of *musha'* tenure, part of the agricultural land was

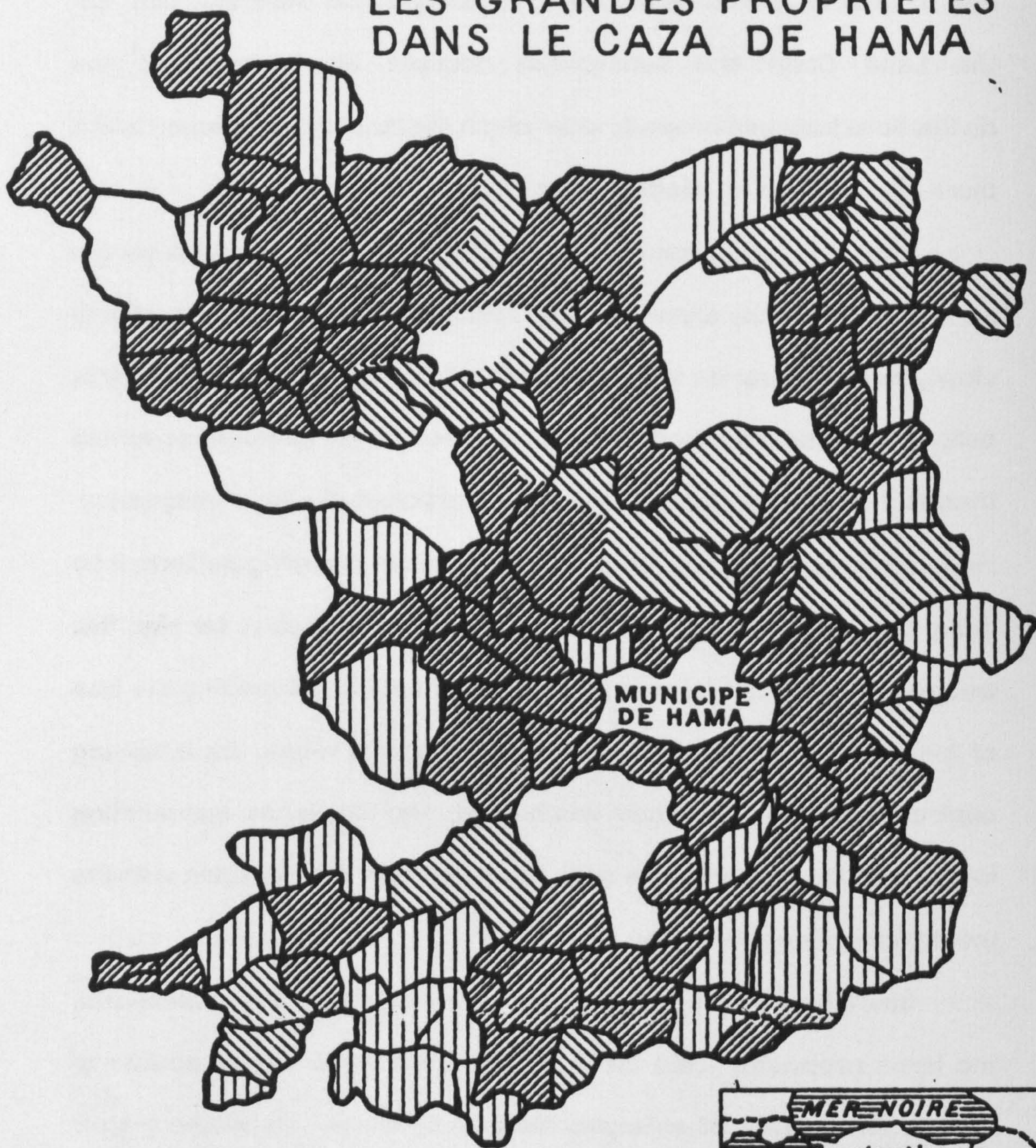
⁷⁹ Of course orchards had long been grown on *mulk* property within villages. Nonetheless, the collapse of the grain market in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century led to an expansion of these alternative crops on what previously had been grain-bearing *musha'* lands. See *infra*.

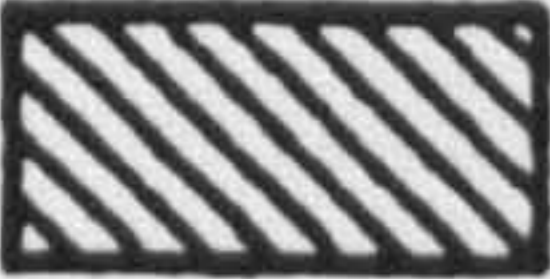
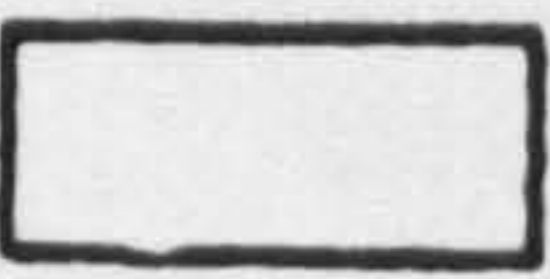
now partitioned into private plots, each separated from its neighbour, and treated as individual property. These parcels were still *miri*, but the Land Code and subsequent decrees slowly removed the distinctions between property over which the landlord or peasant had a mere *tasarruf* and an allodial estate.

Thus emerged a spirit of incipient capitalism where each sought his own profit at the expense of the community, a spirit whose effects slowly began to eat its way into the fabric of Syrian rural life. In this process, the notable landowner, possessed of far greater resources than any villager or group of villagers, participated with a vengeance. He too was quite happy to break a centuries old cropping pattern, if by doing so he could bring himself more profit. Nevertheless for him, this was a minor gambit. He was far more interested in increasing the size of his estates, and with it his influence and prestige, by obtaining control of the villages, their inhabitants, and the lands surrounding them. In accomplishing this goal, his most important weapon was the mechanism of debt bondage.

Since he was the principal source of capital in the countryside, the large proprietor used the peasant's need for a steady source of finance as a means of enlarging his own property. He would extend credit at an exorbitant rate of interest to peasants who were operating on very thin margins. The only collateral the peasant could offer was the land he worked; therefore as he fell deeper in the hole, which was not difficult to do, the lord would accept this land in payment for a loan

LES GRANDES PROPRIÉTÉS DANS LE CAZA DE HAMA



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------------|
|  | Propriétés
Kilani. |  | Propriétés
Barazi. |
|  | Propriétés de divers notables.
(Azem, Tayfour, etc.) | | |
|  | Villages appartenant aux cultivateurs. | | |



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which was then rolled over into a new cycle with the peasant now a mere tenant forever tied to his master by the chains of fiscal obligation.

Another way for the notable to penetrate into the villages was as an arbiter of one the numerous disputes which arose between members of a village community in return for a gift of land. In this way, little by little, he could come to own the entire village.

Perhaps he would not wait for an invitation, but would claim a piece of land on some rather flimsy pretext. When this was brought before the court, the power of the great proprietor gained a decision in his favour.⁸⁰

Thus in various ways the notable-proprietor gradually extended his grip over village after village, enlarging his estates as he did so. One finds an example of this process in the district of Hama. This region was the *locus classicus* of the *latifundia* where only 33 out of 114 villages (29%) were held under *musha'* tenure in 1933. In a study done in the early 1930's, Jean Gaulmier documented how over the past fifty years, the great families of Hama had gradually divided the district into large landed properties.⁸¹ At that time, peasant-cultivators owned *in toto* four out of 114 villages (of which two were *musha'*), and in two others, part of the village (both being *musha'*). According to Gaulmier, the notables had garnered their estates in one of three ways. First, the

←---Fig. 10 *Latifundia* in the *qada'* of Hama in 1933.

Source: Anon. [Jean Gaulmier], 'Notes sur la propriété foncière dans la Syrie centrale,' *L'Asie Française*, XXXIII, 309 April, 1933, 132.

⁸⁰ Anon. [Gaulmier], 134-35 describes these stratagems, giving examples.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 132-34.

village might have been a gift from the Ottoman Sultan as recompense for some service performed. This was somewhat rare in the Hama district, and only two of the villages had been acquired by notables in that way. A second method of acquisition was to buy villages which had come into the possession of different beduin tribes who made use of the pastures, and derived a certain revenue from the crops. These nomads were willing to sell their villages for a slightly larger, but still derisory sum. The nomads had alienated 21 villages in this manner since approximately 1890. As one might expect, almost all of these villages (19/21) were situated on the eastern edge of the district bordering on the *qada'* of Salamiya. Finally, there were the villages which were "ceded" (one dare not say "sold") in whole or in part by the peasants themselves, a total of 17 since 1880.⁸² Therefore in the fifty year period 1880-1930, notables acquired at least 40 villages in the Hama district. Gaulmier indicated that this process had been taking place for a considerable period before that. He said that it was 'fairly easy' to determine the origin of land belonging to notable families of relatively recent settlement in the district. He implies that this was more difficult in the case of two families, the Kilanis and the 'Azms, who had lived in Hama since the end of the fifteenth and the middle of the seventeenth

⁸² Or 19 if one follows the map on 133. Unfortunately the list of peasant villages sold since 1880 does not match the villages on the map above it. Three of the villages listed are not on the map, and five of the villages on the map are not on the list. Perhaps the discrepancy can be explained by the fact that some of the villages were obtained before 1880.

century respectively, since many of their 'acquisitions' had been made in the distant past.⁸³

It is difficult to tell whether any particular type of village was more resistant to the avarice and influence of the great families, particularly in a district where almost all were owned by a notable proprietor. Nonetheless Gaulmier believed that the most vulnerable ones were those inhabited by Alawis who tended to be far poorer and also of lower social status than their Sunni Muslim and Greek Orthodox neighbours. Unfortunately the evidence he cited for this was somewhat confused. It was certainly true that the four large (and rich) villages wholly owned by the cultivators were inhabited by members of the Greek Orthodox and Sunni Muslim communities, but perhaps this was only an indication that a prosperous group could resist encroachments better than a poor one.⁸⁴

Latron remarked that 'Syria and Coelesyria (i.e. the Bīqa') are characterised at the present time by the "stabilised village", the second phase of communal landholding.'⁸⁵ Yet no author indicated when this shift began. It was not the increased involvement of peasants in the market which in itself triggered this process. For after all, they had supplied grain to European buyers in the 1860's and 1870's. But grain production, whether for home consumption or for trade outside the

⁸³ 'Apart from the Kilani and the 'Azm, the other notable families. . . have settled relatively recently in the area. It is thus rather easy to uncover the origins of their estates.' Anon. [Gaulmier], 133.

⁸⁴ For Gaulmier's attempts to relate sect and socioeconomic status to a capacity for resistance, *Ibid.*, 133-34.

⁸⁵ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 191.

village, was not incompatible with *musha'*. One can surmise that it was the collapse of the world grain market at the end of the 1870's which predisposed (perhaps 'forced' is a better word) peasants and landlords to turn to more remunerative crops. In Lebanon certainly there was a change from silkworm raising to fruit trees after the turn of the century due in part to demand from Beirut's growing urban agglomeration.⁸⁶ So perhaps one can say that the move towards fruit trees which took place in the *musha'* villages of inner Syria came in the thirty year period 1880-1910 as grain became less profitable and the coming of the railroads (from the middle of the 1890's) made it easier to ship such perishable goods to urban centres.

Another factor influencing stabilisation was the greater security of the countryside which made the cohesion of the village community in some respects less vital. In Salamiya, Tal Tuqan, and other villages in the *Ma'mura*, the *musha'* lands were no longer subject to periodic re-allocation. In Salamiya, at least, this practice had ceased before the Great War.

Thus when the French came to Syria, the two processes of stabilisation of *musha'* villages and creation and aggrandisement of large landed properties were firmly embedded in the countryside. For their part, Achard and his colleagues had their own ideas as to the course which agrarian relations should follow in the Mandated territories, ideas which added yet another skein to the twisted threads

⁸⁶ For the decline in the silk industry, see Chapter III, *infra*.

which bound together the different elements shaping the social structure in the rural hinterland.

II.5>The Mandate and the concept of the smallholder

When Edouard Achard delivered his assessments of the ills besetting Syrian agriculture, he placed the inequities of the land tenure system at the top of his list. His solution to this problem developed from an ideological orientation towards private property and the virtues of the individual smallholder capitalist, and ignored the rôle which the village community played in the life of the countryside. His ideas ran counter to the basic orientation of the land system existing in Syria at his time of writing. This order was founded on peasant communities based on *musha'* cultivation, although it had been somewhat modified since the last quarter of the nineteenth century by processes of stabilisation and individuation. Nonetheless these changes had occurred within the framework of the village community which still remained an essential component of Syrian peasant life.

From the very beginning of his Syrian career, Achard held firmly to the belief that the misery of the peasants was directly attributable to the tyranny of an indolent class of absentee landlords. He stated that to these notables, it was dominion over peasant villages which was of greater importance than dominion over the land itself. For the shackles of debt which this mastery entailed were a sure method both of gaining

income and of ensuring that servitude which enhanced the status of the notable, who was seen to be lord over myriads of souls.⁸⁷

Achard believed that the only way to end this tyranny was to break up the great estates and create smallholdings from them because he felt that only a peasant with clear title to his land would have the incentive and the means to improve its productivity. In his opinion, possession of a legally-recognised title deed would guarantee security of tenure to the cultivator whilst enabling him to obtain bank loans at a reasonable rate of interest, using his land as collateral. Thus the peasant would be able to by-pass the wealthy notable who in the past had himself used credit as a means towards enlarging his estates, a process which had turned him who enjoyed the usufruct of the land he tilled into a tenant forever tied to his master by bonds of fiscal obligation. Achard was convinced that the replacement of these great estates by independent smallholdings would deliver the peasant at one stroke from the tyranny of the landlord whilst ensuring an improvement of production whose profits would bring prosperity to him who made actual use of the land rather than to him who merely lived off its proceeds.

How did Achard propose to implement this revolution in tenurial relations? Certainly not by outright confiscation of the great estates, because such acts of 'spoliation' would in all likelihood lead to the

⁸⁷ Achard, 'Notes sur la Syrie,' 100-101. For the mastery of the great landed proprietor over his dependents and the importance accorded exhibition of mastery, see Gilisenan, *Lords . . .*, Chap. 1, 3-22.

revolt of those so dispossessed. Moreover he was well aware, or certainly became well aware, that these powerful proprietors were one of the principal props of the Mandatory régime.⁸⁸ Although for the moment, these men were necessary evils because they linked an alien administration to the great mass of the agricultural population, Achard felt that eventually the French would be able to win the rural masses over to their side and dispense with landlord support as the results of the reform percolated downwards.

Since direct government seizure was eliminated as a solution to the agrarian question, Achard turned to indirect methods to move towards the goals desired. The principal tool was to be a cadastral survey of all the Syrian lands which would provide those secure titles from which he hoped all other good things would flow. He also called for a reform of the tax system so that the tithe (*'ushr*), would be a fixed amount determined by the average of the tithe for the four previous years instead of being a fixed percentage of the annual crop. The idea behind this was that if the peasant knew he would only have to pay a certain sum every year, he would then seek to augment his production in order to retain more for himself.

Writing in 1925-26, Achard had high hopes for the capacity of such proposals to overturn existing agrarian relations. Nevertheless by 1939 these programmes had brought little change. It was not just that

⁸⁸ Achard, 'Propriété rurale . . .,' 16, 18; 'Les Problèmes . . .le problème agraire,' 11, 12. For the symbiotic relationship between administrator and notable in one region--the 'Akkar--see Gilsenan, *Lords . . .*, 84-85.

the cadastral survey had only examined half the cultivable/cultivated area and fifteen percent of the total: after all the areas completed were those lands most useful for agriculture. Nor was it that the plummeting agricultural prices of the early nineteen thirties made it impossible for the peasants to pay any tithe, much less an average of the previous four years.⁸⁹ It was simply that the *process* to be triggered by the institution of such a survey never occurred. Although much can be laid at the door of bureaucratic inefficiency, impenetrable legal tangles, and above all, inadequate finance, these obstacles merely affected the implementation of the various measures designated as the agents which would create an army of smallholders in the countryside.

II.6>Two contrasting cases

In order to gain an insight into the obstacles of creating an estate of smallholders in the countryside during the period of the Mandate, it is useful to look at two regions with systems of landholding in different states of evolution. There was a striking contrast between social relationships in southern Syria--the Hawran and the Jabal Druz--and those in the districts around Hama to the north. Moreover during the Mandate period these evolved quite differently.

The Hawran and Jabal Druz. In both the Hawran and the Jabal Druz, there was a strongly developed sense of community in the

⁸⁹ For a comment on this problem, see Affaires Financières, 'Note au sujet de la situation financière au 31 Mai 1932,' 18 June 1932, 2. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 311--Conseiller Financier.

countryside. In the Hawran, there were few landlords: An estimate of the middle 1920's gives the peasants ninety-five per cent of the total, whilst one made approximately ten years later assigned them some eighty-eighty-five per cent.⁹⁰ Moreover the villages maintained their cohesion through the egalitarian disciplines of *musha'* tenure, well suited to life on the edge of the cultivated zone. In the Jabal Druz, a hilly region of black rocks and poor soils, there were no *latifundia*. Starting in the seventeenth century, the Druze, a heterodox community anathema to the Ottoman state, had established themselves in this place of refuge. The Druze community was under the sway of great families who were tied to the peasants by bonds of religion, custom, and history.

Insurrections did occur, but these were directed against outside forces both human and economic which disrupted the harmonious relationships within and between communities. In the late nineteenth century, vicissitudes of the international grain market brought penury to the cultivators. This was accompanied by attempts on the part of the Ottoman authorities to impose their will over these regions. The result was a series of sustained and bitter revolts directed against the central authorities in Damascus, but also to some degree against landlords whose perceptions bore too heavily upon the cultivators. In these conflicts, the Ottomans were victorious because of superior firepower

⁹⁰ For the first estimate see, Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, *Khitat*. . ., in Issawi (ed.), *FCDEH*, 330. For the second, see Epstein, 'Le Hauran . . .,' 247; *Idem*, 'Notes . . .,' 600.

and a scorched earth policy, but whilst these policies brought an uneasy peace, they alienated the inhabitants from the state and its representatives.⁹¹

With the coming of the Mandate, the French sought to master this 'land of dissidence', in particular the Jabal Druz. Here they first agreed to a form of indirect rule with a local governor and administration under the guidance of French counsellors. This system soon broke down and was replaced by the direct rule of an enlightened French governor who sought to send the winds of modernity whistling through the hills of the Jabal.

This period of direct rule illustrated in microcosm the critiques made by Georges Hardy of the methods chosen by his compatriots to administer their overseas possessions: He believed that French colonial officials

- 1> Legislated in the abstract,
- 2> Collected facts within systems of expectation,
- 3> Conceived a pre-established order rather than counting on a spontaneous organisation,
in a word
- 4> Founded colonial law on principles of absolute value.⁹²

In the Jabal Druz, these principles were embodied in Captain Gabriel Carbillet who was Governor between September, 1923 and May, 1925. A man of the Left, a radical and Freemason who had received his training in North Africa, he was a moderniser who brooked

⁹¹ For these events, see Introduction *supra*. Also Commandant Hassler, 'Les Insurrections druses avant la guerre de 1914-1918,' *AF*, XXVI, 239, March, 1926, 102-08; and XXVI, 240, April, 1926, 143-47.

⁹² Labouret, 8 and Chapter I *supra*.

no interference as he rode roughshod over the customs and sensibilities of his charges in order to bring them some of the benefits of European civilisation. He constructed those public works so beloved of French colonial administrators: paved roads and new tracks; urban water supplies and irrigation ditches. He inaugurated a system of modern education by opening some thirty schools within which three thousand Druze children were given their first taste of the sweet delights of French culture. He introduced agricultural improvements by planting some one million vines in fields that had been cleared of stones and walled.

Nevertheless the most fundamental and most controversial change wrought by Carbillet was in the area of agrarian reform. Landholding in the Jabal was a form of *musha'* tenure with the fields being reallocated triennially. Nevertheless here, where an oligarchy of great families overlaid the basic communal structure, the Druze peasants had various ties of kinship and obligation to these chiefly groups. Therefore when land was redistributed, the lords had the right to choose the best third for themselves, and the peasants were required to till these lands in addition to their own. In line with conventional wisdom, Carbillet sought to create a class of smallholders in the countryside, offering them the lands he wished planted in vines. If they accepted his offer and followed his programme, they were considered to have a valid title to this property, thus putting an end to communal rotation. This course did not prove particularly popular with the great families because they lost their property and saw their hold

over their clients weakened. Yet neither were his moves particularly favoured by the peasantry he was supposedly helping. These cultivators were deeply conservative by nature, and were bound to their lords by ties which transcended the land.

Moreover both lords and peasants resented the high-handed methods used by Carbillet and his collaborators to drag the Jabal into the twentieth century. The peasants detested the corvée required of them to construct the public works brought to their villages. The oligarchy were bitter at Carbillet's refusal to concede them superior status: He cancelled the monthly stipends allotted them by his Druze predecessor; abolished their leaseholds; eliminated the system of collective tax payments which was subject to abuse by the powerful; treated them when before the courts as if they were no better than the humblest peasant--in short sought to impose republican egalitarianism on an essentially hierarchical society. Moreover every inhabitant whether peasant or chief waxed bitter at the brutal manner in which Carbillet and his collaborators carried out their duties with imprisonments, beatings, and gratuitous insults. Perhaps, as he said, he 'loved' the Druze, but if so, he certainly expressed it in a peculiar way.

As a man of the Left, faithful to the principles embodied in the French Revolution, Carbillet saw the re-shaping of Druze society as a duty with himself as tutor. It was his duty to give to his tutees those physical conveniences and cultural advantages which France was in a unique position to provide. This obligation included the moulding of

Druze social organisation into some sort of republican ideal in which the cultivator was freed from the shackles of landlordism, and the gentry were cut down to size. Carbillet was not content to follow those indirect methods espoused by Achard since 'spoliation' was exactly what he was trying to achieve. He acted as though his charges were children, filled with uncurbed passions and lacking any sense of direction: Only the strong hand of Authority could bring them out of darkness into light. Carbillet reaped the whirlwind because he founded his programme on principles of 'absolute value' by imposing an ideal and 'pre-established order' rather than seeking to rely on a 'spontaneous organisation' flowing up from below.⁹³

Although Achard made no reference to the policies followed in the Jabal Druz in either of his two reports on the agrarian question in Syria,⁹⁴ one wonders if he had them in mind when he warned that the brutal destruction of a landlord-dominated tenure system would 'throw defiance into the class of the great proprietors' and 'provoke on their part an opposition which, given the influence which they exercise on the mass of the population might have regrettable political repercussions.' For that was precisely the result.

The land reform which Carbillet imposed on the Jabal Druz was the only such attempt to change the structure of agrarian relations in Syria during the Mandate period. A Marxist logic would dictate that the

⁹³ For Carbillet and his reforms, see 1>Lenka Bokova, *La Confrontation franco-syrienne à l'époque du Mandat, 1925-27* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1990), 120-28; 2>MacCallum, 110-14; Khoury, *Syria . . .*, 155-58.

⁹⁴ 'Propriété rurale . . . ,' and 'Les Problèmes . . . le problème agraire.'

cultivators, oppressed by their 'feudal' lords, would unite in support of those who struck a blow for their freedom. Instead, this reform led directly to the Great Revolt of 1925-27 which was the most serious uprising against the French Mandate.⁹⁵

The reason for this outcome was that the land reform and other programmes of modernisation were imposed by an alien authority who deliberately sought to denigrate and destroy traditional customs and values. The Druze, both peasants and lords, viewed these efforts as attempts to destroy the integrity of their community. The fact that the Ottomans, another outside power, had also sought to destroy this integrity, albeit in a cruder way, made a negative reaction to any similar attempt even more certain.

Hama and central Syria. If such strong communal ties fanned the flames of revolt in the Jabal Druz, their very absence ensured that any rebellion would fizzle in central Syria. For example, the Great Revolt failed to implant itself in the districts of Homs and Hama. This was due in part to the nature of the terrain, flat and open, ideal for military operations, where aerial surveillance and

⁹⁵ For the revolt of 1925-27, see 1>Bokova which is the most recent study using Arabic and French sources as well as interviews with Druze fighters or their descendants; 2>MacCallum, *passim*; 3>Khoury, *Syria . . .*, 151-204; 4>Edmond Rabbath, 'L'Insurrection syrienne de 1925-27,' *Revue Historique*, CCLXVII, Jan.-Mar., 1982, 405-47; 5>Saifuddin Joarder, 'The Syrian nationalist uprising (1925-27) and Henri de Jouvenel,' *The Muslim World*, LXVII, 3, July, 1977, 185-204.; 6>Joyce Lavery Miller, 'The Syrian revolt of 1925,' *IJMES*, VIII, 4, October, 1977, 545-63; 7>Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 148-76.

bombardment proved most effective.⁹⁶ It was due also to the diffuse nature of the insurgency, with no central military command and no mass party to root it among the villages. Outside the Jabal Druz and neighbouring districts, any armed action was by nature sporadic, imposed from outside by small mobile bands which were not really rooted in the countryside and which could eventually be harassed into disintegration. Any local uprising tended to take the form of short bursts of destruction and pillage rather than that of a spontaneous and massive rebellion.⁹⁷ Although many of the great proprietors supported the rebellion, many others were neutral or inclined towards the régime in place as being better able to protect their property and commercial interests. As the pendulum slowly swung towards the Mandatory power, this attitude became much more in evidence.⁹⁸

The Great Revolt failed in central Syria because there was little community of interest between peasants and landlords except one founded on oppression. Although there was social discord between them, the peasants, in thrall to their *seigneurs*, could express their frustrations only through violent *jacqueries* because they were denied any of the more civilised forms of protest. There were outbreaks of disorder during the first ten years of the Mandate, but it was only in the nineteen thirties when peasants driven desperate by poverty faced

⁹⁶ Rabbath, 437 reminds us of this elementary point.

⁹⁷ Bokova, 236-37 makes these points very well.

⁹⁸ For the attitude of landlords and their manipulation by the French, see Khoury, *Syria. . .*, 192-93.

landlords driven desperate by debt that the edifice of obligation cracked, and hopelessness bred anger and violence.

In normal times, the landlords were able to maintain a balance between their appetite for an extravagant style of life, and the income they were able to wring from their estates. To assuage this greed, the tenant-cultivator was pushed towards the margin of existence and the landlord continued to use his social authority and access to resources to ever expand his domains.

Nevertheless this equilibrium between the extravagance of the landlord and his income was always a precarious one because the former ever increased whilst the latter tended to fluctuate with the agricultural market. In times of depression, when agricultural prices plunged, the proprietor often found himself in dire straits. Nevertheless, unwilling or unable to curb his excesses, he first reduced the amount necessary to finance cultivation which led to a reduction of the area under crops.. This produced less income, and the notable then turned to the banks for loans using his properties as collateral. The notable, well aware that agriculture in Syria was inherently unstable, always believed that good times would bail him out as they always had in the past. Nevertheless the crisis of the nineteen thirties proved so long and so deep that the proprietor found himself facing real impoverishment.

Examples of this process were rife in central Syria during the 1930's. Thus in Hama, in 1932, a member of the rich Kilani family reduced the hectarage under cultivation by more than one-fifth. At the

same time, the number of villages held by banks continued to increase: In Hama, ten were mortgaged in their entirety as early as 1930, and others partially. By 1933, this picture had darkened considerably as the number in this condition had tripled.⁹⁹

Although the proprietor now found himself in a vastly weakened economic position, he continued to make his accustomed claims on the livelihood of his tenants. Nevertheless his own impoverishment reduced the hold he had over his cultivators. They in turn, seeing their lord in such straits, and being themselves at wits end, had nothing to lose by defiance.

Even now there was no organised revolt, for the peasants, deprived and leaderless, were hardly in a position to bring about sweeping changes to the social order. At times, particular incidents of brutality produced an enraged response on the part of those attacked, but these spontaneous eruptions did not expand into a general outbreak of violence.

For example, on 7 July 1930, one of the Barazis was attacked in his own house by the peasants of Tilif who demanded complete ownership of the lands they cultivated.¹⁰⁰ The peasants of a village belonging to the well-known Hama notable family of Tayfur followed them in revolt when this family seized their land, and did not cease their agitation until they were granted papers of *tapu*, giving them

⁹⁹ Anon. [Gaulmier], 136-37.

¹⁰⁰ *Loc. cit.* Probably the same incident is reported by Hanna, 382. Here the notable is specified as 'Abdo Agha al-Barazi.

ownership. Such discontent was so generalised that on 16 August 1930, the correspondent of the Damascene newspaper *al-Sha`b* reported that

"A day does not pass that we do not hear that the peasants of such and such a village called for insurrection against its owners, refusing to surrender their part of the harvest, and demanding property with a permanent deed. . . ."¹⁰¹

Nevertheless even when the peasants were given title to property, they were unable to exploit their new holdings properly because they lacked tools and seed which the landlord often supplied under the old system. Moreover they had to pay the former owners the price of the land, which though small, was quite beyond them, particularly in these years of deep economic crisis. There were two alternatives: either to mortgage their holdings to banks, often foreign--the principal one being the *Crédit foncier d'Algérie et de Tunisie*¹⁰²--or to borrow once again from the proprietors at an even greater rate of interest. In either case, there was a vicious circle, and the peasants soon lost their lands once again to the notables.

An example of this occurred in the *qada'* of Masyaf where the peasants were largely Alawi, the poorest of the poor. In 1929, in an attempt to put an end to unrest which had led to violence, pillage, and theft, the government of the Alaouite State purchased six villages belonging to proprietors from the city of Hama, and their land was

¹⁰¹ Hanna, 382.

¹⁰² André Latron was one of this bank's principal officials in Beirut, and his investigation of rural life in the Mandated territories was done in connexion with his official duties. See his comment in 'En Syrie . . .,' 225.

distributed to the peasant cultivators against payment of an annual sum over a period of ten years to the State Agricultural Bank. A similar move was made with regard to certain villages in the Ghab belonging to the State Domain. Yet these attempts proved vain in face of the much older traditions of usury and clientelism, and after a short interlude, the proprietors were once again in the saddle. As one of the authors describing this venture ruefully remarked: 'In order to change such a state, it would be necessary to resolve it by a veritable social revolution.'¹⁰³ Which is exactly what occurred some thirty years later.

When faced with such insurmountable obstacles, it is little wonder that peasants vented their frustration in violent attacks on their landlords. One of the most notable incidents of this kind took place in the village of Barin which was also located in Masyaf *qada'*. This village, a large agglomeration of seven hundred inhabitants, was constructed on top of the ruins of the crusader castle of Montferrand on the peak of a volcano which dominated the plain at the foot of the north face of the Jabal Hilu. In the nineteenth century, this village had become by force the property of the Kilanis, and in October, 1935, it sought to recover its liberty. First its inhabitants turned to law, but the Kilanis possessed their titles legally. So then they turned to direct action. First they chased off the stewards of the Kilanis, and when they attempted to return in force they were thoroughly stoned and one of the Kilanis saved himself only by virtue of the swiftness of his horse. Then

¹⁰³ Latron, *La Vie . . .*, 208; Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, 366 whence comes the quotation.

the peasants divided the harvest, taking only the ears of wheat and leaving the straw on the threshing floors. When the agents of the fisc came in order to make the annual tax estimate, the cultivators told them that they owed nothing because “this year the wheat grew without ears.”

The result was the occupation of the village by the gendarmerie. Nevertheless unrest continued and only ceased when the village was threatened with military intervention.¹⁰⁴

Hanna himself sought to understand the nature of this rebellion. According to him, the ‘feudalist-bourgeois’ Damascene newspaper *a/-Qabas*¹⁰⁵ portrayed this uprising as a “revolt” and the insurrectionaries as “rebels”. Hanna pointed out that the way in which one assessed an event of this sort depended very much upon one’s own point of view. What the feudalists and their allies considered sedition, the peasants saw as a popular uprising to recover their dispossessed rights.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless despite the desires and intentions of the cultivators, successful social revolution required more than just the unchannelled anger of status groups held in thrall by those with greater access to resources such as money, prestige, and authority. What was

¹⁰⁴ Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, fn 2 on 364, 366, ; Hanna, 386.

¹⁰⁵ Founded after 1912, it had ‘reflected a more radical and uncompromising interpretation of Arabism, including greater political autonomy for the Arabic-speaking provinces’. By the nineteen thirties, it was one of the two newspapers in Damascus which were owned and/or financed by the Nationalist Bloc. It thus mirrored the attitude of Syrian nationalist/notables: opposition to foreign domination, but at the same time, fear of social revolution. Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 60-61; *Idem, Syria . . .*, 268.

¹⁰⁶ Hanna, 386.

needed was the organisation of these discrete and intermittent explosions into a movement of mass protest, controlled and directed from above.

In central Syria during the nineteen thirties, this protest was still amorphous. Moreover the French, following the Achardian precepts of indirect means, were unwilling to tinker with, far less to overturn the established order, even when it was obvious that discontent was rife among the mass of the agricultural population.

One finds an example of this policy in the 'Akkar plain.¹⁰⁷ This was a region dominated by notable proprietors, the 'beys', mostly coming from among the various branches of the Mir'abi clan who had established their lordship at the end of the eighteenth century. Here the tenants commonly received some 60% of the harvest, but bore all expenses and were heavily in debt to their lords. On the other hand, they might be mere *murabi'* saddled with the most disadvantageous form of production contract.¹⁰⁸ The beys were absolute masters, even, it was said, to the right of the *ius primae noctis*.

The 'Akkar was a region which was somewhat isolated from the main currents of agriculture and commerce: It was neither an important wheat-growing area due to the nature of its soils nor did it

¹⁰⁷ For the 'Akkar, see, 1>Edouard-C. Achard, 'Etudes économiques sur la Syrie centrale--la plaine d'Akkar,' *AF*, XXIII, 200, March, 1923, 63-69.; 2>Col. Paul Jacquot, 'L'Akkar,' 23 July 1927. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 877; 3>Latron, *La vie. . .*, 212, 214; 4>Paul Sanlaville, 'Les Régions agricoles du Liban,' *RGL*, XXXVIII, 1963, 55-57; 5>Gilsenan, 'A modern . . .,' 449-63 *passim*; 6>*Idem*, *Lords . . .*, *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Gilsenan, *Lords . . .*, 92. For the *muraba'* contract, see Table II.1 *supra*.

participate in the silk industry which burgeoned in neighbouring Jabal Lubnan. Therefore under the Mandate, the French relied on the beys and their agents, the *aghas*, to keep order, supplying them with arms and support. As a result, these lords reinforced their domination of the cultivators, with the connivance of authorities too busy to keep the peace themselves.

Colonel Jacquot, commander of the Northern Sector, in a report written in 1927, clearly saw the dangers of this policy. He believed that the rôle of France was to be 'pitiless, just, and impartial', and that to rely on the beys as individuals or as a group was to

augment his privileges, favour his ambitions and his appetites, arouse the jealousies of other chiefs or notabilities. . . , it is to diminish our prestige, distort the character of impartiality of our mission, alienate little by little the sympathy or the confidence of the inhabitants who hold us responsible for their disappointments or their sufferings.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, although he pointed out the dangers of a policy of favouritism, he did not adumbrate an alternative. Perhaps he shied away from what might be the logical conclusion to his argument: the creation of an alternative and francophile power base in the countryside through active support of the peasants against their oppressors.

In any case, an intelligence officer, more attuned to the realities of power, minuted caustically after reading his report: 'This is a masterpiece of stupidity. . . of an unsavoury idealism which has. . . a

¹⁰⁹ Jacquot, 7.

pretence of understanding'.¹¹⁰ Yet French reliance on the beys only produced the result which one might expect.

In December, 1931, the Tripoli correspondent of the Damascene newspaper *Alif Ba* wrote that the peasants, hired workers, and *métayers* had risen up to demand from the beys ownership of a portion of the land. The French sent an official, a certain Doucet, to investigate this matter, and it soon became clear that the Mandatory authorities were afraid of the 'regrettable political repercussions' which might result if this movement were allowed to develop in a more 'profound' direction. Therefore Doucet's 'investigation' amounted to a brief to preserve the established order, intimidate the peasants, and repress their movement before it got out of hand.¹¹¹

II.7>The dilemma of agrarian relations

This vignette captures the dilemma posed by agrarian relations during the Mandate. The indirect methods proposed to solve the agrarian problem such as the cadastral survey; the creation of agricultural banks; the giving of title deeds to peasants which they could use to obtain loans to set themselves up as independent smallholders--all were inadequate in face of entrenched notable domination of the countryside.

These procedures were not found wanting merely because of inadequate resources. Even if the cadastral survey had been

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8

¹¹¹ Hanna, 384.

completed and every peasant had received title to the land he worked; even if the banks had proved to be veritable cornucopias providing a never-ending stream of loans for peasants to establish their independence, there still would have been no agrarian revolution during the Mandate period--for several reasons.

The first was that Achard and his colleagues refused to admit that they could only create a secure class of peasant smallholders after they had thoroughly despoiled the notables who dominated the countryside by dispossessing them of their properties.

The second was a necessary corollary of the first. The French could not dispossess the great notables because France came to Syria as a tutor, not to remake the social landscape, but merely to guide its tutees towards an independent destiny. As a tutor, accountable to the international community represented by the League of Nations and the Permanent Mandates Commission, she could not take drastic measures to remake Syrian society. Moreover, she had no wish to do so, but merely to carry out her appointed task as expeditiously as possible. Finally, compared to her strong and longstanding position in the Maghrib, France did not have that much invested in Syria, whether in financial investments, strategic interests, or emotional bonds, and so was less willing to drain her energy in seeking solutions to apparently insoluble problems.

The third reason for the absence of agrarian revolution during the Mandate was that the period between the two world wars was one of transition. In economic and social policy, *laissez-faire* still remained

the order of the day. Private enterprise, not public corporations, still took the lead in economic development whilst on the social side, inequities were usually left to stand no matter how unpalatable they might be.

Such attitudes towards official intervention were reinforced by the repugnance felt by officials of aristocratic or bourgeois origin for methods which smacked of Bolshevism. Nevertheless even the French Left had aims other than social revolution in the lands under the sway of France.

The non-communist Left sought withdrawal from what they saw as expensive and exotic ventures which brought little remuneration in the form of raw materials to supply French industry, and increased the burden of the French taxpayer. The assets wasted in far-flung colonies could be far better spent at home. Rather than curing the sick, irrigating the farmlands, or building the roads in places which were not only alien, but whose people were unappreciative of even the most well-meaning efforts, such programmes should be carried out first in the *métropole*. If the Left regarded Syria as 'a bottomless pit'¹¹² which devoured men and money, they regarded it equally as an illegal enterprise, foisted upon a people who legitimately sought their

¹¹² The title of an article critical of the Syrian venture by the Socialist deputy Sixte-Quentin. Sixte-Quentin, 'Le Gouffre Syrien,' *La Populaire*, 15 March 1931.

independence, and who consistently had rejected the tutelage of France.¹¹³

Nevertheless whilst the non-communist left focused on the needs of France at home, and merely called for withdrawal from Syria, it was the communists who pointed out the inequities existing in Syria despite the claims of high French officials that Syria was “calm and prosperous”. In 1934, the authorities made numerous attempts to extract taxes from cultivators who were living on the edge of subsistence. In Damascus, two Syrian deputies protested at the seizure of the harvest of the Hawran in order to pay off debts owed the State Agricultural Bank. In Zahle, most of the inhabitants protested at their tax burden and refused to hand over their due. In Aleppo, a municipal counsellor wrangled bitterly with those who wished to seize the goods of his father for non-payment of taxes. As the commentator put it:

¹¹³ In France, the Left was not necessarily communist or even socialist, but included freethinkers and anti-clericals--in short all those opposed to Roman Catholicism and monarchism. Examples of their attitudes towards French involvement in the Levant are to be found in 1>the debate on credits for the Syrian enterprise held in the Senate on 28 July 1920, in particular the speeches of the senators, D'Estournelles de Constant and Victor Bérard, reported *in extenso* in 'Les Affaires du Levant au Sénat,' *AF*, XX, 184, July-August, 1920, 268-87; 2>a further debate on the demand for more credits in the Senate session of 30 December 1920, in particular the speech of Victor Bérard. For a good example of views at the opposite pole, see the remarks of Dominique Delhayé in the same debate. 'La Syrie au Sénat et la discussion des douzièmes provisoires,' *AF*, XXI, 188, January, 1921, 30-36.

For the attitude of the socialist left towards colonial questions in general, see Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: Le Table Ronde, 1972), Chap. VI, 434-35, fn 12. With regard to their protests against the Mandate in particular, see 1>'Le Mandat à la Chambre des Députés,' *AF*, XXXI, March, 1931, 98-99; 2>Sixte-Quentin, 'Le Gouffre. . . .'

If deputies and counsellors, privileged by imperialism, protest, one imagines easily the distress of the poor peasantry, one understands then how they battle daily against the seizures, the gendarmes, and the taxmen.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless if the wind of revolution was still a mere wisp of a breeze, it was nonetheless beginning to waft over the landscape. The crisis of the nineteen thirties shook the foundations upon which was based the domination of the city over the countryside. If the notables were that much weaker, the peasants became emboldened by desperation to revolt against particularly harsh injustices. This occurred in areas where the link between proprietor and peasant was weakest. In central Syria, domination was based on usury and often imposed by force. Therefore in this region, desperate cultivators had no compunction in rising up against their lords, distant masters of great *latifundia*, who ruled through their stewards, men whose status was only slightly above that of the peasants they directed. These overseers could speak the language of the cultivator, but were eager to differentiate themselves from someone whom they despised. Therefore they had no scruples in administering rough 'justice' to carry out the will of the master.

II. 8>From revolt to revolution

During the period of the Mandate, both the great revolt against the alien oppressor and the smaller insurrections against the

¹¹⁴ 'Syrie: La Syrie et la Conférence coloniale,' *Cahier du Bolchevisme*, 15 November 1934, 188. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 716.

indigenous one proved to be utter failures. In each case, this was because of the lack of a co-ordinating organisation capable of manipulating events in an ordered fashion. When this organisation was formed with an ideology, and a means to precipitate action, intermittent revolt was transformed into social revolution.

Moreover there was another element which was at least as important for such a social revolution to occur. It was that any transformation had to be rooted within Syria itself, and could not be imposed from outside. This could only develop out of other processes of change within Syria--ones which altered the way in which Syrian society saw itself: the achievement of independence; the débâcle of 1948 which began to undermine the notables; the international climate which saw state intervention and social revolution become not only acceptable, but *à la mode*; the example presented by Egypt and its revolution; the formation of the United Arab Republic. These and more prepared the climate for the agrarian revolution which eventually came.

Perhaps the most important part was that Syrians confiscated from Syrians. Although the process was painful for those dispossessed, perhaps they found it more acceptable because it came as the culmination of an internal evolution rather than being the imposition of an external idea which had no indigenous roots.

Thus it was not for another twenty years, with the arrival of Akram Hawrani and his Arab Socialist Party, that mobilisation would begin in the countryside. And it was thirty years before the Ba'th would institute a far-reaching land reform, and once and for all destroy the

tyranny of the notables, replacing it by a different sort of tyranny, that of a cumbrous state machine. Nevertheless in the end, the revolution did finally come.

II.9>Community, notable, and state under the Mandate

Finally one must come full circle and return to the question of the peasant community, the building block of the countryside. André Latron¹¹⁵ emphasised that the equality created by collective disciplines and the physical layout of village fields maintained the primitive structure of the community and provided a powerful physical base for rural society, especially in the plains of inner Syria. This method of organisation was *musha'* cultivation.

He also pointed out that the tendency in what he calls the more 'evolved' areas was towards individuation of properties. This process in essence meant the end of the rural community because each individual sought to care for his own land, and rejected the collective disciplines which had served that community so well in the past. Latron believed that this process of individuation was favoured by the planting of market crops instead of cereals; by the 'decadence' of the notables; by the increased sophistication of the peasant; and by the physical division of the land into individual bounded plots.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Latron, *La Vie rurale. . .*, 238-40.

¹¹⁶ One must note in this regard that C. Duraffourd, the chief of the Cadastral Survey, did not completely share the aversion of Achard for *musha'* tenure. Although he supported the idea of regrouping the scattered parcels into more manageable lots, he believed that by basing the new lots on family groups, one would reinforce them, and make of them the core of the new

Whilst acknowledging the evolution of this process towards 'a complete individualisation of things and men' Latron felt that the process should not be hastened because the peasant functioned better in a communal situation. Therefore he suggested that the disappearance of the community both physically and socially should be supplemented by certain organisations, limited to the village group and using what remained of the collective spirit. He believed that the peasant, even if entirely independent, would be driven by economic necessity and a natural tendency to seek a renewal of those links which his own evolution had caused him to lose.

This official of the *Crédit foncier d'Algérie et de Tunisie* was hardly a socialist. Nonetheless he understood the value of the village community as the base of both the rural economy and rural society, and believed that it was in the interests of the Mandatory administration to bolster it as it grew weaker.

He was also aware of the power of the notables whose domination over the countryside was being reinforced by his compatriots in order to maintain control over an alien land. It was precisely because of this need that the French encouraged the expansion of *latifundia* at the expense of the village community. Moreover the ideology dominant among French administrators--

organisation which would replace the community built around the rights of the collectivity. To his mind, the family group was the 'social cell' which would serve as the building block of rural society. Duraffourd, 5-6.

glorification of the individual smallholder--precluded support for such collectivities.

Indeed in the last report on the Homs irrigation scheme made by those who directed the peacetime Mandate, the writer called for the dissolution of *musha'* lands because, among other things, they 'constitute an impediment to the free exercise of possession and the repercussions which result are most harmful from a social and economic point of view . . .'.¹¹⁷ Those who held such an attitude towards the village community were hardly likely to share the vision of André Latron. Such blindness could only impede a thorough regeneration of agriculture in Syria during the Mandate.

II.10> *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in the countryside

Ferdinand Tönnies would consider those village communities which practised *musha'* tenure as an 'outstanding example' of *Gemeinschaft*like social formations because they were bound together by kinship, either real or fictitious; neighbourhood--the fact of living together; common agricultural disciplines; the holding of common property; willing obedience to the decisions of a common leader--all permeated by the two principles of fellowship and authority.¹¹⁸ Tönnies would also assert that the processes of stabilisation and individuation

¹¹⁷ 'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 19 April, 1939. This report was transmitted along with others to the French Foreign Ministry at Vichy on 14 December 1940 as the last act of HC Gabriel Puaux before he left Syria for good. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 370.

¹¹⁸ Tönnies, 'Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft,' Part Five of Tönnies, *Community and Society*, Loomis, ed., 257-58 and introduction, *supra*.

which occurred among the *musha'* villages of the Syrian countryside starting in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were moves towards *Gesellschaftlike* social formations inspired by the lure of the cash nexus. This happened because the relationships among the peasant producers, members of the community, slowly grew more impersonal as these producers became animated by a rational and external purpose which was to acquire profit for themselves.

Nonetheless Tönnies would also point out that these changes were not aberrant, but rather a natural process as Syria evolved towards modern life. Moreover he would emphasise that movement towards *Gesellschaftlike* structures did not necessarily entail the complete disappearance of *Gemeinschaft*. Among the *musha'* villages of Syria, the shift towards a rational pursuit of gain, whilst attenuating the links forged by a common life and common burdens did not obviate them. For the bonds of community, nurtured by the common agricultural disciplines of *musha'* cultivation, were quite tensile, and could not split just because capitalism began to appear in the countryside.

If the French, for reasons of ideology and sociology, were unable to alter the relationships between landlord and cultivator in the countryside, they had somewhat better success with the two other prongs of Achard's programme, the improvement of production and the

development of a programme of irrigation. These measures, then, served as their true legacy to Syria.

CHAPTER III

The Mandate--III: Crop Diversity and Production

III. 1>Introduction--ideas of Achard

Destroying the power of the large landowners and populating the countryside with independent peasant smallholders was only one important aspect of the agricultural improvement programme Achard set forth for his political masters. He realised that any change in the structure of agrarian relations in the countryside would necessarily be a long process due to the fact that France could only employ indirect methods to achieve this end..

Therefore he placed equal emphasis on a programme of physical modernisation which he hoped would be of more immediate benefit.¹ Achard believed this to be all the more urgent because he saw Syria to be an essentially agricultural country whose crops provided both the main source of sustenance for her inhabitants, and a means with which they paid for foreign imports. Such dependence was rendered particularly delicate due to the peculiar meteorological conditions which affected agricultural production in Syria. To begin with, here was a country where there were only two seasons, wet and dry, sharply divided one from the other. Moreover rainfall often failed, even during the so-called `rainy' season. Such factors meant that peasants placed strong emphasis on such winter cereals as wheat and barley because

¹ Edouard-C. Achard, 'Actualités . . .,' 200-06.

the varieties grown in Syria were able to make good use of the limited amounts of water they did receive. In contrast, summer crops such as maize, vegetables, sesame, and cotton were confined to those regions of western Syria where they could be sustained by impermeable soils and water from rivers and springs or draw sustenance from systems of riverine irrigation.²

Achard argued that when Syria had formed an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, this reliance on agriculture was mitigated by the prominent rôle domestic and international trade played in her economy. Nonetheless, variations in rural production certainly had an effect both on the commercial transactions of which they formed a major part and on a budget which sustained itself on the tax revenues they produced. According to him, the period 1911-13 exemplified this relationship because agricultural deficits had led to the slackening of commercial activity, and a reduction in the tax revenues normally produced by crop production.³

After the First World War, Syria was no longer part of such a large economic entity, and was now hemmed in by frontiers and tariffs

² In another paper, Achard estimated that in the early 1920's the cultivated land in Syria was given over to 80% cereals/20% summer crops. See *Idem*, 'Les Problèmes . . .l'exploitation . . .,' *Bull. EHC*, 102; Nantes, FB, Carton 1571, 2.

³ Cause and effect in this relationship is not as clear as Achard would have it. Other commentators had different ideas: For example, Huvelin believed that the decrease in exports from Beirut, Syria's most modern port, during the years 1911 and 1912 was due to two events: The reduction in 1911 resulted from the opening of the railway line between Tripoli and Homs (meaning more traffic for Tripoli and less for Beirut) whilst that for 1912 was a consequence of the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire over Cyrenaica and Tripolitania which disrupted commercial traffic in the eastern Mediterranean as well. See Huvelin, 45.

which restricted the scope of her commercial activity. Therefore she was forced to rely as never before on agriculture for prosperity, agriculture which unfortunately was constrained by immutable climatic limitations,

Another way of posing this problem is to look at Syrian agriculture in terms of deficiencies in the three factors of production, *viz* Land, Labour, and Capital.

LAND>Potentially, Syria did have plenty of suitable cropland. Yet much of this land could not be used in its present state either because it was covered by marshes or because it was undeveloped due to its aridity. Moreover traditional irrigation systems had been allowed to deteriorate over the centuries.

LABOUR>To French observers, rural Syria appeared to be underpopulated. One of the reasons for this was the maldistribution of cultivators which led to a need for seasonal migrations to help bring in the harvest and perform other labour intensive tasks.

CAPITAL>Syrian agriculture was undercapitalised because of the refusal of holders of large estates to invest money in order to improve the output of their holdings. The peasants, whether owners or sharecroppers, had no capital to invest since they were in a perpetual state of indebtedness. Therefore it might prove extremely difficult to finance the necessary improvements in that infrastructure which supported agriculture.

In his various proposals to regenerate Syrian agriculture, Achard dealt with the lacunae present in the factors of production: The

principal problem he faced was the revitalisation of the land. First he sought to bring some regularity into agricultural production. He believed that this would generate an economic climate favourable for vital commercial transactions whilst providing the revenue to ensure necessary budgetary stability. Coupled to this was a second programme to expand and improve this production. Third he emphasised the importance of increasing rural population in a country where for many years to come men would continue to do the work of machines.

How did Achard propose to implement such far-ranging and complex recommendations? Although he believed that agrarian reform and improvements in methods of cultivation were absolutely necessary in order to regularise and increase output, he readily admitted that any progress on these fronts would only occur over time. He was well aware that there was little that could be done in the immediate future to augment the harvest of winter cereals except to extend the area under cultivation. Therefore he focused his attention on crops grown during the dry summer season whose yield might be improved by better techniques. Of these, the most important was cotton.

France had sought to retain Cilicia after the First World War precisely because of its potential for cotton-growing. Since she had lost Cilicia to the resurgent Turkish nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal, she turned her attentions to the cotton producing potential of Syria.⁴

⁴ For an appraisal of cotton and its possibilities in Cilicia and Syria, see Achard, 'Etudes . . .,' 19-62.

Achard held that irrigation was the only method which when properly employed would realise the potential for cotton and other summer crops. This was a technique that neither affected established social structure nor forced a rapid change in custom. Moreover it harnessed available natural resources which had been wasted heretofore. Finally, the inhabitants of the Levant showed long familiarity with this approach to the problems of cultivation. Indeed they extolled its utility whilst calling for its extension.

Thus Achard placed great emphasis on the use of irrigation as a means to strengthen the agricultural potential of Syria and to expand cultivation into areas untouched by the plough for centuries. Such approaches would improve the lot of the peasant whilst supplying France with certain raw materials she urgently required.

Nevertheless he was of the opinion that to somehow improve the methods of irrigation already in use was an approach which would only show results over a long period. Such a scheme demanded a knowledge of the physical characteristics of soils and plants which were lacking, and entailed attempts to change procedures sanctioned by custom and enshrined in law which undoubtedly would rouse opposition and delay.

Therefore expansion onto virgin lands through exploitation of water resources still unused was the only answer. As might be expected, Achard emphasised the possibilities to be found in western Syria, the area with the most agriculture, the most peasants, and where the Mandate could exercise the most control. He did advocate the

repair of the extensive system of *foggaras* or *qanats*, ancient underground canal systems which existed on the eastern edge of the cultivated zone as one means of restoring the ancient patterns of irrigation. Nevertheless he cast his eyes on much bigger and potentially more useful projects, projects in which his compatriots could display all the panoply of modern engineering skills to revive agriculture which would bolster the prestige of their homeland in the eyes of its wards.

He discoursed favourably on the potential for irrigation inherent in the 'Akkar northeast of Tripoli and the plain of the 'Amk ('Amuq) in the *sanjaq* of Alexandretta. He extolled the enormous possibilities for irrigated agriculture presented by the Euphrates and its affluents, the Khabur in particular. Nevertheless, ever the realist, he focused most of his attention on the waters of the Orontes. Here was a river with underutilised water resources running through a region of good soils well suited to the growing of cotton, maize, rice, and other high-yielding food and industrial crops. He felt that the area of the middle Orontes showed particular promise for extension of irrigation. The valley called the Ghab⁵ between Qala't Shayzar and Jisr al-Shugur was a swampy morass which after drainage seemed eminently suitable for raising cotton and other valuable summer crops. It was set amidst districts which possessed a large population of peasants, and was linked by a

⁵ Or by some, incorrectly, the 'Gharb'. This appellation is a mute comment on the previous experience of many who worked in Syria since it was employed here by analogy with the rich agricultural district of that same name to be found in Morocco.

good network of communications to the world outside. Indeed he believed it possible to irrigate a minimum of 44,500 hectares which he estimated to be a bit more than half of all currently irrigated land in Syria. Again, what is significant here is not the figures which are somewhat dubious, but the way in which they illustrate the important place development of the Orontes, and particularly the Ghab held in the eyes of French experts and administrators.

The fact that one attraction of the Ghab was its location bordering heavily populated rural localities focuses attention on Achard's proposals to remedy the deficiencies in Labour, the second factor of production. He realised that agricultural expansion in the absence of machines was a labour intensive process, and he had observed that there was apparently a dearth of cultivators in the countryside. Therefore for agricultural regeneration to succeed, rural areas must necessarily be repopulated.⁶

Achard pointed out that under Syrian conditions, it was economically impossible for a landowner to operate his farming enterprise directly or by means of rent-paying tenants. In a country where one year out of three might bring a good cereal harvest, the owner could never cover his costs, much less make a profit or build up his equity. Such a situation was hardly conducive to economies of scale involving the cultivation of vast surfaces with the most modern agricultural equipment money could buy. Such methods of cultivation

⁶ For Achard's views on this important question, see 'Les Problèmes . . . l'exploitation . . .', *passim*.

required enormous capital reserves to service them, reserves which were not available to the Syrian landowner. Even if he had such monies in hand, this scenario assumed that the magnate, who was more than likely a notable of the old school, would wish to invest funds in combines and harvesters when there were apparently myriads of peasants able to do the job so much more cheaply. Moreover this notable was far more interested in dominating men than he was in controlling land, for his authority was bolstered by the number of his clients. Thus for the landowner, the system of *métayage*, forms of share cropping where the costs were divided between owner and cultivator, proved a much more advantageous solution to the labour problem. It was far more economical and enabled the *seigneurs* to ensnare a clientele through the mechanism of debt bondage. If this process left the sharecropper, 'poor devil', crushed by poverty and hounded by debt, so what!

Whatever the evils of *métayage*, it was indeed a labour intensive system of cultivation. Achard certainly could not find 'myriads' of peasants to make this system work efficiently on the lands currently cultivated or to open up those new territories which the implementation of irrigation would make available. Using what were undoubtedly faulty population figures, and making certain theoretical assumptions based upon them, he stated that the agricultural population would have to *double* for the proper exploitation of 'those vast stretches of fertile, and in very large part, irrigable land which spreads out in the plains of the Ghab and the Amk [*sic*'Amuq], in the valley of the Euphrates, in the

upper Jazira, along the right of way of the Baghdad Railway'.⁷ What is important here is not the figures, but the sheer magnitude of the requirements which he derived from them.

Confronted by this plague of underpopulation which he perceived to be an enormous impediment in the path of the agricultural resuscitation of Syria, Achard proposed several solutions:

1>The creation of smallholdings in order to

A>reduce or stop large-scale emigration either to cities within Syria or abroad.

B>successfully settle those agricultural populations which had emigrated recently from Anatolia to Syria or might do so in future.

C>provide a more prosperous and secure life for the Syrian peasant family in order to 'sustain and develop its prolific tendencies'.

2>The development of a rural health programme in order to reduce the rate of infant mortality.

These proposals were part and parcel of efforts to solve the agrarian question, and were also programmes whose effect would only become apparent over many years. That is another reason why he placed so much emphasis on the harnessing of water resources that bordered districts in which large numbers of cultivators were concentrated.

In all his papers, Achard dealt only indirectly with the problems revolving around Capital, the third factor of production. The ultimate idea behind the creation of smallholdings to which the peasant proprietor held clear title was to break that cycle of indebtedness endemic to the countryside, and give the cultivator a means of

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Bull. EHC*, 104; Nantes, FB, Carton 1571, 5.

establishing recognised credit through which he could improve his patrimony.

Nevertheless this too was a long term process, and Achard was well aware that the large drainage and irrigation projects so dear to his heart could only be created by means of the infusion of considerable foreign monies. These large capital requirements were implicit in his proposals, but he left it to others to clarify them.

In his expositions on the problems of Syrian agriculture, Achard highlighted certain areas in which he felt that intervention by the Mandatory Power could have a positive effect on the physical resuscitation of the land within a relatively short period of time. His concerns both mirrored and influenced the preoccupations of those who shaped the policies designed to promote this regeneration.

The Mandatory authorities saw their task as fourfold: **First**, to create a basic infrastructure which had not existed heretofore, and upon which they could build. **Second**, to increase the agricultural options available to the cultivator whilst supplying vital raw materials for French industry by the introduction of new, remunerative crops. **Third**, to expand the cultivated area through the extensive use of irrigation which it was hoped would make of Syria once more “le pays du vin et du levain, le grenier de L’Empire Romain”. **Fourth**, to augment the rural labour force, certainly through natural propagation, but also by immigration and internal migration.

These strategies were interdependent with each contributing its part. Nonetheless as they worked themselves out during the course of

the twenty year Mandate, some came to be realised much more fully than others. Of these, the most intractable problem proved to be the augmentation of the agricultural labour force.

III.2>Increasing the rural population

How were the Mandatory authorities to augment the number of hands available for the task of rural reconstruction? Natural increase was important, but since Syria during the Mandate was not a 'brave new world', the control of this process was well beyond the ken of even the most bureaucratically-minded French official. With Achard, they could only hope that the general improvement of the countryside and the life of the cultivator would induce him to become more prolific. Since the authorities were well aware that this process could only work itself out over time, they were forced to turn to internal migration and immigration of foreign populations to fill the gap.

The movement of seasonal workers to help in the harvest was not new to Syria. Whilst peasants in the *vilayets* of Aleppo and Damascus tended to move about only locally in order to bring in the winter cereals, those living in the Alaouite region were accustomed to travel more frequently and for far greater distances to seek agricultural work. They moved to the plains for the cereal harvest between the months of May and August, and once again to the *qada's* of Idlib and Ma'arat al Nu'man for olive picking in November. This temporary migration from the Jabal Ansayria to seek work was related to the fact that in general, these mountains were the most over-populated part of Syria. The

existence of this spare labour force in the surrounding regions was an important factor in determining the development of the Orontes valley for cotton cultivation.⁸

Although internal migration was an important means of supplying agricultural workers where needed, immigration of foreign populations had been a well-tried solution followed by the French in their other overseas territories, particularly in North Africa. Their colonisation by Europeans had gone on apace, and opinion held that they had infused an element of modernity and stability into rural areas. During the era of the Mandate, Morocco was the most salient example of such a policy.⁹

On the face of it, Syria would appear to be an even more favourable candidate for European colonists than were the lands of the Maghrib. It was Muslim, but there was a prominent Christian element which had long enjoyed close ties with France. Agriculture was in a state of degeneration and more than ever needed the transfusion of capital and expertise which such immigration would bring. Nevertheless from the very beginning, the French were keenly aware that Syria could never be a *colonie de peuplement*.

For Syria was a *mandate*, not a colony or even a protectorate: The international community represented in the League of Nations had commissioned France at her own request to guide this proto-nation to maturity after which she would depart. No time limit was set for the

⁸ For a discussion of the currents of internal migration and its importance for the development of cotton, see Achard, 'Culture . . .,' 73-81.

⁹ For the impact of European colonisation in Morocco, see Will D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages . . .*, *passim*.

achievement of this process, but it was assumed to be short; certainly not more than one generation. Moreover there were powerful landed elements upon whom the French depended for support who were hardly likely to welcome European competition for possession of their patrimony. Partnership with such elements was one thing; their displacement was quite another.

Nevertheless, foreign organisations and groups, not understanding or caring to understand this difference between mandate and colony would propose colonisation schemes to the High Commission from time to time. Most of these did not get beyond initial enquires. For example, in June, 1937, the Ataman of the Algerian Cossack Organisation (Association algérienne des Cosaques), formed of Cossacks who fled Russia after the Revolution, wrote the High Commissioner (whom he styled 'Resident General') to propose the establishment of Cossack agricultural co-operatives in the Alaouites and along the Euphrates. The High Commission summarily rejected this *démarche* because the 'present evolution' of the Mandated territories (i.e., the signing of the Franco-Syrian Treaty in 1936) did not lend itself to the creation of such European colonies.¹⁰

A much more serious proposal came from the pen of Leo Winz, a German Jewish philanthropist from Berlin, editor and publisher of the newspaper, *Gemeinedeblatt der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin*, the official organ of the Jewish community executive. In 1933, he

¹⁰ For this episode, see the exchange of letters between the Ataman of the Algerian Cossacks and the High Commission, 17 June-2 July 1937. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 567.

approached Haqqi Bey al-'Azm, the President of the Council of Ministers of the State of Syria, with a scheme for the settlement of a large Jewish agricultural colony in Syria. Winz made his request directly to the Syrian leader rather than through the High Commission in order to demonstrate to the Syrians, nationalists and others, that his proposals were not a product of French imperialist machinations. Haqqi Bey was not averse to dealing, but suggested that Winz develop his plans discreetly.

After a study tour in the fall of 1933, Winz set forth his ideas in a letter to the Syrian leader: He proposed to settle his co-religionists in the Jazira which the State of Syria would proclaim a separate *vilayet*. Jews would have the right of unfettered immigration into Syria and the agricultural colonies which they established would enjoy complete administrative autonomy. Whilst the Syrian government and the Mandatory Power would give every guarantee for the protection of the immigrants and their property, the colonists themselves would have the right to bear arms for self-defence. Winz believed such rights and guarantees of autonomy to be all the more necessary as the Jewish colonists were possessed 'of their own peculiar characteristics and civilisation'. Nonetheless any who might wish to become Syrian citizens would be allowed to do so.

The Syrian government would give the association which represented the colonists the sole right to exploit all state lands, watercourses, and mineral deposits in the region. All those to whom the state had previously granted lands along the course of the rivers

Khabur and Jagh-Jagh would have their properties exchanged for others. In return for the right to live under these conditions, the colonists promised to use their capital to develop the economy of the Jazira. Winz assured his interlocutor that he had the support of important Jewish financial circles in Europe, and that any collaboration between the Syrian state and his proposed settlement would prove fruitful for all parties concerned.¹¹

These 'conditions minima' were to serve as the basis for further negotiations, and the turn of events appeared sufficiently propitious for Winz to feel at liberty to inform the High Commission of his plans. Nevertheless, in the climate of the middle nineteen thirties, such a demand for a foreign concession, for concession it was, even if not specifically so called, had no chance of success. In his reply to Winz, the High Commissioner pointed out that the establishment of a capital-rich colony in the Jazira held obvious economic advantages in addition to its humanitarian aspect in this time of persecution. Unfortunately neither the Syrian government nor the Mandatory Power could guarantee the security of a foreign concession in the face of a rising tide of Muslim [and nationalist] opinion against the alienation of their patrimony to outsiders, especially those who smacked of Zionism.¹²

Thus the character of the Mandate reinforced by local sensitivities precluded *European* immigration either from the *métropole*

¹¹ See letter from Leo Winz to Haqqi Bey al-'Azm, 23 January 1934. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 616.

¹² Letter from HC de Martel to Leo Winz, 16 December 1934. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 616.

or from other countries outside the Levant. At the beginning of the Mandate at least, it was another matter entirely with regard to populations seeking to enter Syria from other countries of the Middle East--particularly if they happened to be Christian refugees fleeing from persecution. Ever since the Revolution, France had seen herself as a refuge for those seeking a haven from oppression. In the Levant, she had long posed as the champion of Christians caught under the Ottoman yoke. Therefore it was natural that she should welcome Christian communities fleeing hostility. This was even more the case because she felt that such groups would be beholden to her politically in her struggle with nationalist elements, and might contribute economically as well. The French always considered Christians of whatever stripe to be more civilised and more reliable than their Muslim neighbours; employed them almost exclusively as intermediaries; and thus tended to see non-Christians through what was indeed a distorting lens. Such attitudes generated a predilection for Christians, particularly if they were emerging from the horrors of massacre and destruction.

Unfortunately the settlement of many of these groups did not serve to swell the agricultural labour force. Thus the French gave a ready welcome to the numerous Armenian refugees who fled the Republic of Turkey after the First World War. but their aptitudes and preferences tended to revolve around the shop rather than the farm.¹³

¹³ For comments on the aptitudes of Armenians for agriculture, see Georges Carle, 'Les Arméniens immigrés dans les Etats sous mandat français: leur valeur économique et sociale,' *Bull. UES*, V, 3, 30 September, 1926, 195-201.

Moreover as the Mandate moved into the nineteen thirties, and the balance began to swing ever so slowly against the French in Syria. Muslims and nationalists decried the immigration of potential agricultural populations, even if they possessed impeccable Middle Eastern roots. The perfect example of this is the way in which the vagaries of internal Syrian politics sabotaged a plan to develop the Ghab with the aid of a community of Christian refugees.

III.3>The Assyrians and the Ghab

When the League of Nations sought a home for Assyrian refugees fleeing from persecution in Iraq, a proposal to place them in the heart of western Syria was greeted by howls of protest. In its search for an area in which to settle this group, the League appealed to twenty-two countries in October, 1933 and again in June, 1934 to find out if any of them might have a spot in either their home territories or their colonies.¹⁴ Faced with either a complete rejection of its request or the fact that the territories offered proved unsuitable, the League cast its eye once again on the Levant states which already held some 8,800 Assyrians in a temporary settlement on the Khabur. On 14 April 1935, France offered the the Ghab Valley, provided that it would in no way be responsible for financing any settlement there.

As a result of this offer, a proposal was drawn up to place a colony of some 15,000 Assyrians in the Ghab Valley. Its elements would

¹⁴ For a list of these countries and their responses, see Société des Nations, 'Etablissement des Assyriens de l'Irak,' Document C./Min.Ass./226, Geneva, 7 October 1936. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 581.

comprise a nucleus from the Assyrian colony on the Khabur which would then be closed and a further lot of immigrants, some 5-6,000, currently living in the region of Mosul.

The French authorities had long wished to develop the region of the Ghab, but for various reasons had thus far been unable to do so. At the behest of the High Commission, the Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques (REH) had recently presented a plan for the complete development of the Orontes which included the drainage and irrigation of the Ghab. This fortuitous combination of a sound irrigation project and sufficient manpower to exploit it gave the French hopes that it might be possible to make an area, which up until that time had remained virgin territory, agriculturally productive.

In this case the project would be expedited because finance seemed readily available. Its total cost was estimated at 82,500,000 F, of which 62,000,000 were for the works of drainage and irrigation and 20,500,000 for the settlement of the refugees. The High Commission was willing to make a contribution of 22,000,000 F towards the cost of creating the physical infrastructure if the League and its member states found the funds to complete the budget. This in itself seemed a difficult task. The United Kingdom and Iraq were each willing to make a larger pledge, but there was a real question of how the rest of the funds could be raised. Given the economic circumstances of the time, it was difficult to persuade other members of the League to part with cash to

support a foreign people no matter how deserving, and an appeal to private charities might not be sufficient to supply the balance.¹⁵

If the finance was problematic, opposition within Syria proved a much more serious obstacle. As one might imagine, a project to place a large alien Christian population in the heart of western Syria engendered violent protests on the part of Muslim and nationalist opinion. For example, important members of the community of Homs led by their chief, Hashim al-Atasi, Deputy and President of the National Bloc, wrote a letter to the High Commissioner in April, 1935 expressing strong objections to the immigration of people who, if they had proved troublesome in Iraq, would certainly be so in Syria, a country that was similar to Iraq in race, language, and religion. In the eyes of Atasi and his friends, the French government which had taken upon itself to protect the economic, administrative, and social interests of Syria by accepting a mandate should not prejudice these interests by introducing any discordant elements into Syrian territory.¹⁶

These sentiments were reiterated in meetings and newspapers throughout Syria, but particularly in Hama and Homs, the regions which would be most affected by the Assyrian settlement. In the spring of 1936, the controversy became even more acute because of developments in Franco-Syrian political relations. In January, the

¹⁵ For the problems, financial and otherwise surrounding the launch of this scheme for Assyrian settlement, see Société des Nations, 'Établissement des Assyriens de l'Irak: Rapport du Comité du Conseil sur l'établissement des Assyriens de l'Irak dans la région du Ghab (Territoires du Levant sous mandat français).' Document C.352.M.179.1935.VII, Geneva, 12 September 1935. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 582.

¹⁶ Letter from Hashim al-Atasi *et al.* to HC de Martel, 27 April 1935. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 584.

French brutally suppressed demonstrations occasioned by the closure of the Damascus office of the National Bloc, and the arrest of several of its leaders. The protest rapidly escalated into a forty-three day general strike which effectively shut down the entire country. This culminated in an accord on 2 March between the National Bloc and the High Commission which, among other things, provided that the Bloc would send a delegation to Paris to negotiate a Franco-Syrian treaty. As everybody knew, this act signalled the eventual termination of the Mandate, and the achievement of full independence. Long and difficult *pourparlers* were pursued in Paris, and it was not until the middle of September that the delegation of the National Bloc could return to Damascus with a draft treaty in hand.¹⁷

This sudden change in the course of Syrian history had a decisive effect on the plan to settle the Assyrians. From the very beginning of this episode, the French themselves had not been insensitive to the problems such a colony might cause and were conscious of both Syrian reactions and their obligations as the Mandatory Power.¹⁸ Their concerns became magnified by the new turn of events, and they felt compelled in light of the rapid unfolding of the situation to point out to the League that the insertion of a new and unwanted Christian minority

¹⁷ For this episode see, Khoury, *Syria . . .*, 457-67.

¹⁸ See the letter from French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval accepting the charge to settle the Assyrians., 'Procès-Verbal de la Quatre-Vingt-Cinquième Session (Extraordinaire) du Conseil, Tenu à Genève du lundi 15 au mercredi 17 avril 1935,' Annexe 1538: 'Etablissement des Assyriens de l'Irak--2>Lettre, en date du 14 Avril 1935, du Gouvernement français au Président du Comité pour l'établissement des Assyriens de l'Irak'. Document C.165.M.91.1935.VII, Société des Nations, *Journal Officiel*, XVI, 5, May, 1935, 579-81. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 581.

in a region immediately adjacent to one of the centrepieces of Muslim resistance (i.e. Hama) would prove extremely unwise. As a result, of this warning which tended to corroborate its own observations, the Committee which had been charged by the Council of the League with the resolution of the Assyrian question reluctantly proposed to their colleagues that the Ghab scheme for Assyrian settlement be terminated forthwith. On 4 July 1936, the League Council decided to follow this recommendation.¹⁹

A fortuitous concatenation of circumstances had led to the formulation of a project designed to kill two birds with one stone: to turn what had always been a vexatious Christian minority into a community of peaceful and productive cultivators, and in so doing, make the Ghab an important part of the Syrian agricultural economy. The outcome of the Assyrian settlement plan only served to underline the fact that it was well-nigh impossible to use foreign immigrants to swell the rural labour force in the face of virulent local opposition, even if these immigrants had the full backing of the international community.

Writing at the beginning of 1940 on the 'Economic Future of Syria', Jean de Hautecloque, the Delegate at Damascus, came to the

¹⁹ For the dénouement of the Ghab settlement scheme, see 1>Société des Nations, 'Etablissement des Assyriens de l'Irak: Rapport du Comité du Conseil sur l'établissement des Assyriens de l'Irak, and Annexes IVa and b, Geneva, 2 July 1936. Document C.282.M171.1936.VII. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 581; 2>Assyrian Settlement National Appeal, 'Organising Secretary's report on his visit to Geneva, June 21st-July 5th, 1936,' 14 July 1936, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 583; 3>Letter from J.P. Walters, Sous-Secrétaire Général, Directeur de la section politique to Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères de la République Française a.b.s. de Monsieur le Sous Directeur de la Société des Nations, 4 July 1936. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 444--Services Techniques.

conclusion that there could only be two solutions to the labour problem: In areas such as the Jazira, machines must replace men; in regions such as those of western Syria and the Hawran where the soils were too thin for the successful use of machinery, a reservoir of manpower would have to be sought, as it was in the past, from regions of surplus population. Although districts such as those in the Alaouites had long been accustomed to send their sons to work in fields far from home, de Hautecloque proposed their 'stabilisation' on surplus state lands in important agricultural areas. Like Achard so many years before, he pointed out that the best way to attract cultivators was to provide them with work that was both secure and profitable. Nevertheless he too felt that there was no urgency in seeking an answer to this problem, and that eventually other solutions as yet unknown might be found.²⁰

For de Hautecloque as for Achard before him, there were other questions more amenable to administrative action. Among these, was the creation of the physical requisites for agricultural productivity.

III.4>Creation of an agricultural infrastructure

Building a firm foundation was a primary responsibility for those delegated to deal with agriculture. This revolved around important, but mundane chores: the digging of new wells and the restoration and cleaning of *qanat* systems; the creation of experimental farms and the re-establishment of the state agriculture school located at Salamiya;

²⁰ Jean de Hautecloque, 'L'Avenir économique de la Syrie,' 15-20; Achard, 'Les problèmes. . . l'exploitation. . .,' *passim*.

the encouragement of the use of fertilisers both natural and chemical; the construction of stations where motoculture was practised; the organisation of the fight against locust depredations in co-ordination with their colleagues from other mandated territories. In short, the goal was to promote all efforts to expose cultivators to the methods and mechanisms of modern husbandry.

This was a continuing process, unheralded, and with mixed success. Certainly many *qanat* systems were cleared and wells dug. Certainly there was a more organised fight against the locust, although the results were disappointing. Nevertheless much that was accomplished was too little, given insufficient financial resources and inadequate supervision.

One finds an illuminating example of good intentions which came to nought in the saga of the Agriculture School at Salamiya. This was a school established around 1910 by the *mutasarrif* of Hama using sequestered funds, which were originally destined as an offering (the *khums*) from the Isma'ili inhabitants of Salamiya to their spiritual leader in India, the Aga Khan. Its buildings were largely destroyed by fire during the Ottoman retreat in 1918--a fire which the Sunni inhabitants of Hama accused the Isma'ilis of setting themselves in order to obliterate the bad memories roused by the school.

It was re-established in 1920 in a spirit of Franco-Isma'ili co-operation in order to teach modern methods of cultivation in one of the most important agricultural areas of Syria. The inhabitants of Salamiya contributed land for its experimental farm. Nevertheless it was never

very successful as an educational institution because 'it sought to create agricultural engineers in lieu of educating cultivators'. Thus whilst hired labour worked its land, the school gave theoretical courses rather than the practical instruction which was so badly needed.

Politics reared its head when the Syrian nationalist government closed the school in 1937 because they saw it as the fruit of an entente between the hated Mandatory Power and the Isma'ilis, a group little disposed to support the nationalist cause. Moreover the land belonging to the school, which had been originally received as a gift from its Isma'ili owners, was well-watered and fertile. It aroused the cupidity of some leading Hamiote nationalists who were apparently assured that they would easily be able to rent the cropland and the tree nursery at a good price. In doing so, they would profit both financially and politically by snatching the rights to this most desirable of properties from under the noses of their Isma'ili opponents. That this act roused bitterness in the local inhabitants goes without saying.²¹

The unhappy history of the Agriculture School at Salamiya illustrates the kind of problems faced by the Mandatory authorities in accomplishing some of the more mundane tasks for the betterment of agriculture in Syria. Lack of even the most basic information about

²¹ For the history of the Salamiya Agricultural School, see 1>Dick Douwes and Norman N. Lewis, 'The trials of Isma'ilis in the first decade of the twentieth century,' *IJMES*, XXI, 1989, 228-29; 2>'Ecole d'Agriculture de Salamieh', n.d. (Nov. 1925?), MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 861; 3>P. Berthelot (Délégué Adjoint--Homs-Hama), 'Information a/s: Ecole d'Agriculture de Sélimieh,' Homs, 18 November 1937, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 864. See also Berthelot's bitter critique of the actions of the Syrian government with regard to this school in 4> 'Notes sur la mise en valeur de la région de "Caza" de Homs, Mémoire de Stage (No. 249), February, 1938, Centre des Hautes Etudes sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes [C.H.E.A.M.], 34.

crop requirements; a heavy reliance on theory to the exclusion of practical knowledge; the intrusion of political and communal rivalries in what would appear to be the most non-controversial matters often tended to stymie their various projects. Nevertheless, considering that there was so little modern agriculture in Syria to begin with, and that she had suffered the devastation of three years of war and famine, the French accomplished a good deal in reconstructing and building upon basic structures.

III.5>Crop diversification--cereals

One of the most important strategies followed by the Mandatory authorities in their efforts to place Syrian agriculture on a sounder footing than hitherto was to encourage Syrian landlords and peasants to move from their heavy dependence on the cultivation of cereals used largely for local consumption towards experimentation with other potentially more remunerative crops. In pursuing this idea, French functionaries were aided and abetted by French capitalists who hoped to make profits whilst providing important raw materials for their home market.

Nevertheless one must begin any examination of this means of strengthening rural resources by looking at winter cereals. Wheat and barley were the most important food crops in Syria, yet during the period of the Mandate they appeared to suffer from a certain 'benign neglect'. There was no grand strategy to increase cereal output; no massive infusion of French capital; no effort to introduce new varieties

or increase the yield of old ones by the introduction of modern techniques.

At first glance, this seems strange for reasons related both to historical image and historical reality. From the beginning to the end of their Mandate, many French officials and publicists held tenaciously to a particular historical vision of what Syria once had been; what she had become; and what she would become with their help. In their eyes, Syria had been a fertile grain producing land when under the sway of those various ancient dynasties which once held her in thrall--Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Seleukids. She reached her apogee during the centuries of the Roman Empire when she was truly the granary of Rome. Such prosperity persisted through the Classical age only to fall into a slow decline under Muslim domination. This desuetude reached its nadir during the four centuries of Ottoman rule, and France as the heritor of Rome had the appointed rôle of restoring Syria to the agricultural pre-eminence she had held during Roman times.²²

Yet this image of Syria as Demeter bearing sheaves of wheat was contradicted by recent experience which demonstrated just how far she had fallen from that ideal. During the years which immediately preceded the début of French administration, the spectre of famine had emerged as the central fact of life in Syria. Indeed when the French and their allies first came to the Levant in 1918, they were faced with

²² For an elaboration of this idea, see Huvelin, 4-5.

the task of repairing the enormous damage caused by hunger, disease, and other ravages of war.

Yet he who peruses the reports of Achard and Huvelin written after their study mission of 1919 learns nothing of these calamities because there is nary a mention of them. It is not that the authors were ignorant of the famine or unaware of its consequences. It is simply that they felt that one should not dwell upon calamities which directly stemmed from the War because 'however profound and cruel one observes them to be, . . . they will pass with the crisis which brought them'. Far better to focus on those endemic causes of agricultural stagnation which had bedevilled Syria for generations before 1914.²³

Strangely, this contrast between historical vision and recent experience in no way incited the French authorities to promote and improve cereal cultivation. In focusing on the agricultural situation of postwar Syria, they considered their vision of Syria as the granary of Rome to be far more a metaphor for a reputed prosperity which might be restored than a basis for sound policy. Despite the enthusiastic prognosis of such influential figures as General Gouraud who spoke of the possibility of producing eight million tonnes of cereals, much of which could be exported,²⁴ no one seriously proposed that Syria would or should become a major supplier of wheat--even after the Jazira became available. Achard, his colleagues, and his successors were

²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴ Figure whose stated origin was 'specialist reports' which he gave to the French Premier and the Finance Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, 13 and 20 November, 1920. 'Memorandum de l'exposé verbal . . .': II--'Possibilités Economiques,' 2; and 'Note sur les questions posées . . .,' 2.

well aware of Syria's capacities for grain production, and saw no immediate means of preventing cereal deficits given prevailing weather conditions, except through expansion onto new lands.²⁵ This attitude is exemplified by Achard's caustic comment about the granary metaphor, that seeing as how Rome found it necessary to have granaries scattered throughout her possessions, did it not then follow from this that each was of limited capacity?²⁶ To him it made far more sense to focus on crops such as cotton which might prove truly profitable.

Nevertheless if there existed no concerted strategy to augment the output of grain, the Mandatory authorities did institute a number of tactical measures in order to shape the pattern of exports and imports of this commodity. These acts were designed to remedy short term imbalances caused by fluctuations in local production and the impact of the world market.²⁷

The most salient fact about Syrian grain production was that it was usually insufficient to meet Syrian needs. Indeed of the eighteen years between 1924 and 1941, only five saw more exports than imports

²⁵ cf. the opinion of Huvelin that any improvement in yields would be 'problématique (and in any case too slow and too irregular)' to be of much use. Huvelin, 9.

²⁶ Achard, 'Notes sur la Syrie,' 98.

²⁷ For information on policy towards the grain trade during the early and middle Mandate, see 1>Norman Burns, *The Tariff of Syria, 1919-1932* (Beirut: American Press, 1933 [Reprint: New York: AMS Press, 1973]), especially Chap. X, 143-74; 2>L., 'Le Commerce du blé au Liban et en Syrie,' *AF*, XXXIII, 312, July-August, 1933, 227-33; 3>*Idem*, 'L'Orge au Liban et en Syrie,' *AF*, XXXIII, 313, September-October 1933, 267-68; 4>Reclus (Conseiller du Haut Commissariat aux Affaires Economiques), 'Situation économique et politique douanière,' April. 1933, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 697. Unfortunately, there is little information for the period from 1933-40.

of wheat and its products (flour, semolina, and groats).²⁸ The frenetic speculation of the immediate postwar years combined with the scanty output of grain led to the prohibition of grain exports outside the Mandated territories, a ban which was maintained until 1930 with one short exception. Exports were then permitted throughout the 1930's with the exception of 1937 and 1938 when low stocks accompanied by speculation brought another prohibition.

The approach to grain exports during the 'normal' economy of the 1920's was complemented by a tariff policy so formulated as to balance the needs of both consumers and producers. Since the Syrian diet consisted largely of wheat products, those who ate them had to be protected from bread shortages and price surges. Yet many consumers were also producers, and their prosperity determined their purchasing power which in turn affected those other parts of the economy which supplied their needs. Therefore the goal was to use the tariff to keep the price of bread low whilst assuring a sufficient profit to the cultivator.

Thus the tariff evolved from the standard Ottoman rate of 11% on all goods which provided a limited form of protection for both consumer and peasant to a more differentiated and flexible one: In 1925-26, when the Druze rebellion combined with a poor harvest to reduce drastically

²⁸ For this information, see Table: 'Balance des importations et exportations de blés, farines semoules et gruaux de blé à 1924 de 1941 [*sic*], Léon Mourad, 'Les Conditions économiques de l'agriculture: organisation--transformation--débouches,' Annexe No. 6, in Fouad Saadé *et al.*, *L'Agriculture: richesse nationale* (Troisième semaine sociale de Beyrouth, 19-26 avril 1942) (Beirut: Editions les lettres orientales, 1942). One can also find this table along with an interesting commentary upon it in an extract from Léon Mourad, *Notre économie*, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 809.

the stocks of grain and drive prices up, the tariff on imported grain was lowered to 5.5%. A similar tactic was followed during the bsd harvest year of 1928-29.

With the coming of the world crisis, a tariff wall was gradually erected around Syrian wheat. A plunge in the prices of agricultural commodities was accompanied locally by bountiful harvests. For the peasant, the costs of production were higher than the value of the grain produced. To remedy this, a strong protective tariff policy was introduced which raised duties through a series of stages to 80% by the end of 1932. A poor grain harvest in 1932-33, brought a recoil to 40%. This general policy of protection was continued throughout the 1930's. By the end of the peacetime Mandate, wheat and barley were walled in by a tariff of 120%, semolina by one of 180%, and flour by one of 220%! This last was applied in order to stop the inundation of French flour with which the exporters of Marseille were flooding the Syrian market.²⁹

The question then, is whether tariff policy was successful in regulating the excesses of the free market by bringing the grain supply more into equilibrium with the needs of the Mandated territories. To contemporary observers, its application seemed to lack a certain synchronism.

For example, the tariff was certainly lowered after poor cereal harvests---but not until the price of bread had soared into the stratosphere leading to undue suffering on the part of the consumer. By contrast, when grain was abundant, the authorities were not slow to

²⁹ Mourad, 'Les Conditions économiques . . .,' 128.

raise the tariff--but always it seemed after the poor peasant had sold his crop to his own disadvantage. Therefore the ones to reap the benefit were the fat middlemen who needed it least.³⁰

In these situations, the peasant seemed always to be the loser. Because he had no capital reserves, he could not hold back his harvest to await a more advantageous situation. By contrast, the large proprietor or wealthy merchant who were often one and the same could afford to indulge in a bit of grain speculation at the expense of the cultivator.

Speculation was helped by the fact that the price of grain was not uniform throughout the Levant. Physical insecurity, the state of the roads, and slow means of transportation--in some areas, still by camelback--meant that grain continued to be marketed in local centres--the 'agro-cities'. Whereas the peasant remained at the mercy of the rich proprietor or merchant to whom he was, like as not, bound by the iron fetters of fiscal obligation, the latter had many more options for marketing the grain he thus obtained.

The result was a frenetic round of movement as the middlemen rushed to take advantage of one market as against another. This led to enormous changes in price as one market might be flooded with product following the whispered rumour of an elevated price. The first-comers were well-served by their information; those slower afoot suffered for their delay, any one centre being capable of absorbing only so much. And so the race would begin again.

³⁰ Burns, 154.

Thus in 1931, speculators from Homs and Aleppo sent wheat collected from their regions to Palestine which had experienced a bad wheat harvest instead of to their neighbours in the Jabal Ansayria who suffered equally, but were unable to pay the original price demanded. The inhabitants of this region were so desperate for bread that finally they themselves were forced to go to Palestine to make their purchases. In the end, the total price they finally paid was certainly no better than that which they had originally refused--and probably a lot worse!³¹

Fiddling with the tariff could only alleviate temporary shortages or surpluses within Syria. Protection as practiced in the 1930's was no long-term solution because whilst the exclusion of foreign grain gave more scope for the Syrian producer, it also often drove prices higher for the Syrian consumer. Moreover protection had no effect on the problem of self-sufficiency in grain which was due to much deeper structural causes. At the time, knowledgeable commentators linked this question to the Increase of cereal production. Such an increase, they felt, was directly related both to improvements in technique and to expansion of the cultivated area into new lands, especially those in the Jazira.³²

One of the authors cited above, writing in 1933, stated that

The return of security allows lands abandoned for several years to be put once more into cultivation, but no real extension of the cultivated area is clearly apparent compared with the period before 1914. On the other hand, up to the present, one does not notice

³¹ L., 'Le Commerce du blé . . .,' 230.

³² *Ibid.*, 231; Burns, 154.

any improvement in yields for crops taken together: certain quite worthy improvements in detail are without influence on the total of the harvest.³³

If this were true in 1933, a glance at the changes in wheat production patterns in the great grain-growing districts of inner Syria during the succeeding five years amply demonstrate why such an assertion could not be made at the end of the Mandate, *viz*

TABLE III.1
WHEAT:
CHANGES IN THE PATTERN OF PRODUCTION, 1934-38
(‘000 hectares; ‘000 tonnes)

	1934		1935		1936		1937		1938	
	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.
N. Syria	100	90	110	150	100	100	113	62	110	150
S. Syria	216	133	145	187	150	93	142	147	145	151
Deir ez -										
Zor/Jazira	62	107	71	102	84	149	111	157	115	229
TOTALS:	378	330	326	439	334	342	366	366	370	530

Nota: Figures taken from the *Bulletin de la Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban* [title varies slightly], 1936, 8; 1937, 10; 1938, 9; 1939, 12. Unfortunately figures for previous years are not broken down by region.

As the table clearly shows, it was the opening of the Jazira which had the greatest impact on cereal production. Between 1934 and 1938, the areas in that region devoted to wheat nearly doubled whilst production more than doubled. This increase was constant except for a slight lag in production in 1935. More important, average yields were reported to be approximately double those of any other wheat-growing area in Syria.³⁴

³³ L., ‘Le commerce du blé . . .,’ 230-31

³⁴ Régie des travaux du cadastre . . ., ‘Rapport général de reconnaissance foncière . . .,’ 16.

It is interesting to note that the rise of the Jazira to prominence was paralleled by the shrinking importance of the traditional wheat-growing regions of Syria. Northern Syria, the old *vilayet* of Aleppo, saw its wheat area hold steady whilst its production fluctuated sharply. In southern Syria, once the dominant grain-growing region, there was a reduction of wheat area accompanied by a stagnation of production.

Thus by 1938, there was an opening of new lands on the northeastern frontier, pre-eminently suited to wheat cultivation. The increase in area and production of this basic foodstuff pointed the way to what appeared to be a secure future.

Whilst self-sufficiency in grain was never attained during the Mandate, matters were alleviated considerably by the opening of the Jazira. The only other way to increase grain output would have been to grow more of it under irrigation. Nevertheless French planners refused to consider this, believing that irrigation should be reserved for finer things. In the words of the writer of one of the reports written in 1940 which summarised French achievements during the Mandate, 'These crops [winter cereals--wheat and barley] were able to help the country live; they couldn't enrich it'.³⁵

The products of the soil which would 'enrich' Syria were certain summer crops destined to feed the ravenous maw of French industry. It is these which received most attention during the Mandate, two in particular, silk and cotton.

³⁵ 'L'Oeuvre du Mandat dans le domaine agricole,' 2.

The period of the Mandate saw the decline of an old crop--silk--and the introduction of a new one--cotton. The dislocations of the Great War--in particular, the destruction of thousands of mulberry trees--dealt a body blow to the Lebanese silk industry. It could never be revived, despite strenuous efforts of the authorities who were seconded by interested industrial circles in the *métropole*. Silk from the Mandated territories continued to face stiff competition from that produced in the Far East (chiefly Japan). Its fate was finally sealed by two unrelated occurrences: the Great Depression and the invention of rayon. The economic crisis of the 1930's brought with it a sharp drop in the prices of silk and other raw materials whilst destroying those Lyonnais firms which had financed the revival in the Levant. When silk production recovered somewhat in the later 1930's, it was with the aid of local capital. Nevertheless even the best financed industry could not swim against the tide of fashion. The invention of rayon--the so-called 'artificial silk'--led to a change in style which inexorably drove silk from centre stage.

The demise of the silk industry was counterbalanced by the increase in cotton-growing. Cotton was the major crop fostered during the Mandate period. A local variety of cotton had of course long been produced with more or less success, but the initial hopes held out for it soon ran afoul of problems revolving around the quality and consistency of the fibre produced. Here again, French industry took a hand, supplying seed, machinery, advice, and a ready market for the product. The Great Crisis had an effect on cotton similar to that on silk,

bringing a price collapse and the failure of those French firms which had promoted cotton in Syria. Nevertheless the ultimate outcome was different--and happier. Local entrepreneurs took up the slack, and by the end of the Mandate, cotton-growing in Syria was well established. Here there was no rival fibre to take its place: it was merely a matter of growing a product of consistently high quality--and this was something which could only develop over time.

Thus there were striking similarities in the sagas of silk and cotton, but also striking differences. The contrast between them is quite instructive.

III.6>Silk, its rise and fall

During the second half of the nineteenth century, sericulture had developed into one of the premier industries of the Levant.³⁶ Its main centre of concentration was the Christian enclave of Jabal Lubnan whence it spread to the neighbouring *qada's* belonging to the *vilayets* of Damascus and Beirut.³⁷ The dominance of Mount Lebanon was

³⁶ For various aspects of the Levantine silk industry before the Great War, see 1>Owen, 154-60, 249-53; 2>Marcel Emerit, 'La Crise syrienne et l'expansion économique française,' *Revue Historique*, CCVII, April-June, 1952, 211-232; 3>Dominique Chevallier, 'Lyon et la Syrie en 1919: les bases d'une intervention,' *Revue Historique*, CCXIV, 1960, 275-320; 4>Boutros Labaki, 'La Soie dans l'économie du Mont Liban (1840-1914),' *Peuples Méditerranéens/Mediterranean Peoples*, VII, April-June, 1979, 125-39; 5>*Idem*, 'La Filature de la soie dans le sandjak du Mont Liban,' *Arabica: Revue d'Etudes Arabes*, XXIX, 1982, 80-90; 6>Kais Firro, 'Silk and agrarian change in Lebanon, 1800-1914,' *IJMES*, XXII, 1990, 151-69; 7>Maurice Fevret, 'La Sériciculture au Liban. Première partie: sa fortune passée,' *RGL*, XXIV, 1949, 247-60.

³⁷ Estimates at the beginning of the 20th century apportion the mulberry trees as follows: Mount Lebanon-----28,000,000 'pieds'----- 69%
 Vilayet Beirut----- 9,170,000-----22%
 of which Tripoli District-----6,800,000

confirmed by the fact that it was under a special régime free from Ottoman interference and Ottoman taxes such as the tithe. It was thus a region where European economic influence could firmly entrench itself. In the case of silk production, it was the entrepreneurs of Lyon who were the moving force behind its efflorescence. Certain firms (originally chiefly from Lyon and Marseille, that other great centre for relations with the Levant) themselves set up modern factories to produce the raw product under the best conditions. Another favoured approach was for Lyonnais silk merchants to finance small-scale production by local entrepreneurs imitating European methods, but using more primitive techniques. This was done either by loaning capital directly to local entrepreneurs or more safely by passing it through banks in Beirut who in turn financed the reeling establishments in the Mountain. These used agents who obtained the cocoons from the peasants who actually raised the silkworms. With so many middlemen involved, those at the end of the chain received very little for their pains.³⁸

Another tie binding the Levantine silk industry to its suppliers was its increasing dependence upon France for the silkworm eggs necessary for production. Between 1853 and 1872, epidemics of

	<i>Vilayet</i> Syria	-----3,595,000-----	-----9%
<i>of which</i>	Biqa' Valley	-----3,115,000	
	TOTAL	-----40,765,000-----	----- 100%

The total covered some 14,000 hectares. Figures are from Chevallier, 297 and 298. In fn 1 on 298, he gives another hectarage estimate of 22,000 ha. Firro (Table 1, 152) gives a breakdown of figures for area district by district. From his figures, one obtains 20,260 hectares as the total area of trees.

³⁸ For a clear discussion of the credit system which financed silk production, see Chevallier, 291-97.

muscardine and pébrine ravaged indigenous silkworms, necessitating importation of uncontaminated eggs from France. Because these produced the quality of silk demanded by the world market, French eggs fed the local hatcheries almost exclusively until the coming of the First World War cut off the source of supply.³⁹

As a result of these different links, the merchants of Lyon achieved complete control of a market which could supply them with product of a high standard at an attractive price. Certainly, they imported far more silk from the Far East,⁴⁰ but there they were in competition with other large consumers of silk such as the United States. In contrast, over 90% of the raw silk spun in the Levant came to Lyon by the time of the First World War.⁴¹

This dependence meant that the silk industry in Syria was subject to the vagaries of the world market. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the vast increase in the production and export of Chinese and Japanese silk led to less demand and a lower price for silk from the Levant. Moreover the cost price of spinning raw silk in these countries was greater because of backwardness in technique. Nevertheless local entrepreneurs were unwilling to make the large investments necessary to modernise their spinning processes so long as the quality of their product faced a serious challenge from the Far East, and the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 287-89; Firro, 154-55.

⁴⁰ For example, in 1914 the *Condition des Soies*, the organisation which accounted for all silk arriving at Lyon, recorded that two thirds of its imports came from the Far East as against only five percent from Syria. Michel Seurat, 'Le Rôle . . .,' 131, fn 1.

⁴¹ Chevallier, 286.

quantity shipped would not make up for the losses caused by the fall in prices. As a result, many silk producing establishments closed.⁴²

The effects of the fall in price also affected the planting of mulberry trees. Because they needed so much care when young and took so long to mature (some four or five years) before returning the investment made in them, these trees were not ripped out during a short dip in the market or because of a bad yield. Therefore the fact that after 1903, peasants in the areas around Beirut began to replace them with fruit and market garden crops which found a ready outlet in the growing urban agglomeration, shows how much they were touched by the fall in the market. This was followed by the planting of orange trees along the coasts, of tobacco higher up the mountain, and even of wheat in the Bīqa' from around 1909.⁴³

Moreover in the years before the First World War, there was a large current of emigration from Mount Lebanon to North and South America where the villager could have a life better than cultivating mulberry trees or, in the case of women, working in silk factories for a pittance. Thus the home industry was drained of many of its most skilled workers, but the region as a whole did not lose their income because they kept up the ties with their native land and faithfully sent remittances home.⁴⁴

⁴² For the negative forces striking the silk industry before the First World War, see particularly, *Ibid.*, 301-02; Owen, 250-53.

⁴³ For these changes in the crop pattern, see Chevallier, 301-02; Firro, 155-56.

⁴⁴ For emigration from the Lebanon and its effects, see 1>Chevallier, 302; 2>Labaki, 'Filature . . .,' 87-88; 3>*Idem*, 'La soie . . .,' 126; 4>Richard Thoumin, *Géographie humaine de la Syrie centrale* (Paris: Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1936), Pt 5, Ch. 9, 331-342.

These indications were but straws in the wind, noticeable only to a close observer of the situation.⁴⁵ Cocoon and raw silk production, the most obvious indicator of the health of the industry suffered no letdown before the Great War. Indeed the five years 1910-1914 saw an all-time record set of some six million kilogrammes of cocoons produced *per annum*.⁴⁶

The coming of the First World War undoubtedly struck a heavy blow at the silk industry in the Levant. Nevertheless, it would have gone into decline because of the factors enumerated above even if war had not intervened.

The War merely accelerated the process.⁴⁷ Suddenly, the growers had to make do with inferior silkworm eggs from within the Ottoman Empire because their source of supply in France was cut off. Furthermore, during the famine years, peasants were all too willing to rip out the mulberry trees in order to plant their lands with food crops for their own sustenance. This was quite apart from the wanton (but perhaps apocryphal) destruction of trees in the Biqua' valley by the Ottomans who needed fuel for their wood-burning locomotives.

Another blow to the industry was a continued reduction of the labour force. The death by starvation of thousands of people removed

⁴⁵ Note Ducouso's comments given in Owen, 251.

⁴⁶ For production figures for cocoons from 1880-1934, see A. Latron, 'La Production et le commerce de la soie au Levant,' *AF*, XXXV, 328, March, 1935, 79. Firro gives figures from 1861-1910, Table 3, 156. Where the two tables overlap, the figures are similar. From 1,000-1,200 kgs of 'fresh' cocoons, one gets in the end an average of 100 kgs of raw silk.

⁴⁷ For the war and its effects, see Maurice Fevret, 'La Sériciculture au Liban. Deuxième partie: son déclin actuel,' *RGL*, XXIV, 1949, 348-349; Thoumin, 167.

as surely as did emigration those skilled workers so necessary to rear silkworms and reel their cocoons.

The first year of peace saw the reduction of cocoon production by more than 90% to some 500,000 kgs. There was an immediate call to revive an industry which was considered to be the most important in Lebanon. Therefore during the first decade of the Mandate a vast programme was set on foot with the co-operation of silk interests in Lyon and other French centres. Its goals were to plant mulberry trees; provide properly disinfected silkworm eggs; build modern rearing houses (*magnaneries*); erect experimental stations and model nurseries; bring experts to advise on the most efficacious techniques; provide education and translate the latest manuals into Arabic; give tax relief--in short do everything to restore this industry to what was seen as its pre-war grandeur.⁴⁸

The instigators of this programme were aided in their task by a rise in price which reached a peak in 1923 and again in 1926. Furthermore the complicated system of credit which had existed in the period before the War linking peasants, agents, local entrepreneurs in reeling, Beirut bankers, and ultimately French capital was once more set in place to nourish growth of the industry.⁴⁹

Nevertheless all was to no avail in the face of market forces which buffeted the slowly recovering silk industry. In its report to the

⁴⁸ See the French government reports to the League of Nations for various expositions of this programme, *e.g. Rapport . . . Juillet 1922-Juillet 1923*, 28; *Rapport . . . 1923-1924*, 37-38; *Rapport . . . 1924*, 55-56, etc.

⁴⁹ For the credit system during the Mandate, see Latron, 'La Production . . .,' 81.

League of Nations for 1926, the French government could boast that 'the situation of silk production has been in essence restored to its pre-war state'. Three years later it admitted that 'the decrease in the price of silk has led to the reduction in the number of mulberry trees which are at 100,000 in 1929 as opposed to 200,000 four years ago'.⁵⁰ By 1934, the price of silk was lower than it had been in 1914.⁵¹

This fall was due first to the continued flooding of the markets with high quality silk, principally from Japan, and secondly to the world economic crisis which brought with it the collapse of prices for all raw materials, silk included. Nevertheless silk was faced with a special problem of its own because the increased production of rayon, soon to be followed by the invention and dissemination of other artificial fibres created a competitor on its own ground which was too strong to resist.

For the silk industry in Lebanon, the foundering of prices followed by the world crisis led to the unravelling of those complex strands of credit which had bound together its various elements. The French firms who were the originators of this system found they could no longer support it when times were bad, and repayment of debt was put off from year to year until finally deemed irrecoverable. They withdrew their interests from the Levant. By 1933 there were no more Lyonnais firms involved in Syria, either because they had passed into other

⁵⁰ *Rapport . . . 1926*, 133; *Rapport . . . 1929*, 96. Latron says that between 1928 and 1932, the destruction of mulberry trees was compensated by the creation of new plantations. It was only in 1933 and 1934 that most fertile zones were definitely turned over to citrus, particularly banana trees and market garden crops. *Loc. cit.*

⁵¹ For a chart of silk prices between 1908 and 1934, see Latron, 'La Production . . .,' 80.

hands or had gone into bankruptcy. As the President of the Silk Commission of the Chamber of Commerce reported, 'Lyonnais interests in the Levant are today practically nil'.⁵²

As for those at the local end of this credit system, they were also felled by the cessation of credit and by their own penchant for speculation. With fewer resources, they took greater risks. Thus there were many failures, but so had it always been.

Eventually, there was some recovery towards the end of the Mandate, financed entirely from local funds. Nevertheless the demise of the French connexion which had ensured a ready market for Levantine silk, along with the vastly weakened position of silk itself as an important fibre ensured that the industry which produced it could never return to the palmy days before the Great War.

The silk industry in Lebanon was successful because the happy combination of foreign capital and local expertise created a system of production sufficiently resilient to sustain itself over a long period through good times and bad. Because investments on the part of capitalists, reelers, and silk producers took so long to bear fruit, they were compelled to weather economic downturns in the sure expectation of a recovery of their fortunes based on the value of their product and the guarantee of a market.

⁵² See, 'Sériciculture en Syrie et au Liban,' 5 April 1934; Commission de la Soie, réunion du 10 Avril 1934 in CCIL, Fonds Condition de Soies M 1* 6, Carton 6, Dossier: La Sériciculture en Syrie et au Liban, 1928-1934. Quotation on 2.

During the Mandate, the recovery after the dislocations of the Great War was only relative. Thus the highest cocoon production of this period (3,550 tonnes in 1930) was less than 60% of the production of 1914. The average for the ten year period 1921-1930 (2,747 tonnes) was slightly more than half that of the years 1901-1910 (5,340 tonnes) and lay midway between the averages for 1871-1880 (1,990 tonnes) and 1881-1890 (3,410 tonnes).⁵³ Based on average production, one could say then that the silk industry had regressed to the 1870's and 1880's.

Moreover, by the 1930's, the position of the silk industry had changed profoundly, as André Latron makes clear.⁵⁴ It was not that there had never been failures of local entrepreneurs, undercapitalised and over speculative. It was not that there had never been a turn away from mulberry trees to fruit trees. It was not that there had never been competition from masses of cheap silk from the Far East. It was simply that in the nineteen thirties, the depreciation of the product in terms of prices and demand when combined with the closure of the golden tap which for much more than half a century had continually irrigated the local industry with funds, rendered it moribund with little hope for recovery. To put it bluntly, silk was on the way out.

Moreover there was a certain irony in that throughout this period and beyond, a certain sector of the silk industry continued to flourish. For raw silk was not only produced in the Lebanon, but also in the Alaouites, principally in the southern part of the state, in the *qada's* of

⁵³ Figures based on Latron, 'La Production . . .,' Table on 79; Firro, Table 3, 156.

⁵⁴ Latron, 'La Production . . .,' 81-82.

Safita and Tal Kalakh. This was a cottage industry, hand-wound and spun in the villages, and the inferior silk produced--*aghabi*--was exported via Homs for use in the Arab-owned mills to be found in the great cities of the Levant. It was used in making *aghabani*, muslin decorated with silk used in feminine apparel. European firms of course took no interest in this product which never became subject to the caprice of Western fashion or the uncertainties of the world market. As a result this modest industry continued to produce a steady average output of some 425 tonnes of fresh cocoons between 1930 and 1950. Maurice Fevret makes the comment that at the time of his writing (1949), the Alaouites produced almost as much as Lebanon--formerly *the* great centre of silk production in the Levant.⁵⁵

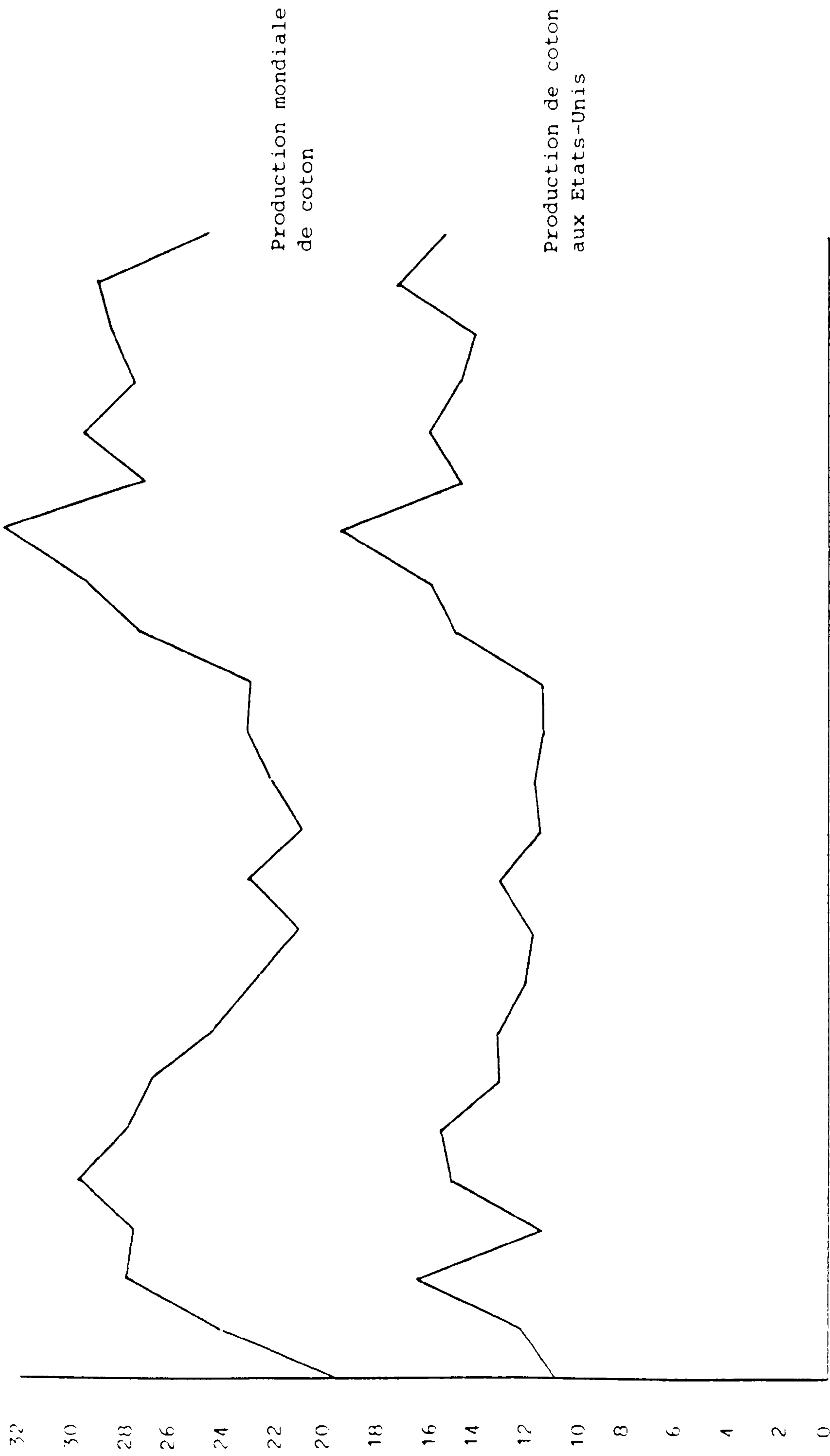
If the Levant during the Mandate period saw the demise of its most important industry, it was compensated by the rise of a new one. Each was based on a fibre, silk for the old; cotton for the new. In certain ways, the early history of cotton developments during the Mandate showed a similarity to that of its 'rival'. Nevertheless the results were in the end quite different.

III.7>A cotton famine

The story of cotton during the Mandate begins with fear of a famine--a fibre famine.

⁵⁵ For silk in the Alaouites, see 1>Latron, 'La Production . . .,' 80; 2>Fevret, 'La Sericiculture au Liban. Deuxième partie . . .,' 349.

Mio. balles



1910 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33

In 1914, the world cotton crop reached the highest production in history at 29,805,000 bales. Then for the next ten years (until 1924-25), it stabilised at an average of 23,336,000 bales.⁵⁶ Meanwhile world cotton consumption between 1914 and 1925 tended to balance production with a seven year average of 21,074,000 bales.⁵⁷

The United States as the largest producer--slightly more than 50% of the crop during this period--determined the size of world output. A graph of production during the years 1910-1930 shows how closely world output mirrored U.S. output.⁵⁸

Nevertheless U.S. production, whilst stable, was subject to certain inhibiting factors. One was the problem of gradual soil degradation in the old cotton lands of the southeast which was compensated somewhat by the cultivating of districts further west in Texas and Oklahoma. Another was the outbreak of the boll weevil pest which entered the United States from Mexico around 1892, and by 1922 had spread throughout the cotton-growing areas. A third was that

<---Fig. 11. Graph showing world cotton production and production of the United States, 1910-33. *Source: Emil Schreyger, L'Office du Niger au Mali: la problématique d'une grande entreprise agricole dans la zone du Sahel (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1984), Graph on 15.*

⁵⁶ These figures are taken directly or derived from tables in Baron Edmond de Moreau d'Andoy, 'The depression in the cotton trade,' in 'Official Report of the XV International Cotton Congress held in Paris,' *International Cotton Bulletin*, No. 36, IX, 4 August, 1931, Appendix, Table 1--The Cotton Crop of the World, 542. Here the 'bale' is the 'running bale' of approximately 490 lbs. which is taken as equal to 225 kg. These figures are taken from the Annual *Handbook* of the 'Comtelburo', London and are generally the most accurate. They tend to differ considerably from figures found in French sources.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Table II--The Consumption of Cotton in the World., 543. Note that this is a seven year average because consumption figures for the war years 1915-1918 are not given. I have included the year 1914.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Graph I, 523. Also see graph in Schreyger, 15.

during the 1920's, the black cotton workers, attracted by the chance of a better life, began to migrate in large numbers to certain northern cities. A fourth was a certain shift away from cotton to more remunerative crops such as sugar cane and tobacco.

The other aspect of the cotton problem was the increase in cotton consumption which tended to keep pace with production. Moreover the United States began to make increased use of its own production. For example in 1914, the United States consumed 40% of the home output. By 1924, this had zoomed to 60%.⁵⁹ This trend was due to the fact that the textile industry in the United States itself was moving south to be in closer proximity to the centres of production where workers and transport were cheap, and where the lack of unions and labour legislation meant that more goods could be produced at lower cost.

All of these factors produced increased anxiety among many European millowners who were dependent on raw cotton produced in the United States. A bad crop and increased use by U.S. mills of their home production could send the European textile industry into a tailspin. Such a state of affairs in 1903 led to reduction of output in the English mills which brought unemployment and misery to Lancashire. In 1907, the same again. In 1921, there was a bad crop everywhere except in Brazil, and world production tumbled by two million bales.

⁵⁹ Figures extrapolated from de Moreau d'Andoy, Tables I and II, 542-43.

This time accumulated stocks helped to absorb the shock. Nevertheless, the menace was still there.⁶⁰

France was particularly affected by this threat. Because she was not herself a producer of raw cotton, she had to import that which she spun on her spindles. Her principal source of cotton was the United States (75-80%) with Egypt and India running a distant second. Moreover her import bill for this cotton was enormous. Between 1914 and 1918, the price of 50 kg. of 'cotton middling' leaped from 78.50 F in July, 1914 to 408 F in August, 1918, a bill which had to be met by a vastly depreciated currency.⁶¹

Albert Sarraut and like-minded patriots cast around for a solution to this problem of dependence for one of the most important of French industries, one that had suddenly expanded by 30% with the return of Alsace to the mother country. Their answer was to seek an increase in cotton production within the colonial empire hitherto barely exploited, but which had proven its worth during the crisis of the Great War.

At this time, French cotton imports from her colonies were miniscule, 764 tonnes in 1913 out of a total of 328,861, and 2,716 tonnes in 1920 out of a total of 232,214.⁶² This was in large part due to underdevelopment in cotton cultivation, but also to the fact that such

⁶⁰ Discussion of these problems can be found in 1>Schreyger, 13-18; 2>Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923), 163-167; 3>Achard, 'Etudes', 20-25; 4>X, 'Notre approvisionnement en coton,' *Bull. UES.*, II, 4, 31 December 1923, 245-46.

⁶¹ Schreyger, 19 and Table.

⁶² Sarraut, Table on 163.

'large' producers as Indochina sent most of their crop to established markets outside the *métropole*.

Therefore, during the next ten years, there began a concerted programme to develop the cotton resources of the colonies. North Africa, Madagascar, Cambodia, and especially the valley of the Niger in the French Sudan, were all foci of this campaign. As part of this strategy, planners turned their attention to the undoubted possibilities exhibited by that part of the Levant placed under French tutelage.

III. 8>Cotton in the Levant

Not the least of the reasons put forth for France to establish herself in the Levant was in order to cultivate for her own benefit the apparently large resources in cotton to be found there. To this end, the acquisition of Cilicia was seen as particularly desirable. Its reputation for cotton was such that the Germans had made efforts to develop it in conjunction with the Baghdadbahn during the decade and a half before the war. Between 1908 and 1914, the Deutsch-Levantinische Baumwollgesellschaft (DLBG) which operated under the auspices of the Deutsche Bank, had increased the percentage of Cilician cotton exported to Germany from 20% to 50-75%.⁶³

Syria was seen as much less important in this regard. In his report on cotton production in Cilicia and Syria, Achard devoted thirty pages to extolling the possibilities of the former, and just five pages to a cursory survey of the latter.

⁶³ For the DLBG, see also Chapter I *supra* and references there, fn 23.

Despite her hopes, France lost Cilicia, stymied by the valour of the Turkish nationalist forces led by Mustafa Kemal, a check which was confirmed by the Franklin-Bouillon Agreement of October, 1921. To writers like Albert Sarraut, the loss of Cilicia meant the loss of the greatest part of the lands suitable for cotton. Whatever could be produced from the regions in Syria where cotton was cultivated--Idlib, the Orontes and Tripoli--would be so meagre that it could have 'no serious relationship to the order of grandeur of our needs'.⁶⁴

This was the opinion of Sarraut. Other, more experienced observers had different ideas. One of these was Georges Carle. A specialist in rural engineering, he had formerly held the post of Director of Agriculture in Madagascar, and afterwards had spent some time in Brazil where he had been engaged in the development of cotton growing. He was of sufficient reputation for General Gouraud to summon him to Syria in the spring of 1922. Carle was charged with the mission of investigating opportunities for irrigation and agriculture. Whilst in Syria, he also turned his attention to the prospects for cotton cultivation and was of the opinion that this fibre could be profitably grown in Syria.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, he indicated certain problems which would attend cotton cultivation in this country. He pointed out that for this plant to be successfully grown, it must be of a variety perfectly suited to the climatic and agricultural conditions peculiar to Syria. After several

⁶⁴ Sarraut, 168.

⁶⁵ Georges Carle, 'La question du coton en Syrie,' *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, CXX, 31 July, 1924, 416-24.

years, imported varieties would become indistinguishable from those grown locally through a process of cross-fertilisation to which cotton is most prone, and would soon lose their superior characteristics. It would take some years for agronomists to create a superior strain that was fully acclimatised.

He also pointed out that in a country characterised by dry weather conditions, irrigated cotton would inevitably give higher yields than that which was unirrigated. He called for the creation of cotton growing enterprises financed by European capital in idle state domain lands in such regions as the Ghab, the 'Amuq, the area around Lake Homs, but also in the plains of Jabla and the Nahr al-Sinn in the Alaouite State.

He also called for a programme to make the cotton that was produced more saleable by the establishment of ginning stations which would buy raw cotton from the producers and resell it after treatment. To these centres might be attached research stations, which would produce new varieties of seed whilst experimenting with the production of long-fibred cotton. If such organisations had sufficient capital, they could make advances to the producers to facilitate their harvest, either in cash, in seeds or machinery, or even in labour, *e.g.* the loan of a tractor to till the soil more easily. Perhaps they might even vend such machines.

Finally, these stations would be in the best possible position to themselves create great domains of cotton production. These would be

worked either by machines or (more likely) through a system of *métayage*.

Carle pointed out that such a programme was hardly new. The most recent example was the pre-war German project in Cilicia. If such a programme could be formulated and carried out under the antiquated Ottoman régime, how much easier would it be for French enterprises to do something similar under a French Mandate. How much indeed!

The ideas put forth by Carle were an accurate reflection of some of the proposals which made the rounds of French investment circles during the early years of the Mandate. These revolved around several recurring questions: What kind of cotton should be grown in Syria and what methods should be used to propagate it?

III.9>Cotton--local vs.imported

The cotton native to the Levant was of the species *Gossypium herbaceum* or Asiatic cotton.⁶⁶ It was known in Turkey and Syria as *yerli* or *baladi*, meaning 'local'. This was a plant which produced short, coarse, and brittle fibres of 12-25 mm in length, yielding 20-25% fibre after ginning. Its advantage was that it was perfectly acclimatised, did not hybridise itself when grown in conjunction with foreign strains, and was immune to disease.

⁶⁶ For discussions of this type of cotton, its advantages and disadvantages, see, for example 1>Carle, 419-20; 2>Achard, 'Etudes . . .', 34-47 and Annexe I, 60-61; 3>Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 8. Particularly interesting in this regard is Annexe I to Achard's study which is the French translation of a British report: Professor Wyndham Dunstan, Director of the Imperial Institute, 'Caractères des cotons d'Asie Mineure et de Syrie,' part of a *Rapport sur l'agriculture en Asie Mineure*, May, 1908.

Nevertheless this fibre was of small commercial value because it was difficult to select for consistent quality, and could not be spun properly. Even such advocates as Achard and Carle admitted that *baladi* could only be a cotton of transition on the way to something better.

The 'something better' came in two varieties: Egyptian cotton and American Upland cotton. The first, *Gossypium barbadense* of the type Sakellerides or 'Sakel', produced fibres of 35-42 mm which were white, creamy, supple, silky, and robust, yielding 30-35% fibre after ginning. Unfortunately, the plant itself was very delicate, susceptible to diseases, and grew best under irrigation in lands where the weather was consistent. In a country like Syria, possessed of a variety of climatic zones, where conditions were more difficult, and where there was little irrigation, Sakel just did not do very well.⁶⁷ Moreover although most desirable, this type of cotton was not much used in the French textile industry.

Therefore it was American Upland, *Gossypium hirsutum*, upon which those eager to regenerate cotton cultivation focused their efforts. This plant produced white, creamy fibres of medium length, 28-32 mm, which were also supple, silky, and robust, and yielded 30-35% fibre after ginning. Despite these similarities, American Upland was a much hardier plant than Sakel. Whilst it did best under irrigation, it could also be grown under a system of dry farming. Nevertheless it was susceptible to disease, and the plants grown from imported seed

⁶⁷ Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 9; Achard, 'Etudes . . .', Annexe I..

tended to degenerate by the third year after this was introduced through a process of hybridisation with local varieties. Growers could combat this tendency by continuous imports of new seed, but this was an interim solution, if only because of the expense. The correct solution lay in the 'creation' of a cotton plant which was perfectly suited to local conditions. This could take years. Indeed in Syria, it was not until the middle nineteen fifties that this goal was achieved successfully.⁶⁸

The second problem facing those who wished to propagate and benefit from cotton cultivation was the choice of means. The introduction of a new crop would require capital to finance it. Since Syria was under French Mandate and since the results of this agricultural experiment were ultimately to bring benefits to France, it was French investors who sought to promote and control the process.

III. 10>French capital for Syrian cotton

In the pursuit of this goal, the French followed two different strategies: In the first, impetus for the projects came from the capitalists. In these affairs, the High Commission merely played the rôle of broker by placing French investors in touch with local landowners and entrepreneurs; acting as intermediary with local governments; and using its departments and personnel scattered

⁶⁸ Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 9-10; Achard, 'Etudes . . .,' Annexe I. For the problem of degeneration of cotton plants and the methods of combating this, see, for example, 1>Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 23; 2>Carle, 420-21; 3>Jean Lecreux (Director of the Association en participation pour les essais de Culture de Coton en Syrie [ACCS]), 'Resumé de l'action poursuivie en Syrie par le groupement des filateurs d'Alsace pour assurer le développement de la culture du coton,' June, 1927, 6. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571.

throughout the countryside as so many *points d'appui* to help facilitate the operations.

In the second, the authorities themselves took the initiative. These were much larger and more complicated undertakings whose implementation would affect the very fabric of the countryside: irrigation schemes requiring massive public works, physical alteration of the land, and a change in the lives of the local inhabitants. Nevertheless those who designed these projects made them attractive to private capital, holding out hopes for lucrative concessions and eventual profits. Such reliance on the funds of investors, proved a weakness, for if they pulled out, all plans had to be terminated.

Nonetheless in this early period, no other alternative means of finance was even considered. Both the French government at home and its representatives in Syria were strapped for cash. Members of the French parliament were already howling about the wasteful expenses of the Syrian enterprise.⁶⁹ The High Commission in Beirut, faced with the heavy expenses of occupation and the setting up of a new administration could not find spare funds for development projects, no matter how worthy. Therefore they had to turn to the private sector, a necessity which was reinforced by tradition. This was largely due to the pattern of investment which had inscribed itself in Syria under the Ottoman Empire. Foreign capital embodied in

⁶⁹ See for example, speeches by various French senators, in particular Senator Célestin Charles Jonnart, a former Governor-General of Algeria, in the session held 3 April 1921 and reported in 'Le Sénat et les affaires du Levant,' *AF*, XXI, 192, May 1921, 193-206.

concessions had produced every single public work of any consequence in Syria--the port of Beirut, the DHP, trams and electricity in Beirut and Damascus--with the exception of the Hijaz Railway.

For French capitalists, then, concessions were the name of the game. Yet they were wary, and rightfully so. The concessionnaires of the Ottoman period had suffered much during the War, and had received no indemnity for the damage inflicted. Moreover, although the ties which linked France and her capitalists to Syria were of long standing and had stood the test of time, the postwar period was a new and uncertain era. True, there was a French Mandate in Syria. Nevertheless no one was quite sure what such a mandate entailed. Capitalists were particularly worried over the interpretation of Article 11 of the Mandate Charter laid down by the League of Nations⁷⁰ because it provided for an Open Door policy under which all members of the League and the United States were placed on a footing of absolute economic equality. If enforced to the letter, this barred preferential treatment for French firms. Moreover any mandate was inherently a temporary arrangement. Would guarantees given by a French administration have any value after independence? French investors had well-founded doubts on this point.⁷¹

⁷⁰ 'The Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon,' 24 July 1922 in League of Nations Official Journal, 8, Part 2, August, 1922, 1013-17. For the text of this charter, see Longrigg, 376-80.

⁷¹ On the problems which the policy of the Open Door caused French capitalists and their fears for the future, see 1> **Letter:** 'Le Président de L'Association des commerçants et industriels français du Levant à Monsieur le Haut-Commissaire de la République Française,' 28 March 1927, with 2>a **cover letter** from the H.C. to the MAE commenting on this complaint and reporting a conversation held with the president concerning it, 'Le Ministre Plenipotentiaire Haut-Commissaire p.i de la République Française à Son

In order to facilitate their economic penetration of Syria, those industrial and financial groups interested in the Levant had grouped themselves at the behest of HC Gouraud in an organisation called the Union Economique de Syrie (UES).⁷² It was headed by André Lebon, a former Minister of the Colonies during the 1890's and chairman of the powerful colonial bank, Crédit foncier d'Algérie et Tunisie. In that capacity he had been closely involved in the manoeuvres by French financial groups to obtain concessions in Anatolia and the Levant for large agricultural projects in the years just prior to the War.⁷³

The first efforts at cotton development were small projects, financed by industrialists who moved within the orbit of the UES. From the inception of their group, its members viewed the development of cotton schemes in Syria as a lucrative enterprise of national importance.⁷⁴ The method followed in implementing these affairs, as in so many such ventures during the Mandate, was for investors to expose themselves to as little risk as possible by first creating a 'research company' (*société d'études*). They also sought local associates, and only put up more capital when the enterprise proved sound.

Excellence le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères--Afrique Levant.,' 3 May 1927, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1573; **3>Letter:** 'L'Union Economique de Syrie à M. Le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères,' 9 June 1927, MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1573.

⁷² For the Union Economique de Syrie and its aims, see 'Note pour Monsieur le Général Weygand à propos de l'Union Economique de Syrie,' Paris, 28 April 1923 and attached letter to him from this organisation inviting him to a reception in his honour. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 876.

⁷³ For these, see Chapter I *supra*, and Thobie, *Intérêts . . .*, 423-26.

⁷⁴ See for example, the letter from André Lebon to the Minister of Commerce on the subject of the cotton exploitation in Syria with a supporting letter of H.C. Gouraud, *Bull. UES*, I, 1, December, 1922, 21-22 and 25-26.

To begin with, a number of stillborn agricultural schemes were bruted. The first positive action to be taken by French capitalists in the field of cotton development came as the result of an economic study mission which HC Gouraud invited to visit the Levant between 13 September and 19 October 1922 in order to ascertain directly possibilities for agriculture, industry, and commerce in the Mandated territories. The delegation was composed of certain parliamentarians, journalists, delegates from important chambers of commerce, and certain large enterprises, and it goes without saying, a representative of the UES.⁷⁵

III. 1 1>Cotton in Syria--the Alsace connexion

Among the men who made this voyage was one Max Dollfus representing the Chamber of Commerce of Mulhouse and the Syndicat industriel alsacien, the professional association of regional industry.⁷⁶ Just as Lyon was the great centre of silk manufacture, so Mulhouse was renowned for cotton manufacturing and was the hub of this activity in Alsace. Max Dollfus was a scion of one of the powerful Alsatian textile

⁷⁵ For this mission, see 1>'Une mission d'études économiques en Syrie,' *AF*, XXII, 206, November, 1922, 423-24; 2>'La mission économique française en Syrie et au Liban,' and 'Compte-rendu de M. R. Fournier, Représentant de l'U.E.S.' *Bull. UES*, II, 1, 31 March 1923, 26-30 and 31-46.

⁷⁶ For the saga of the Alsatian fostering of Syrian cotton-growing during the 1920's, see 1>Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 17-21 and 30-36; 2>Jean Lecreux, 'L'Industrie alsacienne et le coton en Syrie,' *Association Cotonnière Coloniale, Bulletin trimestrielle [ACC Bull.]*, XXV, 77, January, 1927, 8-12; 3>Georges Masquelier, 'Le problème de coton et nos colonies,' *Bulletin de l'Agence Générale des Colonies*, XXIV, 273, December, 1931, 1657-58.

dynasties, and was naturally interested in discovering new zones of cotton production.⁷⁷

During his sojourn in Syria, he came to the Alaouite State, to the plain of Jabla where under the impulsion of General Billotte, at that time Delegate of the High Commissioner for the Northern Region (the former *vilayet* of Aleppo), experiments were being made in the improvement of certain varieties of *baladi* cotton. Dollfus was quite impressed by the results, and decided to take samples back to Mulhouse in order to see if they would prove any use for the Alsatian textile industry. He agreed on behalf of the Syndicat industriel alsacien to send some good seed of that American Upland cotton whose fibres were most prized by the Alsatian mills in time for the 1923 planting season.

For various reasons, it was not until 1924 that the seed which Dollfus had sent in 1923 came to be planted on the Jabla plain. The precise name of this seed could not be determined, but since it was known that it had originated in the state of Texas, it was called 'Texas' and later more precisely 'Texas Lone Star'. The history of cotton under the Mandate is the history of the increasing dominance of this strain as it slowly drove Egyptian and *baladi* varieties to the wall.

In 1924 and 1925, the trials of this particular variety continued at the agricultural station at Buka in the Tartus region and at a newly organised station at Sukas in the heart of the Jabla plain. Also in 1925,

⁷⁷ For the growth of the Alsatian textile industry since the eighteenth century and the rôles played by its great dynasties of entrepreneurs, see Michel Hau, *L'Industrialisation de l'Alsace, 1803-1939* (Strasbourg: Association des Publications près les Universités de Strasbourg, 1987), *passim*.

the government of the Alaouite State set up a ginning station at Jabla with the help of the Agricultural Bank.

The Syndicat industriel alsacien purchased the crop grown from the seed it provided and the crop of Egyptian as well: three hundred tonnes of American cotton and one thousand of Egyptian. Unfortunately the product was disappointing. The ginning station, located in small temporary quarters was unable to classify the cotton properly, no guidelines having been laid down by the prospective purchasers. Therefore there was much heterogeneity with irregular fibres of mixed quality. Nevertheless the American cotton was considerably better than its Egyptian counterpart, more homogeneous and of a more regular texture.

The situation was such that the Alsatian industrialists decided to focus on the production of American cotton, tougher and with less tendency to hybridise than the Egyptian. The aim was to achieve homogeneity by a rigorous classification because only cotton which was up to world standard would prove useful to them.

Therefore they decided to create a *société d'études*, the Association en participation pour les essais de culture de coton en Syrie (ACCS) headquartered at Jabla, whose members comprised some well-known textile firms of Alsace: les Etablissements Schlumberger Fils et Cie., Charles Mieg et Cie, la Société Anonyme d'Industrie Cotonnière (SAIC), les Etablissements Dreyfus Lantz et Cie, la Filature de Guebwiller, MM Frey et Cie, l'Union Textile, les

Etablissements Boutry-Droulers,, Hartmann et Fils, Herzog et Cie.⁷⁸

The canny Alsatian investors capitalised this partnership to the tune of a mere 220,000 F.⁷⁹ Nevertheless anyone who knew their reputation were well aware that should the enterprise succeed, they could support it with unlimited resources of money and technical expertise.

The programme set forth for the partnership was, first and foremost, the establishment of a ginning station at Jabla which would set classification standards to which cotton grown in Syria would adhere. In addition, it was to organise the purchase of the crop from the planters for the account of those who owned the ginning station.

To these ends, 500 hectares were sown with Texas seed provided by the partnership who directly controlled the cultivation of the crop. They made contracts with local proprietors by which the spinners provided them with specially selected seed as well as technical advice. They advanced the necessary funds to the growers using the Agricultural Bank as a conduit, and agreed to buy the entire crop at a price equivalent to that of the corresponding American type, taking into account expenses and other factors affecting the cost price, c.i.f. Marseille.

The investors hoped that this experiment, so carefully prepared, would not only produce marketable cotton, free from parasites and

⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that three of the establishments in this partnership: Charles Mieg et Cie, Hartmann et Fils, and Herzog et Cie possessed capital belonging to Emile Dollfus, the brother of Max, and one of the leaders of the industrial élite of Alsace in the interwar period. See *Ibid.*, Table 57, 'La circulation des capitaux dans le milieu industriel alsacien entre les deux guerres,' 358.

⁷⁹ By comparison the Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban, for example, possessed a capital of 25,500,000 francs.

disease, but that the system of financial and technical aid to the client-proprietors would eventually lead to the creation of a *Crédit foncier*, a cotton credit bank. Thus was cotton production launched on a sound commercial basis for the first time in Syria.

In his article discussing some of the first small steps taken by Alsacian industrialists towards involvement in Syrian cotton cultivation, Jean Lecomte set forth certain criteria necessary for the profitable investment of French capital in the Levant. In his opinion, the first hurdle was to persuade his compatriots that it was well worth their while to place their money in a region under a temporary mandate given the fact that the colonies were constantly seeking the aid of metropolitan investors.

Nonetheless Lecomte believed investments in Syria to be vitally important because he felt that the stability of the Mandate was directly related to the economic influence which such interests would give French nationals. Moreover since this 'mission' given to France by the League of Nations was limited both in duration and in function, it was even more necessary for capitalists to grasp whatever advantages might be obtained by her presence.

In carrying out this charge, the rôle of the High Commissioner was all important, for it was he who had the task of ultimate control and direction. Therefore Lecomte believed that French capitalists should ensure that the right man was given the job, one who displayed the proper qualities of authority, energy, and foresight.

A firm hand on the tiller would enable these entrepreneurs to exploit the various interesting and remunerative possibilities which Syria offered those who wished to invest in her: fertile and unexploited lands; a relatively numerous workforce; a good climate with a rainfall régime far superior to that in French North Africa; abundant groundwater and surface water sources. Nevertheless, Lecreux believed that the opportunities which sprang out of these natural advantages could only be harvested by foreign capital. For the Syrians themselves were not capable of forming the great financial combines which controlled the resources so essential to a fruitful outcome. Moreover they lacked the sense of foresight and the spirit of organisation requisite for the successful management of such enterprises.

Despite his harsh estimation of the qualities of possible Syrian associates, Lecreux felt it wise for French investors to team up with local partners in any venture, provided that the European element always maintained the upper hand. Native participants would not only facilitate operations but, more important, would ensure that these projects continue to flourish in the era of independence to come.⁸⁰

Thus Lecreux linked the fostering and maintenance of French influence in the Levant directly to the seeding of French capital there. In presenting to his readers the strategies necessary to achieve this aim, he emphasised two things: the key position held by the High Commissioner in supporting and strengthening the interests of his

⁸⁰ Lecreux, 'L'Industrie. . .', 8-10.

compatriots, and the necessity of finding local partners to protect and facilitate the activities of foreign entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, the course of this first phase of cotton development during which any advances made were largely (perhaps one might dare to say exclusively) underwritten by foreign capital revealed a gulf between these prescriptions and Syrian realities.

III. 12>The rise of cotton ...

In many respects, the Alaouite State was chosen as the locus of this cotton experiment because it represented the beau ideal. For one thing, the quality of the land and the ease of transport and communication made this region the perfect place in which to carry out the trials. Even more important for those seeking to make their fortunes in Syria during the middle twenties was the fact that this part of the Mandated territories was politically stable. The firm control exercised by French bureaucrats and experts provided a favourable milieu within which French enterprises could operate efficiently and securely.⁸¹

In this region then, cotton cultivation made rapid progress as the total area planted with cotton leaped from 450 hectares to more than 10,000 between 1924 and 1930. What is more important is that hectares sown in *baladi* averaged around 150 (except for 1928 when they reached 500) whilst those sown with the new American seed soared from 200 hectares in 1924 to 8000 six years later. Land sown

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

with Egyptian made a smaller increase going 100 to 2000 hectares between 1924 and 1930. The fact that American cotton hectareage was only 45% of the total in 1924, but had attained 80% of the total by 1930 demonstrated the success of the crusade in favour of this particular variety. American came to dominate again in terms of export production: By 1930, of the 961 tonnes of cotton exported, 800 were of the Texas Lone Star variety.⁸²

Similar progress was made in the State of Syria⁸³ although the road here was more difficult and it took longer to implant American cotton. In 1924, there was a large area under cotton, some 23,000 hectares which was almost entirely composed of plants of the *baladi* type.⁸⁴ It was not until the planting season of 1927 that American seed was introduced to growers in the cotton areas of northern Syria. This was done on the initiative of the ACCS and its agent Jean Lecreux, but they had a good deal of difficulty in training the local cultivators in the procedures necessary to nurture this much more delicate plant. In a report on these trials written in October, 1927, Jean Lecreux complained bitterly about the failure of the local representatives of the

⁸² For these figures, see Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, Tables: 'Emblavures annuelles de coton dans le Gouvernement de Lattaquié' and 'Exportation annuelle du coton en balles de 100 Kgs. fibre dans le Gouvernement de Lattaquié' to be found between pages 26 and 27.

⁸³ Note that the so-called 'State of Syria', originally created by the French in January, 1925 included all of modern Syria except for the Jabal Druz and the Jabal Ansayria and its coast. Cotton cultivation was practised almost exclusively in the northern part of Syria in the area of the former Ottoman *vilayet* of Aleppo. For the administrative divisions of Syria during the Mandate, see Hourani, *Syria . . .*, 172-73.

⁸⁴ The figures for 1924 are derived from those given in Edouard-C Achard, 'La Culture de coton en Syrie: rapport sur les résultats de la Campagne 1924,' 17 January 1925. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 866, 1.

French administration⁸⁵ to give his efforts the vigorous support promised by their superiors which in many cases had led to lamentable results. Nevertheless he was sanguine about the future because local cultivators showed a great interest in the possibilities inherent in the American seed.⁸⁶

By 1929, American cotton had begun to make good headway in the State of Syria. By 1935, this variety was clearly dominant in the cotton growing regions of the *vilayet* of Aleppo which in itself contained the most important cotton producing districts of the Mandated territories.⁸⁷

Of even greater importance than the introduction of a cotton whose fibres were sought by European mills was the development of a support structure to ensure that those bales shipped abroad conformed to certain internationally recognised standards of quality. Writing in August, 1926, Lecreux called for the creation of an independent and central organisation to control research into the various problems associated with cotton growing. He also sought a series of legal decrees which would control the various aspects of

⁸⁵ In rural areas this was usually an officer of the Service des Renseignements (in 1930, reorganised into the Services Spéciaux), the military intelligence service whose task was to keep its finger on the pulse of the countryside. For a discussion of these two departments, their attributions and functions, see X, 'La Réorganisation du Service des Renseignements du Levant,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Paris), XXIII, 401, May, 1931, 204-06.

⁸⁶ Jean Lecreux, 'Rapport sur les essais de culture du Texas faits en 1927 dans l'Etat de Syrie,' October, 1927. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1571, *passim*.

⁸⁷ For the continuing success of the American variety, see 1>*Bulletin de la Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban* [*Bull. BSL*], 1930, 14 and 1936, 10-11; 2>MAE, *Rapport à la Société des Nations . . . 1929*, 69; and 3>*Rapport . . . 1935*, 17.

production and ensure that these were strictly enforced.⁸⁸ By June, 1927, his ideas had expanded to include a call for the creation of a Cotton Office, independent and with its own budget which was to be furnished in part by those groups with a direct interest in Syrian cotton: the High Commission, the different Syrian states, the French cotton spinners and merchants who would use the product. He called for it to be created under the aegis and the complete control of the High Commissioner 'with absolute authority in all matters which directly concerned the Syrian cotton question'. He felt it particularly important that this office have complete autonomy, not only to protect it from the vagaries of administrative changes, but also to guard against the 'possible ill will' of the various Syrian states should they take umbrage at measures designed for general welfare. Finally and most important, this organ was to be charged with ensuring that the cotton which was exported from Syria was of homogeneous quality and classified into standard types internationally recognised by the world market. By thus so doing it would ensure that Syrian cotton maintained a good reputation, and through its relations with the users of the product this Cotton Office would see to it that a niche was secured for what was potentially Syria's most valuable agricultural resource.⁸⁹

Lecreux felt that the establishment of a Cotton Office should take place as soon as possible because without such regulation, the planters would tend to make use of inferior seed which would produce

⁸⁸ Lecreux, 'L'Industrie . . .,' 11.

⁸⁹ *Idem*, 'Résumé de l'action poursuivie . . .,' 6-11.

an inferior product. In turn, this would be unacceptable to the world market which would not only discourage the growers, but more significantly, cause the Alsatian industrialists upon whom so much depended to lose interest in such a refractory source. The withdrawal of French interest would leave the market open to foreigners who would seize it with alacrity. He pointed out that recently a powerful Italian cotton firm had established itself at Aleppo, and claimed that its activities had led to the closure of the French ginning station at Idlib which had been established by the Banque de Syrie et Grand Liban [BSL] at the behest of HC Weygand.⁹⁰

In creating the support structure for cotton production, the lead came once more from activities in the Alaouite State. In 1924, the first modest ginning station had been built at Jabla at the behest of the government, but through the intermediary of the State Agricultural Bank. In 1926, this station was supplanted by a larger one which was financed and directed by the ACCS with government agreement. This acted as a centre of the activities of the ACCS who made contracts with the cultivators, supplying seed and finance in return for the right to treat and buy the cotton produced. Initially, the finance was supplied in conjunction with the Agricultural Bank, the contracts serving as guarantee. By 1928, the ACCS was doing its own financing, and in 1929 transformed itself into a limited company, the Société Anonyme Cotonnière de Syrie [SACS] with a capitalisation of two million francs.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

In the meantime, as cotton growing proved more prosperous, other firms entered the lists. Imitating the ACCS, a local firm, G.Saadé & Fils, opened a ginning station which was attached to its modern olive oil mill at Latakia, and began to import seed, contract with cultivators, and make advances on the crop in return for the product. Over the next several years it deepened its involvement in the cotton industry.

The next entry was the well-known Lyonnais silk firm La Maison Veuve Guérin which began an active programme of cotton purchases. Moreover the Agricultural Bank began to import more seed and make ever greater loans whilst the government encouraged cotton growing by the offer of monetary premiums to encourage production. Governmental activity was capped by the promulgation of a series of decrees regulating all aspects of cotton production from planting to sale.⁹¹

Nevertheless despite the sense of urgency represented by the various communications of Jean Lecreux, a sense which was felt throughout the circles of French cotton entrepreneurs, the problem of the Cotton Office continued to gestate with no appreciable result. Matters finally came to a head with the entrance onto the scene of the powerful French cotton lobby embodied in the Association Cotonnière Coloniale (ACC) Always keen to stimulate cotton production in the French colonies and other lands under French influence, it was so encouraged by reports of progress in the Syrian sector that it sent its

⁹¹ For the development of cotton in the Alaouites during this period, see Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 30-32. He gives the principal legal texts on 37-61.

president M. Waddington to the Levant in May, 1928 to determine what aid might be given. Waddington decided that the ACC should concentrate its efforts in the Alaouite State where cotton production was most highly developed. The Association arranged in agreement with the High Commission that rather than create a Cotton Office immediately, it would send an expert to be based in the Alaouite State who would serve as advisor on various aspects of cotton production.

By July, 1929, the success of this expert led to the passing of three conventions valid for ten years between the ACC and the government of the Alaouites authorising the installation and defining the remit of the long desired Cotton Office and its associated ginning station. The former was to be a supervisory organ independent of local political control, directed and funded by the ACC, but receiving a government subvention. Its rôle was to ensure that Syrian cotton was acceptable to the world market. The latter provided the means which facilitated the classification and treatment of cotton. It was established at Hamidiya, in that part of the 'Akkar belonging to the Alaouite State which showed a large potential for cotton. Because of various difficulties, this station did not finally open until October, 1930.⁹²

⁹² For the activities of the ACC in general and its initial forays into the Mandated territories, see 1>*Ibid.*, 32, 35; 2>'Voyage en Syrie de M. Derulle, ingénieur de L'Association Cotonnière Coloniale--Les projets de l'A.C.C. dans les Etats du Levant,' *ACC Bull.* XXVII, 88, October, 1929, 401-07; 3>Conférence des Délégués: a>Services Economiques et Agricoles, 'Note sur le Coton,' 1 March 1929; b>**Procès-Verbal**, 2 March 1929: I--'Coton'; 4>Conférence des Délégués, 1 May 1929: 'Coton,' *passim*. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1574.

The success was such that in December 1929, similar conventions were drawn up between the ACC and the State of Syria creating a Cotton Office and permitting the ACC to set up two ginning stations at Homs and Hama. These opened in the autumn of 1930, in time to process and classify the increasingly important production of the *vilayet* of Aleppo.⁹³

Thus it appeared that by the end of 1930, cotton was ready to develop into *the* major Syrian export crop. Production of the desirable American type was increasing, and a strong support structure had been laid down which would guide it straight towards the French market. Yet this promise was blighted in what seems the blink of an eye. For by the end of 1931, cotton production and those who profited from it were in deep trouble.

III. 13>..And its fall

As with silk, the problem had its origin in the world economic crisis which reduced demand for Syrian cotton. From a record high of 2,212 tonnes in 1930, exports fell to only 633 tonnes in 1931, even though the harvest due to weather conditions favouring cotton set another record of some 4,100 tonnes.⁹⁴ Moreover companies such as the SACS and Veuve Guérin which were backed by French parent

⁹³ For the activities of the ACC in the State of Syria, see 1>'La Culture de coton dans l'Etat de Syrie,' *ACC Bull.*, XXVIII, 90, April, 1930, 97-99; 2>'Remarques sur la culture syrienne de 1929,' *Ibid.*, 106-07; 3>'Rapport présenté au nom du Comité de Direction par M. Hesling, Directeur, à l'Assemblée générale de l'Association Cotonnière Coloniale du 17 Juin 1930,' *ACC Bull.*, XXVIII, 91, July, 1930, 165-67.

⁹⁴ For these figures, see *Bull. BSL*, 1932, 12; Burns, 159, fn 1.

companies had over-extended themselves in giving loans to cultivators on the strength of the continuing progress in cotton production. The producers could not pay back their loans because of the export crisis which meant that the cotton enterprises in their turn could not pay back the money they had borrowed from banks. Lending institutions such as the BSL and the Banco di Roma in their turn were demanding immediate payment because of their own obligations. Due to the impact of the economic crisis in France, the parent organisations were unable to bail out their affiliated companies in Syria.

The result of this unfortunate combination of events was the collapse of those French enterprises which had underwritten cotton production in Syria. The consequences fell heavily on the Alaouite State which had been the earliest and chief beneficiary of their largesse.⁹⁵

One can draw an analogy with Jabal Lubnan and the fate of its silk industry in the early nineteen thirties. Both cases involved a small region dependent on a single export-oriented industry controlled in large part by foreign entrepreneurs. Both industries were sustained by

⁹⁵ For a succinct account of the methods of financing cotton production in the Alaouites, see MAE, *Rapport à la Société des Nations* . . . 1930, 125. For the cotton crisis in the Alaouites and measures taken to combat it, see 1>**Telegrams:** a>Nos. 155-157--Diplomatie, Paris à Haut Commissaire, Beyrouth, 14 February 1931; b>Nos. 12-14--Haut Commissaire, Beyrouth à Gouverneur, Lattaquié, 16 February 1931; c>No. 210--Haut Commissaire, Beyrouth à Diplomatie, Paris, 25 February, 1931; d>No. 214--Diplomatie, Paris à Haut Commissaire, Beyrouth, 4 March 1931. MAE--Nantes, Carton FB, 1573; 2>'Note sur la situation de la culture du coton dans le Gouvernement de Lattaquié & sur les mesures à envisager pour atténuer & résoudre la crise,' 23 November 1931. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1573; 3>'Affaire du coton--Lattaquié,' 20 December 1931; 4>'Note au sujet des affaires cotonnières à Lattaquié,' 31 December 1931, both in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 306--Conseiller Financier.

an intricate system involving companies, banks, and local intermediaries.⁹⁶ The disintegration of the system and its components in a period of economic crisis was caused by a severe and sudden credit squeeze coupled with a collapse in foreign demand for its principal product: in Lebanon, silk; in the Alaouites, cotton.

In looking at the interplay between silk and cotton, between Lebanon and the Alaouites, one curious and somewhat ironic fact emerges. Remember, that it was in the Alaouites, in the *qada's* of Safita and Tal Kalakh where a cottage industry was centred, one which spun a mediocre silk for the Arab-owned mills of the interior. Because this production was neither controlled nor financed by Europeans, it weathered the storm of the economic crisis, maintaining a steady average output through it and beyond. In contrast, cotton which was touted by French publicists and investors as the great hope of the Alaouites--indeed of all Syria--and which received an enormous investment in effort and finance, foundered when its foreign supporters did so.

Cotton production in the Alaouites never really recovered to the level it had attained before the coming of the crisis. In 1932, the bottom of the depression, planters in the Alaouites sowed 2,600 hectares and reaped 150 tonnes of cotton *versus* 6,000 hectares and 1,500 tonnes the year before. Nevertheless even after cotton recovered in the late 1930's, this region did not share in the boom: In 1936, the maximum

⁹⁶ Although to be more exact, it must be noted that the system of silk credits in the Lebanon had been formed over a much longer period and was consequently more intricate. Nonetheless the analogy remains valid.

production year for the Alaouites, only 800 tonnes were harvested from 3,500 hectares whilst the *vilayet* of Aleppo grew seven times that amount on ten times the area. Furthermore this small output was only of local significance, most of it being used to supply raw fibre for the textile firm of Arida Frères which had been established in Tripoli since 1930.⁹⁷

III. 14>Cotton, its resilience and recovery

Despite the setbacks in the Alaouites, cotton, unlike silk, had the capacity within itself to make a strong recovery. Silk was a textile in decline due to changing fashion and the invention of so-called 'artificial silk'--rayon and its successors. Cotton, on the other hand was a fibre on the rise with vast potential for the future, despite the temporary inconveniences of the present. Therefore, placed in a more propitious situation, cotton production could only progress.

Such conditions existed potentially in the State of Syria, particularly in the area of the former *vilayet* of Aleppo. This was a much larger region where more land was under cotton and more was produced than in the Alaouites. Moreover the cotton-growing industry suffered less from the effects of the crisis because in the early 1930's,

⁹⁷ For the figures for 1931, see *Bull. BSL*, 1932, 12; for those for 1932, see *MAE, Rapport à la Société des Nations . . .* 1932, 24; for those for 1936, see *Bull. BSL*, 1938, 12. A discussion of the rôle played by Arida Frères is in 1>A. Schuler, 'La Culture du coton dans les Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français: rôle et activité de l'association cotonnière coloniale,' in *Bull. EHC*, 3, 1935, 293; 2>*Idem*, 'Campagne cotonnière en Syrie en 1936-37,' *Bull. EHC*, 1, 1937, 64; 3>*Idem*, 'La Campagne cotonnière en Syrie en 1938,' *Bull. EHC*, 3, 1938, 168.

production and its support structure was not as advanced: The French companies had only just begun to extend their operations to the State of Syria, and did not have as much capital invested as in their headquarters in the Alaouites. There were also other prominent players: the Italians, but more particularly, local firms, notables and capitalists. Therefore since the French firms were not as dominant, their collapse had less effect.

Cotton production in the State of Syria was able to weather the crisis of the early Thirties and emerge stronger than before. One good sign was that even when cotton area and production were at their lowest during 1932, the reduction was much greater in *baladi* cotton than in the more commercially viable American variety.⁹⁸ Another was that when expansion took place, it did so first in the traditional cotton-growing areas between Homs and Aleppo, especially around Idlib where planters never lost their enthusiasm for cotton nor their expertise in growing it. It would appear that during the Mandate, the major regions for cotton growing continued to lie in these traditional districts west of Aleppo. As regards those to the east, cotton if grown at all, was planted in a small way only starting in 1936. In writing of the *qada'* of Jarablus during September, 1936, M. Pignarre who was Agricultural Advisor to the State of Syria described it as a poor and neglected region whose chief crop was wheat. In the *muhafaza* of Euphrates (comprising from north to south the *qada's* of Raqqa, Dayr al-Zur, Mayadin, and Abu Kamal) cotton had once been grown in the

⁹⁸ MAE, *Rapport à la Société des Nations* . . . 1932, 26.

valley of that great river. When it was taken up again, hectarage went from some 400 of irrigated cotton in 1936 to 520 in 1938 and production from 600 to 1,300 tonnes of raw fibre.⁹⁹

A similar picture appears for the Jazira. Here cotton was once grown in the valley of the Khabur. In 1936, Pignarre in his report praised the agricultural potential of the Jazira and marvelled at the vigour shown by the cotton grown both there and in the valley of the Euphrates. He opined that the well-watered region of the High Jazira was destined to play a regulating rôle in Syrian agriculture due to its rainfall pattern, its terrain and its facilities for irrigation. He felt that in deficit years when other less well-endowed parts of the country were suffering, the Jazira would be able to fill the gap. If the promise of this region proved true for wheat during the Mandate, cotton was just starting its course. In 1936, there were a mere 79 hectares of irrigated cotton, producing some 40 tonnes of unginmed fibre. Nevertheless it was sown throughout the *muhafaza*, along the Tigris, the Jagh-Jagh, and the Khabur. By 1940, only some twenty tonnes were produced and in the cadastral report presented in that year there was the comment that 'Cotton is little cultivated'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ On the *qada'* of Jarablus and the *muhafaza* of Euphrates, see Pignarre, untitled report on 'Situation générale de l'agriculture en Syrie,' September 1936, 17-19. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 864. For the figures and commentary on the Euphrates region, see also Schuler, 'Campagne . . . 1936-37,' 62 and Table on 65 (figures for 1936); *Idem*, La Campagne . . . 1938, 167.

¹⁰⁰ For the Jazira, see comments in Pignarre, 19. For figures and commentary, see Schuler, 'Campagne . . . 1936-37,' 62-63. For figure for 1940 and comment regarding cotton possibilities here, see Régie des travaux du cadastre . . ., 'Rapport général de reconnaissance foncière . . .', 17 and Table on 21.

This expansion in cotton growing in the State of Syria was helped by the creation of local mills. The cotton supplied to such firms as Arida Frères in Tripoli and from 1936, the Société syrienne de filature et de tissage in Aleppo compensated somewhat for variations in foreign demand caused by the vagaries of the international market.¹⁰¹ From 1934 when exports began to pick up again, foreigners tended to take slightly more than half Syrian production, the rest going to local mills. In 1938, the last full year of the peacetime Mandate, Syrian buyers purchased nearly three quarters of their home production.¹⁰²

III. 15>French cotton strategy--a failure

When one looks at the pattern of foreign demand for Syrian cotton, an interesting fact emerges. This is that France, despite all her efforts at investment, failed to achieve any sort of dominance over the export market. From 1924 until 1930, France slowly built up her share of this market from some 10% in 1924 to 43.5% in 1930. These were the

¹⁰¹ For expansion in the Idlib region, see *Bulletin BSL*, 1932, 11; MAE, *Rapport à la Société des Nations* . . . 1934, 23. For the Société syrienne de filature et de tissage, see *Bull. BSL*, 1936, 18; 1937, 22; 1938, 21; 1939, 25.

¹⁰² For the figures, see the *Bull. BSL* and the *Rapport à la Société des Nations*. **Production--1934-36:** *Bull. BSL*, 1937, 12-13;--**1937-38:** *Bull. BSL*, 1939, 15;--**1934-35:** MAE, *Rapport* . . . 1935, 17;--**1936-37:** MAE, *Rapport* . . . 1937, 15;--**1938:** MAE, *Rapport* . . . 1938, 20. Note that the only major discrepancy between the figures given in the two sources are the ones given for 1934 where the *Bull. BSL* gives a production of 3,580 tonnes whilst the *Rapport* gives 2,200 tonnes. This seems to be due to the fact that for 1934, the *Bull. BSL* gives total production of ginned and unginned cotton whilst the *Rapport* gives a figure which includes only ginned fibre. In all succeeding years, the totals match and are for ginned cotton. The *Rapport* also gives another much larger figure for unginned cotton. Since only ginned cotton was used at home and abroad, apparently it alone was counted for the figures. **Exports--1934-35:** *Bull. BSL*, 1936, 11;--**1936-37:** *Bull. BSL*, 1938, 12 and Table on 36;--**1938:** *Bull. BSL*, 1939, 15 and Table on 41.

years when her capitalist entrepreneurs were the most active in supporting cotton production in Syria.

The years of crisis dealt a heavy blow to this promising position. By 1934, her imports of Syrian cotton had sunk to a measly 4% of Syrian cotton exports, and in rank had sunk to fifth behind Italy, Great Britain, Palestine, and Germany. This position continued to deteriorate until, by the last two years of the Mandate, the BSL in its annual report, no longer listed her among the 'principal' importers of Syrian cotton.¹⁰³

It is somewhat ironic that in a report dated February, 1939, the Syndicat industriel alsacien indicated that one of the desiderata of the French cotton industry with regard to the Syrian market was to obtain for itself a share in the *export* of yarn and cloth to a market which hitherto had been dominated by imports of yarn from Britain and India and imports of cloth from Britain and Japan. The authors were particularly excited about a plan to be worked out with the co-operation of the High Commission in Beirut for a quota system which would give the French mills a considerably larger share. All of this from an

¹⁰³ For figures on the French share in Syrian cotton exports, see 1>Schuler, 'La culture du coton . . .', 294; 2>'Coton,' May-June, 1934. This is one of a series of monographs on various products produced in Syria in response to a questionnaire sent out by the committee preparing documentation for the *Conférence Economique de la France Métropolitaine et d'Outre-Mer* which was held in December, 1934. This was a conference whose aim was to improve trade and other economic links between France and her overseas territories. For two different perspectives on this conference and Syria's rôle in it, see 1>'La Syrie et le Liban à la Conference Economique de la France Métropolitaine et d'Outremer,' *Le Commerce du Levant*, 1 December 1934 and 2>'La Syrie et la Conférence coloniale,' *Cahiers du Bolchevisme*, 15 November 1934, 188-93. The documents relating to this conference are to be found in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 716.

organisation which had once had a major part in developing Syrian raw cotton production for its own mills. How times had changed!!¹⁰⁴

Thus a cotton policy which had been pursued on and off for twenty years, in the end had failed to provide France with raw fibre for her mills with the ultimate goal of giving her autarky in event of war. What were the reasons for this?

One of the major problems was simply that of timing. The support structure of Cotton Office and ginning stations and the means to finance them were not in place until 1929-1930. No sooner had they started to function when the effects of the great economic crisis began to bite deep, and these underpinnings collapsed along with the demand for the products they sustained.

For example, the ginning stations in the Alaouites closed with the collapse of cotton production in that region. By the end of 1931, the station belonging to the ACC at Hamidiya which had just opened the previous fall was closed temporarily whilst the one at Jabla operated by the SACS was only running a fortnight per month. By 1935, the field was left to the locally owned station of G.Saadé et Fils at Latakia which operated only for a short period during the season.¹⁰⁵

The story was similar with the stations sponsored by the ACC at Homs and Hama which had also opened in the fall of 1930. By 1933, the station at Hama had closed whilst the one at Homs was treating mostly

¹⁰⁴ Syndicat industriel alsacien, Mulhouse, *Bulletin Mensuel*, 2, February, 1939, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français, Gouvernement de Lattaquié, Services Agricole & Economique, *Bulletin Annuel*, 1931, 97; 1935, 89; Schuler, 'La culture du coton . . .,' 293.

the locally grown Egyptian varieties. Most of the other cotton grown was ginned in one of two ways: if *baladi*, in small stations powered by the norias situated on the Orontes in the region of Homs and Hama; if American, sold to merchants in Aleppo who treated it there.¹⁰⁶

Another obstacle to achieving French dominance, was that every effort made to improve Syrian cotton could not ensure an output as homogeneous nor a quality as consistent as that of fibre grown in other areas of the world where cotton had long been established. Therefore French mills tended to buy their cotton elsewhere.

Moreover the collapse of the price of American cotton provided less incentive for its improvement in lands such as Syria where it had been recently introduced. Nevertheless if France refused to buy Syrian cotton due to quality problems, other countries--Palestine, Italy, Germany, even the Soviet Union--were not so picky. The three European dictatorships had all begun programmes of forced-draft industrialisation and had great need of huge quantities of raw materials to feed their factories. Syrian cotton, not the best, but cheap, and from a region close enough to ensure reduced freight charges, fitted the bill.¹⁰⁷

Finally there was the fact of what one might call the 'indigenisation' of the Syrian cotton industry. This had happened in the case of silk when economic depression had brought the withdrawal of European firms from the Lebanon only to be replaced by local capital

¹⁰⁶ Schuler, 'La culture du coton . . .,' 293.; *Bull. BSL*, 1935, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Schuler, 'La culture du coton . . .,' 294-95.

when times improved. Yet silk was a dying industry and no amount of funds from whatever source could revive it. On the contrary, cotton was a rising one. Local interest and local capital carried it through the dark days, ensuring its survival and its revival under national direction whilst preparing it for the bright future which was to come. Thus when cotton production did blossom during the nineteen fifties, its profits flowed back into national coffers rather than to those of foreign entrepreneurs.

Understandably then, Syrian capitalists and the Syrian government rejected a French hegemony which for all its loudly-proclaimed intentions had failed to set up a support structure to launch Syrian cotton onto the world market. One can discern this bitterness in their attitude towards the projects of the ACC.

Those agreements which had been signed with such fanfare in 1929 between the ACC and the various Syrian states to establish a Cotton Office in order to ensure quality control and improvement, proved practically a dead letter from the very outset. In 1939, when it came time to renew the contract which had been signed ten years before, the Syrian government complained vigorously to the High Commission over its terms. The Syrians pointed out that although they had faithfully paid over an annual sum of 50,000 francs to the ACC as agreed, fibre classification by that organisation had occurred only *once* in ten years. Moreover the rules for classification set up by the ACC had proved defective whilst its ginning stations had closed their doors long ago. The Syrian government itself and local entrepreneurs had

long filled the gap left by the dereliction of the ACC, and all resented the tutelage of an organisation which had failed them so utterly.¹⁰⁸

If French cotton policy during the Mandate failed to achieve its stated objectives through the use of private entrepreneurs and private capital, could it have done any better had government--in this case the High Commission--played a more vigorous rôle? In this regard, one should recall that in 1926, Jean Lecreux believed that perhaps the most important requirement for a successful cotton policy was the presence of a High Commissioner who would bring to his post 'the authority, energy, and perception desired'.¹⁰⁹

III. 16>The shackles of indecision

Unfortunately, the High Commissioner and his official collaborators seemed unwilling to assume such qualities--at least in economic matters. In reading the reports and the minutes of the conferences held between the High Commissioner and his principal advisors in the spring of 1929, one gets a brief glimpse into official attitudes, and senses a real hesitancy to intervene decisively.

They appear to be saying;

'Yes, French cotton policy has failed completely, for ten years of efforts have little to show for them. Nonetheless we cannot intervene decisively to change this because we are handicapped by the limits of our brief.'

'Syria is a mandate, directed in the final analysis by the League of Nations and the conditions

¹⁰⁸ Note from L.M. Demorgny (Affaires Economiques), 15 January 1940. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 866.

¹⁰⁹ Lecreux, 'L'Industrie alsacienne . . .,' 9.

under which we have accepted our tutelage commit us to a policy of the Open Door. Therefore we cannot push French interests too blatantly.

‘Moreover while the State of the Alaouites has proved both docile and efficient, we must show solicitude for the feelings and attitudes of the State of Syria which is more than likely to reject any attempt at the imposition of “draconian” legislation which might infringe on its sovereignty.

‘Therefore, taking all these matters into consideration, we must proceed discreetly and quietly, nudging rather than ordering.’¹¹⁰

In certain respects, such attitudes developed from the original decision to carve the Mandated territories into statelets, whilst providing each of them with ‘national’ attributes, complete with ministers, departments--and even flag. That each of these states was not really master in its own house; that each minister, each department, had a shadow in the form of a French ‘counsellor’; that in the countryside, ultimate power lay with the regional bosses, the French Delegates backed by the officers of the Service des Renseignements/Services Spéciaux, all these were undeniable facts. Nevertheless because they had created this system of ‘indirect rule’, the French felt compelled to nourish this fiction whenever possible by giving exaggerated deference to the sensibilities of their creations in fields which were outside what might be considered the clearly political arena. For the French, it was particularly important to bolster the

¹¹⁰ For these attitudes, see 1>Conférence des Délégués: a>Services économiques et agricoles, ‘Note sur le coton,’ 1 March 1929; b>**Procès Verbal**, 2 March 1929: 1--‘Coton’; 3>Conférence des Délégués, 1 May 1929: ‘Coton,’ *passim*. MAE--Nantes, FB. Carton 1574.

legitimacy of their *protégés* because this was challenged by Syrian nationalists who saw them as mere puppets of imperialism.

Yet these monkeys did not always jump to the tune played by their masters. Those notables who collaborated with the French, just as they and their fathers had worked with the Ottomans, did so in the hopes that as intermediaries they would be able to maintain their local networks of authority. Moreover this traditional pattern of manoeuvre was the only one they knew to use when faced with foreign domination. Nevertheless the French were not the Ottomans. Alien in religion and culture, they had seized Syria by force after the summary dissolution of Faysal's Arab kingdom. As a result of this humiliation, those who cooperated with the invader were burdened with a certain shame for doing so, especially when faced with the intransigence of their nationalist compeers. Therefore they resisted when they could, not actively, but by insisting upon those limited prerogatives which the occupiers had granted them and by a passive refusal to carry out reforms proposed by their advisors--and gaolers. Indeed the more these counsellors pressed economic reforms upon them, the more the Syrians resisted their implementation. As one astute observer pointed out, the fact that the High Commissioner, stymied by lack of agreement on the political front, sought to focus his energies on the economic front was enough to make any reforms in this area suspect in Syrian eyes. It was as if the French sought to lull the Syrians with economic gains in

order to make them forget their desire for liberty. Which was indeed the case.¹¹¹

Thus a certain delicacy of manoeuvre on the part of the High Commission was complemented by obstruction on the part of those whom they chose to do their bidding. In economic policy, the result tended towards paralysis even when events such as the economic crisis of the thirties warranted a vigorous response.

This failure to articulate and implement a coherent cotton policy was equally a function of a certain bureaucratic *malaise*. To put it bluntly, the High Commission could not make up its mind what it wanted to do even when in areas such as cotton policy, positive decisions could only be of benefit to French interests. Such an attitude seems all the more inexplicable because if given a green light, these interests were willing not only to do the work, but also to put up most of the funds.

Another explanation for this immobilism presented at the time was that the existence of so many statelets acted as a strong impediment to co-ordinated action both to the detriment of cotton policy and economic policy in general.¹¹² This observation came as the result of hard experience, but unknowingly reflected a sentiment expressed at the very beginning of the Mandate. In 1920, a high official of the Ministry of Finance pointed out to a colleague in the Quai d'Orsay that this division of the Mandate into numerous small states was unwise

¹¹¹ See the observations by William Martin, 'L'Équipement économique de la Syrie,' *Journal de Genève*, 5 December 1929 in *Bull. UES*, VIII, 8 (New Series), 31 December 1929, 297.

¹¹² For this viewpoint, see Pavie, *Le coton . . .*, 17.

on financial grounds, would stymie the development of their resources, and most important from his point of view, might result in a heavy burden on the French taxpayer who would be required to make up the difference. The response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was that whilst this division was necessary for political purposes, particularly with regard to the Lebanon, nonetheless it did not necessarily mean that for the other states legal partition necessarily implied a complete administrative or financial separation.¹¹³ Unfortunately, despite this caveat and the existence of such shared organisms as the Common Interests (Intérêts Communs) and the Customs Service (Service des Douanes), co-operation between the different states in economic matters tended to reflect the realities strongly criticised by Charles Pavie rather than the pious hopes voiced by bureaucrats sitting far away in Paris.

Nevertheless in examining the evolution of agriculture during the Mandate, there was one field in which it would appear that the High Commission would be forced to assume the leading rôle. This domain encompassed both modifications in the land and lives of the people who worked it as well as large and complex engineering works, all watered

¹¹³ **Draft letter:** Direction du Mouvement général des Fonds à M. le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 'Organisation Administrative de la Syrie,' Paris, 2 October 1920 and **Response:** Le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères à M. le Ministre des Finances, 'Organisation du Mandat en Syrie,' Paris, 6 October 1920 in MF, Carton B32.936, F³⁰ 2043 (1919-32).

by a copious dose of finance. This important aspect of agricultural development was of course, irrigation. An examination of French moves within this sphere reveals much about the strengths and weaknesses of agricultural policy during the Mandate.

CHAPTER IV

The Mandate--IV: Irrigation and Production

Perhaps the most important legacy which the French left to Syria was the creation of the first modern irrigation systems to be installed in that country. To achieve success, such projects required firm direction, sophisticated engineering, and large amounts of capital--all of which the High Commission in Beirut was in a position to obtain.

Moreover these irrigation schemes brought a profound transformation to the village communities in the regions where they came to be established. The French administrators and engineers who designed and constructed the great irrigation projects, modern temples to revivify an ancient land, were convinced that the success of these schemes depended upon the destruction of the traditional agricultural community. They asserted that such communities, built around the collective agricultural disciplines and territorial organisation characteristic of *musha'* cultivation, prevented the free exercise of the right of ownership and the maximisation of production. In their opinion, only a class of peasant capitalist smallholders could achieve these goals. The peasants, for their part, often resisted what they rightly perceived as deliberate strategies to undermine communal

routines which they themselves did not perceive as having the 'most pernicious repercussions from a social and economic point of view'.¹

Yet the French bureaucrats, eager as they were to construct efficient and rational structures to regenerate the countryside, refused to recognise the contradiction between their ideological predilections and the requirements which flowed out of their own actions. This contradiction was that the installation of systems designed to make use of water in a planned and centrally controlled manner could not operate by means of the decisions of individual smallholders, but rather through the central directing authority which had built the physical structures; was responsible for their efficient operation; and controlled the allocation of water, the most important element for successful cultivation.

IV. 1>Irrigation --a panacea for production

When all was said and done, the key to efficient agricultural production in Syria was a plentiful and uninterrupted supply of water. Since rainfall was erratic to say the least, other sources of the precious liquid had perforce to be exploited. Wells, *norias* and other sorts of lifting devices, *foggaras/qanats*, primitive dams--all served to utilise groundwater and water from rivers and streams. The most impressive traditional irrigation system in Syria was the Ghuta surrounding

¹ 'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 19 April, 1939, 2-3. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 370, 7.

Damascus which in this naturally dessicated land resembled a Paradise on Earth.² In 1926, Achard had the Agriculture Service of the State of Syria do a survey of surfaces watered by traditional means and gave an estimate of the area as some 130,000 hectares out of a total cultivated area of some 1,200,000, i.e. slightly more than ten percent. He further estimated that the total irrigable surface was some 385,000 hectares.³

Despite lauding the achievements of the past, and taking measures to put back in order some of the works (such as *foggara* systems) which had fallen into disuse, Achard and his colleagues believed that large scale modern agriculture required waterworks commensurate with it. In their eyes such products of modern engineering skill were bound to be more efficient than the antiquated methods of the past.

Nevertheless to build such structures required bureaucratic co-ordination and decisive action in order to launch them, finance them, and see them through to the end. In Syria, during the Mandate years such a combination tended to be in short supply. In order to

² For the Ghuta, see the extensive discussion in 1>Thoumin, Chapter III, 60-75; 120-25; 228-32. Also 2>*Idem*, 'Notes sur l'aménagement et la distribution des eaux à Damas et dans sa Ghouta, *B.E.O.*, IV, 1934, 1-26; 3>René Tressé, 'L'Irrigation dans la Ghouta de Damas,' *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1929, Part 4, 461-574; 4>J. Allen Tower, *The Oasis of Damascus* (Beirut: Publications of the American University of Beirut, 1935); 5>Anne Marie Bianquis, 'Le Problème de l'eau à Damas et dans sa Ghouta,' *RGL*, LII, 1, 1977, 35-53.

³ For his report on traditional methods of irrigation which discussed the methods in use region by region, see Achard, 'Les irrigations . . .,' *passim*. Since these figures resulted from an investigation to determine specifically the extent of irrigated areas in the State of Syria, they were perhaps more reliable than those Achard gave in his report written two years previously where he estimated the area irrigated in all the Mandated territories as 86,500 ha. (58,500 for the State of Syria) out of a total irrigable surface of 450,000!! See *Idem*, 'Actualités syriennes . . .,' 205.

understand the course followed by irrigation policy, one can do no better than to look at a number of cases where these qualities were present in differing degrees.

IV.2>Irrigation for cotton--the Ghab

One of the reasons for the poor quality of Syrian cotton was that it was largely grown under a system of dry farming. Both Egyptian cotton and its American cousin flourished under irrigation. If necessary, the latter could also be dry-farmed, although this might lead to lower production. Writing in 1935, Schuler stated that, in his opinion, the failure of Syrian cotton to maintain commercially desirable consistency and homogeneity was due to dry farming under the unfavourable climatic conditions of the two previous years. In giving his own analysis, Schuler cited a statement of Achard, one which he had voiced three years previously, but which Schuler himself believed was 'still the most burning question of the hour: "In Syria, the fundamental problem to resolve. . .is that of irrigation. . ."'⁴

Nonetheless, writing two years later about the cotton harvest of 1936, which had the greatest extension of any during the Mandate, Schuler sadly admitted that the *vilayet* of Aleppo, with the largest area under cotton, grew 80% without irrigation (25,600 hectares out of 33,300). As one proceeded south through the *muhafazas* of Hama and Homs and east towards the Euphrates, this proportion was reversed

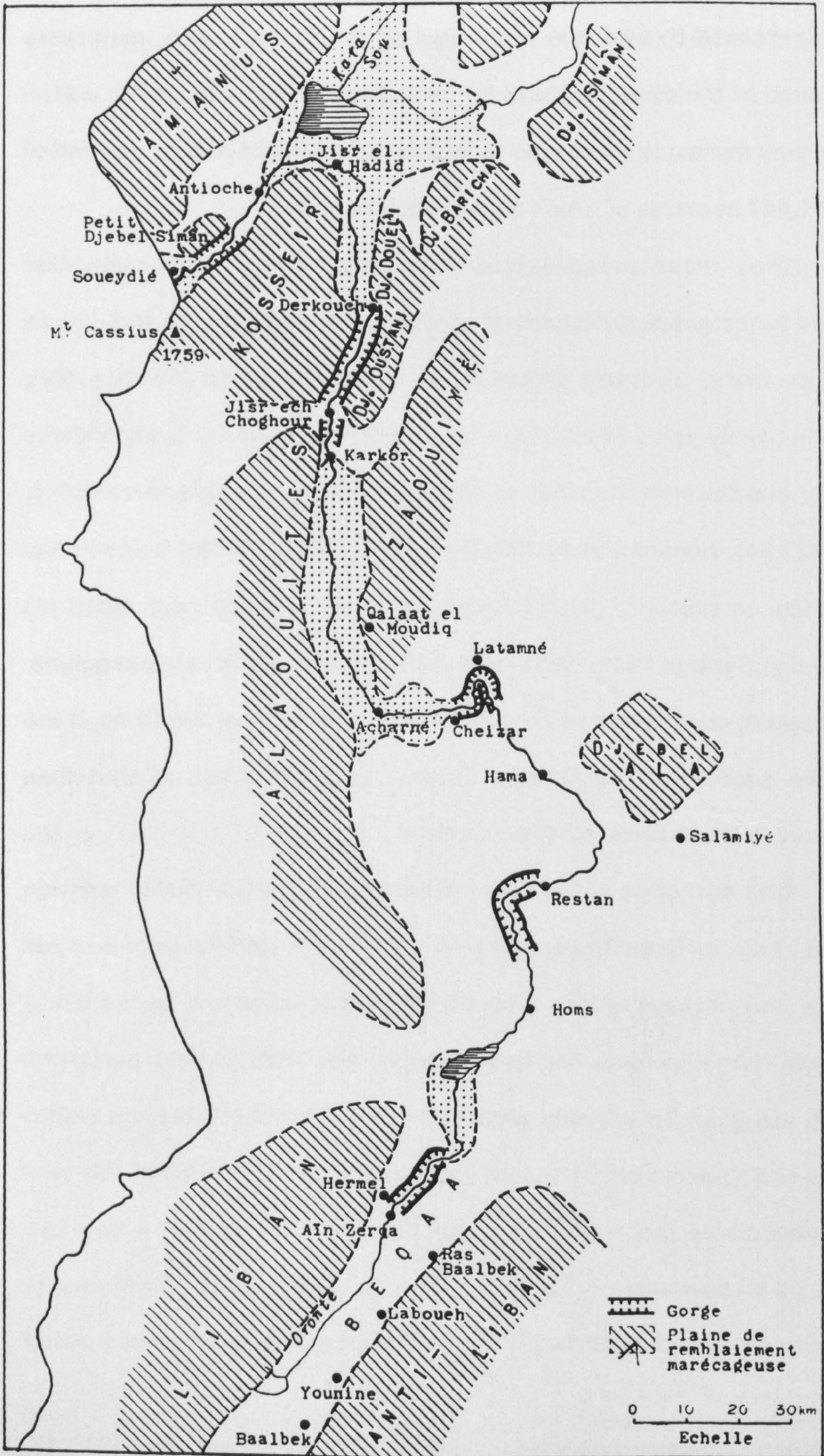
⁴ Schuler, 'La Culture de coton . . .,' 294. He cites a report of Achard 'Rapport sur l'évolution de la culture du coton au Levant,' 1931.

and increased to 94% due to the use of riverine irrigation, necessary because of the excessive aridity. Nonetheless the area under cotton here was miniscule compared to that of the *vilayet* of Aleppo: a total of only 1,447 hectares of which 83 were not-irrigated.⁵

Thus those persons most concerned with cotton cultivation called for irrigation whilst admitting that the amount of land so watered was derisory. That this should be so at the end of the Mandate after nearly twenty years of agitation is cause for question. It is particularly ironic that towards the close of his Syrian career (he retired sometime in 1933-34), Achard should still describe irrigation as 'the fundamental problem to resolve', given his call for such a policy ever since his arrival in Syria in 1919. Writing in 1924, he was much more sanguine, particularly as concerned the irrigation of the valley of the Ghab in the middle section of the Orontes River, a project which at that time seemed to be on the point of realisation.

One attraction of the Orontes was its location in fertile western Syria close to three major cities--Homs, Hama, and Aleppo--and the roads and railways linking them to the rest of Syria and to the world outside. Another was the fact that its most undeveloped parts--the Ghab valley and the 'Amuq plain--bordered the Jabal Ansayria with a large and underutilised peasant population. Yet even beyond this was the undeniable fact that French agronomists and engineers saw this river as a showcase where their modern technical skills would enable them to emulate the still visible work of the Ancients and go well beyond

⁵ Schuler, 'Campagne cotonnière . . . 1936-37,' 60-62, 65; *Bull, BSL*, 1938, 12.



them. Moreover during the Mandate, this was the only river in Syria to provide sufficient scope for large projects, the Euphrates still being in a region of unsettled nomadism.⁶ In order to understand more clearly the fascination exercised by this particular waterway, one must examine closely its physical structure and the engineering achievements of the past.⁷

The Orontes, that most Syrian of rivers, has left an indelible mark on the landscape about it. It flows for nearly six hundred kilometres (600 kms) to the Mediterranean through the northern part of that great trench which is the continuation of the the Great Rift of East Africa. As a river, it possesses two peculiarities:

The first peculiarity is the fact that it is a perennial stream flowing through a somewhat dry area (average rainfall of 400 mm) behind the well-watered coastal region. Its affluents are a series of 'wadis' which pour torrents of water into it during the rainy season, but usually remain dry during the rest of the year. Therefore the only way this river can flow during the dry period is because underground sources which spring from its bed or in close proximity to its course continually feed

←---Fig. 12. The bed and the valley of the river Orontes. Stippled areas indicate marshy lowland valleys; slanted lines represent the bordering hills. *Source:* Jacques Weulersse, *L'Oronte: étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et C^{ie}, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), Fig. 5, 16.

⁶ For expert opinion on the present unsuitability and future prospects of the Euphrates, see the 'Note confidentielle sur les irrigations de l'Euphrate,' 1 February 1928 written by M. Garbe who was Conseiller pour les Travaux Publics for a brief period in 1927-28. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1367.

⁷ For the Orontes, see 1>Moussly, *Le Problème . . .*, 65-69; 2>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, *passim*; 3>Naval Intelligence Division, *Syria*, B.R. 513 (restricted), Geographical Handbook Series, 1944), 45-49.

its waters. In the words of Jacques Weulersse, the Orontes is 'a river which, so to speak, is born of itself'.⁸

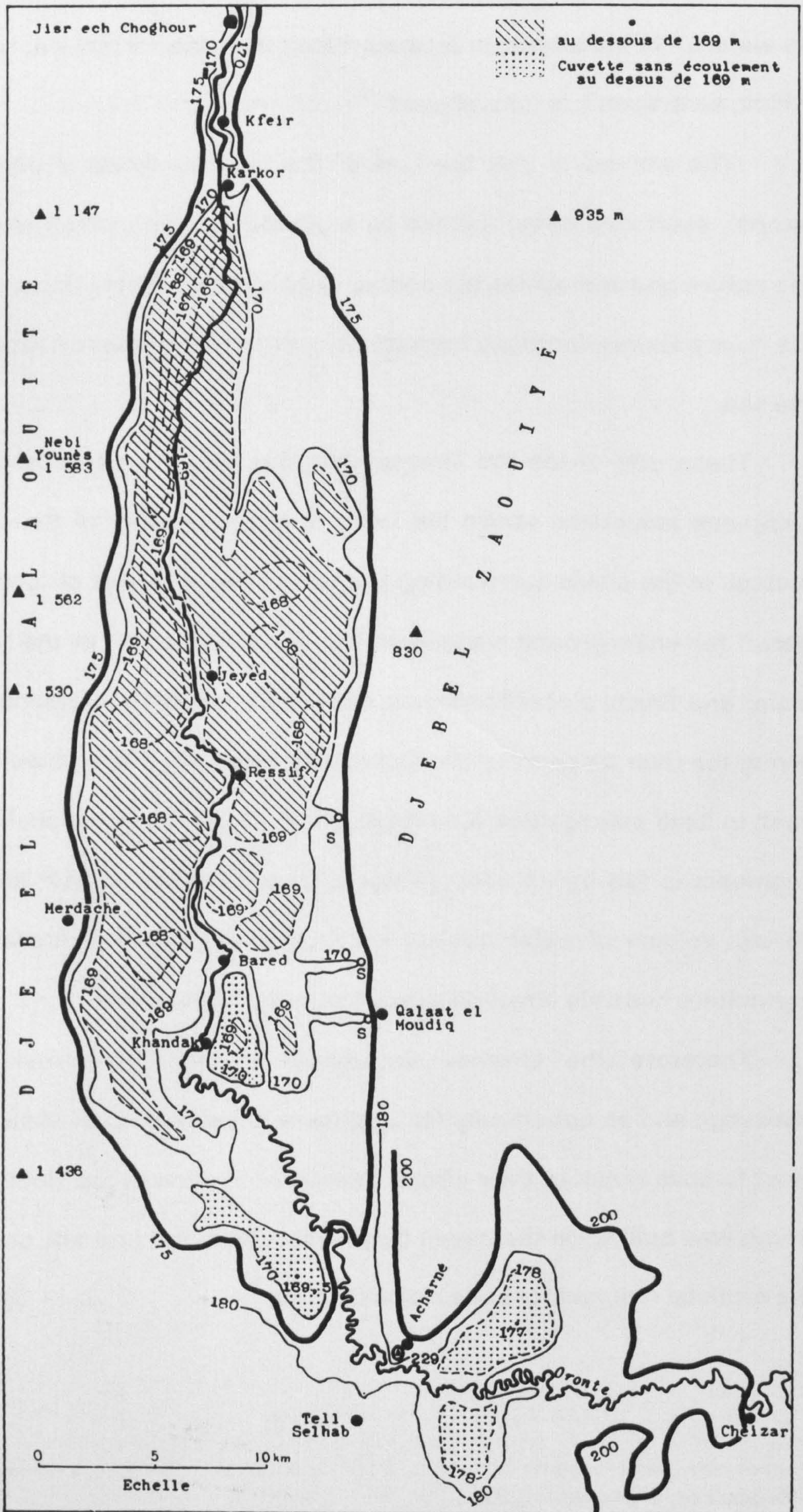
The second is that the bed of the Orontes forms a series of 'steps', each step being defined by a sill of hard rock which changes the nature and sometimes the course of its stream. Within these steps, the river passes alternately through gorges and arid plains on its way to the sea.

These sills divide the Orontes into five slices: a torrent of the Lebanese mountains above the Lake of Homs; a river of the Syrian plateau in the plains surrounding Homs and Hama; a sort of 'drainage canal' for underground sources in the Ghab and again in the 'Amuq plain; and finally a Mediterranean coastal stream below Antioch.⁹ In giving the river its peculiar structure, they also split it up into sections, each in itself manageable for irrigation. Moreover because each of its segments is fed by its own springs and/or affluents as well as by a certain volume of water coming from upstream, any modification for agriculture has little effect on similar projects downstream.

Therefore the Orontes throughout history has provided a challenge and an opportunity for engineers to exercise their skills. The most famous result of their efforts in ancient times was the Homs Dam which was built upon the basalt flows which form the first sill, creating the artificial reservoir of Lake Homs/Qattina.

⁸ Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.



Nevertheless, it was the Ghab rather than the region watered by the Homs Dam which saw the first major irrigation project proposed during the Mandate.¹⁰ This section of the Orontes lies between the sills at Latamna and Qarqur. Here the river first passes through a gorge between the sill of Latamna and Qal'at Shayzar; then it flows west through a plain before turning north into the Ghab proper at the spur of Asharna (Asharina), the last outcrop of the Jabal Zawiya. In the flatlands between Qal'at Shayzar and Qarqur its slope practically disappears as it runs level with the land on either side. In addition, it receives an enormous input of water from more than fifty sources lying along its course and springing out of the surrounding hills. One result is that the channel of the river loses itself in meanders as it wends its way northward towards the sill at Qarqur. Another is that much of the valley never dries out: It remains a noisome swamp where malaria is endemic, and where the temperature during the year varies between 17° C during the winter and 40° C during the summer, always accompanied by stifling humidity.

←—Fig. 13. Topography of the Ghab. *Source:* Jacques Weulersse, *L'Oronte: étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et C^{ie}, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), Fig. 32, 69.

¹⁰ For a physical description of the Ghab and the problems posed by it, see 1>Richard Thoumin, 'Le Ghab,' *Revue de Géographie Alpine*, XXIV, 1936, Fasc. III, 467-538; 2>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 17-18; 3>Françoise and Jean Métral, 'Irrigations sur l'Oronte à la veille de la motorisation,' in *Techniques et pratiques hydro-agricoles en domaine irrigué: approche pluridisciplinaire des modes de culture avant la motorisation en Syrie* (Actes du Colloque de Damas, 27 June-1 July 1987 (Paris: Geuthner, 1990), 407-08; 4>A.-M. Goichon, 'L'Aménagement de la vallée syrienne de l'Oronte,' *Orient* (Paris), X, 37, 1966, 150-56.

The Ghab-Asharna region comprises an immense domain. The Asharna plain which acts as doorstep to the Ghab proper is a sort of vague triangle 15 kilometres on a side whose points lie at Qal'at Shayzar, Asharna, and south towards Aqrayba. The Ghab itself is 55 kms. long by an average of 11 kms. wide.¹¹ In 1923, the author of the first drainage proposal estimated that the utilisable part covered an area of some 60,000 hectares, of which some 32,000 was permanent swamp; 8,000 inundated during the wet season and cultivated during the dry season; and 20,000 cultivable or cultivated.¹²

Although the Ghab was a swamp and had obviously been so for a very long time, to those who sought to promote an agricultural renaissance, it appeared to have possibilities which modern engineering techniques could bring to fruition. When General Gouraud was High Commissioner, he had Georges Carle investigate the potential for agriculture and irrigation in the Mandated Territories with a focus on industrial crops, cotton in particular. Although Carle was on mission in Syria from 1 May until 15 September, 1922, his stay was so brief that he was unable to do more than make a cursory examination of most of the regions which might favour irrigation. Nevertheless he

¹¹ Thoumin, 'Le Ghab,' 471.

¹² Ivan Wilhelm, *La Culture du coton en Syrie: projet d'organisation sur une grande échelle* (Grenoble: Imprimerie Allier Père et Fils, 1923), 23. These figures tally more or less with estimates made later, e.g. 1>Total area: 56,000 ha. (Asharna plain 9,000; Ghab, 47,000) of which 34,000 were swampy (3,000, for the Asharna and 31,000 for the Ghab). See, Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners [Gibb], Report: 'Republic of Syria: The Economic Development of Syria,' (London, 1947), 61; 2>Total irrigable area: 70,000 ha. of which an average of 38,000 were inundated (Asharna, 8,000 of which 1,400 were perennial; Ghab, 30,000 of which 26,000 were perennial). Françoise and Jean Métral, 'Maitrise de l'eau et société dans la plaine du Ghab,' *RGL*, LIV, 3, 1979, 308, fn 7 and 309.

described the Ghab as that part of the Orontes which he found to be the 'most interesting' for purposes of irrigation, and called for a more thorough study to be made in conjunction with a cadastral survey to determine who owned what.¹³

Achard himself examined the problem of the Ghab in the summer of 1922, and sketched out two solutions in his usual succinct fashion, *viz*

A>Build a dam at Qal'at Shayzar high enough to raise the Orontes which would be then be channeled through the valley by two canals lying one on either side of the riverbed. These canals would be large enough to hold both the river at flood and the water coming from numerous springs. The canals would empty into the river below the sill at Qarqur. They would serve in turn as canals of drainage and of irrigation.

B>Straighten and widen the channel of the Orontes in the Ghab above Qarqur whilst widening and deepening it below the sill. Channel the streams flowing from the sources at the base of the mountains on either side of the depression, and build an irrigation canal on each side of the plain to water the newly drained lands.

In his opinion, the execution of either of these projects depended on various considerations, chief among them being

- 1>Technical difficulty.
- 2>Cost price of the works.
- 3>Irrigable area which was dependent upon the volume of water available.¹⁴

The programme which Carle had merely sketched out and to which Achard had provided more detail was adopted with a vengeance

¹³ For the report of Georges Carle, see his 'L'Hydraulique . . .,' 564-602. The discussion of the Ghab is on 595-97 with map of the 'Gharb' [*sic*] on 599.

¹⁴ Edouard-C. Achard, 'Note sur le dessèchement des terrains marécageux du "Gharb,"' Beirut, 28 July 1922 in Pavie (ed.), *Etat d'Alep . . .*, 52, 53. Also in *Bull. UES*, II, 3, 30 September 1923, 160-63 under a slightly different title.

by the man who succeeded Gouraud as High Commissioner in 1923, General Maxime Weygand. Weygand was a superb administrator who had been Chief of Staff and *alter ego* of Marshal Foch during the Great War. Unlike his predecessor, he had never served in the colonies, and had not shown any particular interest in colonial questions. Nonetheless he immediately grasped the potentials inherent in the Ghab as a means of implementing concrete plans to make agricultural prosperity through cotton cultivation a reality. Achard lauded him as the prime mover behind the scheme which next took shape.

Nevertheless if he was indeed the prime mover, the real architect and driving force behind plans to develop the Ghab was one Ivan Wilhelm. Wilhelm was a senior civil engineer of many years experience. He was also a man of vigorous personality: hard driving, energetic, opinionated, and rather undiplomatic. In May, 1923, he accepted a contract to come to Syria as Counsellor for Public Works (*Conseiller pour les Travaux Publics*) to the High Commissioner. Soon after his arrival he began to occupy himself with the problem of the Ghab in consultation with Achard who had already made a preliminary study the year before. In September-October, the units of the Cadastral Survey made their first foray into this region in order to draw up a preliminary assesement of its size; the amount of swamp and cultivable land; the number of villages; and the flow of the river. Upon receiving these statistics, Wilhelm drafted a project of improvements to be made; arranged for his draft to be printed into a little booklet; and proposed that he return to France for several months in order to sell his ideas to

industrialists who might have an interest in financing their implementation.

In his pamphlet, Wilhelm emphasised that the Ghab would be ideal for cotton cultivation after it had been drained and irrigated. To achieve this end he proposed a solution which in his view would prove the cheapest and the most expedient. He rejected the idea of straightening and deepening the bed of the Orontes whilst lowering the sill at Qarqur (in essence Achard's Plan B) as being technically possible, but too difficult and too costly. Instead, he called for the implementation of the 'classic solution' for such situations (a modification and simplification of Achard's Plan A), that which had been used for example in flood control of the Po in Lombardy. His idea was to construct earth dikes along the course of the river on either side, set back so that they would not be undermined by the current and could avoid some of the meanders of the channel. Behind and parallel to each of these would run drainage canals which would channel the runoff from the springs. The excess would be diverted into the river at certain convenient points. The drainage of the plain would be completed by a system of secondary canals.

The second phase of his plan was the irrigation of the plain. He proposed to build a low dam with sluice gates on the Orontes below Qal'at Shayzar which would supply the water to two irrigation canals approximately 75 kilometres long, one on each side of the plain at the foot of the mountains. These would be situated well behind the drainage canals, so as to embrace the largest possible area, and would

capture the waters of those springs to be found along the base of the uplands. Connected to these two principal canals would be a network of secondary canals tied in with a system of irrigation channels for distribution of water to the fields.¹⁵

Officials of the High Commission counselled him to seek finance from the French textile industry to underwrite this project. In order to persuade hard-headed businessmen to put their funds into what they might consider to be a risky and expensive scheme, the idea put forward was for the scheme to proceed by stages. As in the cotton projects formed later in the Alaouites, first would be formed a *société d'études* which would be capitalised sufficiently, but not enormously. This company would be charged with gathering technical information and performing the myriad preliminary tasks necessary for the success of such a weighty enterprise. When the time was ripe, it would transform itself into the enterprise which would actually carry out and operate the project. The scheme itself would unfold over a period of ten or twenty years, and would advance in tranches with the success of one leading to the implementation of the next.

Unlike the cotton projects which would be developed in the Alaouites, the French Mandatory administration was to be intimately involved in supporting this scheme. A senior official suggested to Wilhelm that he ask French cotton industrialists from the three principal textile regions to capitalise the proposed organisation to a tune of 1,000,000 francs to which the Syrian state governments would add a

¹⁵ Wilhelm, 19-21; 23-34.

subvention of 500,000 francs. In addition, another 250,000 francs would be obtained from the Comité de Liquidation du Consortium Cotonnier.¹⁶ This total of 1,750,000 francs was a considerable sum for a mere *société d'études*--the ACCS was only capitalised at 220,000--and indicated the importance and complexity of the enquiries envisaged.

In return for underwriting this preliminary programme the Mandatory administration promised to ensure that the investors received the option to exploit the lands for which they had drawn up the draft projects. The authorities assured them that they would be able to enjoy the concession of land as freehold since the Cadastral Survey had determined that the swampy land was State Domain. There would be no problem allocating parcels once the improvements were completed, and the concessionnaires would from then on enjoy a secure and valuable source of fibre. As for the land currently cultivated, the proprietors could be legally compelled to pay some of the cost of its enhancement whilst the companies holding the

¹⁶ The Consortium Cotonnier was an organisation formed under state control during the Great War in order to centralise the requirements of the textile industry in machinery and raw materials; make purchases abroad; and redistribute them equably throughout the textile industry. When this consortium was liquidated, the funds released were to be used to underwrite existing enterprises or as matching funds to help start new ones. For this, see Letter No. 7: 'Lettre par laquelle M. le Ministre du Commerce et de l'Industrie répond à celle du Président de l'UES relativement à un projet tendant à développer la production cotonnière dans les pays placés sous le Mandat français dans le Levant' (No. '405,' 23 June 1923), 22 November 1923, *Bull. UES*, III, 1, 31 March 1924, 8.

concession would enjoy the right to tax those who profited from the improvements.¹⁷

Wilhelm returned to France in December, 1923 in order to make personal contact with the magnates and Chambers of Commerce in the three principal textile centres of Mulhouse, Lille, and Rouen. His hopes were that they could be persuaded to band together to form a powerful enterprise to carry out the tasks envisaged. He was particularly eager to help in the formation of such a combination because he was worried that a foreign company, probably English or Italian, would demand the right to exploit this opportunity before his compatriots could get onto the ground. Moreover because of the principle of the Open Door which had been written into the Mandate Charter (the famous Article 11), this could hardly be refused them. And given their desperate need for cotton, European textile producers would be fools should they fail to take up this challenge.¹⁸

Upon his arrival in France, Wilhelm gave what was described as a 'magisterial' presentation of his case before a meeting of the UES on Saturday, 19 January 1924. He pointed out that the large outlay of funds required to make his vision become a reality were certainly commensurate with the results to be achieved. In order to keep the

¹⁷ Wilhelm, 30-32; 39-40. Also 'Note pour aider à la constitution d'un groupement qui proposerait sous l'égide du Haut-Commissariat de France en Syrie le drainage, l'irrigation et la mise en valeur de la plaine de Gharb,' n.d. [October-November, 1923]. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 477--Services Techniques.

¹⁸ For these arguments, see **Letter:** L'Ingénieur en Chef des Ponts et Chaussées, Conseiller technique du Haut Commissariat à Monsieur le Général Weygand, Haut-Commissaire de la République,' 10 November 1923. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 477--Services Techniques.

expense down and to find the necessary work force more easily, he indicated that in this first stage only 6,000 hectares would be developed. He emphasised that the *société d'études* to be created could 'count on the full moral and financial support of the High Commission' which would allocate subventions for the studies to be made.¹⁹

Nevertheless despite these high hopes and a positive reception of his proposals, Wilhelm returned empty-handed. As he ruefully admitted a year later, the group of investors headed by the *Crédit foncier d'Algérie et Tunisie* with whom he had negotiated regarding this affair, had finally presented him with a counterproposal whose stipulations he found unacceptable. In effect, the financiers promised their support on 'condition that they would incur no loss whatsoever, neither in capital nor even in interest. When all was said and done, they did not wish to be exposed to any risk'.

Given this attitude, the High Commission decided to continue the preliminary work which was being carried out by the agents of the Cadastral Survey. Once the cadastration had been completed and the maps prepared, the draft project regarding the 6,000 hectares of the Asharna plain would be examined by the Public Works Department of the State of Syria, and the area of State Domain delimited. With this out of the way, Wilhelm felt that he could return to the *pourparlers* with the

¹⁹ 'Projet d'Organisation sur une grande échelle de la culture de coton en Syrie'. Causerie de M. l'Ingénieur en Chef des Ponts et Chaussées Ivan Wilhelm, Conseiller Technique du Gouvernement Fédéral Syrien et du Haut-Commissariat, 19 January 1924, *Bull. UES*, III, 1, 31 March 1924, 15-18.

industrialists and financiers armed with even more precise information as to the cost and the extent of the irrigation canals whilst giving them a more sure appraisal of the extent and nature of those State Domain lands which they were to be given in concession.²⁰

Nevertheless these hopes too were dashed, and writing one and a half years later to HC Ponsot, Wilhelm stated baldly that the only way irrigation works could be constructed in Syria was as a public work, one which would be controlled and directed by the State.²¹ The fact that his opinions in this matter should shift 180° after three years of hard experience says much about the issues raised by irrigation proposals during the Mandate.

IV.3>The 1923 Ghab project--a balance sheet

An assessment of the 1923 Ghab project, the first important irrigation scheme to be conceived in Syria in modern times, reveals certain strengths and weaknesses which were to affect the implementation of French development plans throughout the Mandate period. On the positive side was the fact that a single well-thought out proposal was drafted; a strategy for investment was decided upon; a booklet was printed up complete with map; and its author and his superiors had sufficient confidence in this project to present it to astute

²⁰ **Letter:** 'Le Conseiller pour les Travaux Publics à Monsieur le Ministre Plénipotentiaire, Secrétaire Général du Haut Commissariat,' 5 February 1925. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 477--Services Techniques.

²¹ **Letter:** 'Monsieur Henri Ponsot, Haut Commissaire de la République Française des Etats de Syrie, du Grand Liban, des Alaouites et du Djebel Druze,' 1 September 1926. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1570.

metropolitan industrialists and financiers. That this occurred at all was due to the presence in Syria at that time of a High Commissioner who knew exactly what he wanted and who gave his complete confidence to an able subordinate obstinate enough to push it through. Because he had the support of his chief, Wilhelm was able to fight off rivals who sought to intrude upon what he considered his territory with rival plans of their own.

For example, C. Duraffourd, who was at the beginning of his career as the Régisseur des travaux du cadastre (the chief of the Cadastral Survey), sought to by-pass Wilhelm and present his own plan directly to the High Commissioner. For this he was gently rebuked by the Chief of Staff (Secrétaire Général) as having exceeded his brief whilst Wilhelm himself sharply rejected his encroachment and heaped scorn upon his arguments.²²

Nevertheless this stubbornness which enabled Wilhelm to fight off rivals and ram through his own project also made him many enemies. He was sufficiently undiplomatic to openly display a condescending attitude towards Syrians, whether they were subordinates or his political superiors within the State of Syria. This scorn was heartily returned, and despite his undoubted abilities, he

²² **Letter I:** 'Monsieur C. Duraffourd, Chargé de l'exécution des Travaux du Cadastre et d'Amélioration Agricole des Etats de Syrie à Monsieur le Général Weygand, Haut-Commissaire de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban,' 28 March 1924; **Letter II:** 'L'ingénieur en Chef des Ponts et Chaussées, Inspecteur des Travaux Publics de la Fédération à Monsieur le Haut Commissaire de la République Française,' 23 April 1924.; **Letter III:** 'Le Ministre Plénipotentiaire, Haut-Commissaire p.i. de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban à Monsieur Duraffourd, chargé de l'exécution des Travaux du Cadastre et d'amélioration agricole des Etats de Syrie,' 11 May 1924. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 477--Services Techniques.

was shunted aside in favour of lesser men when a new High Commissioner chose to support his Syrian associates rather than his own compatriot. As a result, the Ghab project languished, returning once more to the limbo of indecision.²³

The outcome of Wilhelm's Syrian career serves to introduce some of the negative issues surrounding this first Ghab project. The first is that this particular period in the life of the Mandate was witness to administrative flux as three High Commissioners passed through in four years. This meant that there was no continuity of direction at the top, something which was vitally necessary for the success of the Mandate and any projects associated with it as observers like Jean Lecomte were well aware.²⁴

Yet at a deeper level than that of one or two personalities no matter how able, the failure to implement the drainage and irrigation of even the smallest part of the Ghab hinged upon the temporary nature of a 'mandate' and its impact upon the execution of any major capital-intensive scheme. Writing in 1926 about his experiences with the Ghab plan, Wilhelm conceded that during the autumn of 1923, he and his colleagues still held 'tremendous illusions' about the possibilities of finding concessionnaires to carry out operations of this type.²⁵ In the final analysis, potential investors were unwilling to put their money into a concession which might in the end cause them to lose their shirts.

²³ For this, see 'Monsieur Henri Ponsot . . .,' *passim*. This letter is one long plaint about the problems Wilhelm faced during his three years in Syria and a plea for vindication.

²⁴ See *supra*. Chapter III.

²⁵ 'Monsieur Henri Ponsot'

Twenty years or even half that amount was a long time in a temporary political construct, and metropolitan capitalists were not keen to rely on the guarantees of an administration which was likely to be long gone when their investment was finally realised. Even the suggestion that the project proceed in tranches, with the success of one leading directly into implementation of the next, did little to allay their fears. As Wilhelm pointed out, they wanted no risk at all!

One must admit that after all the talk of concessions, this sudden attack of financial conservatism on the part of potential investors seemed all the more incongruous. Nevertheless it was forged in the heat of uncertainty as to the future in both the *métropole* and its newly won mandate.²⁶

On the home front, the early nineteen twenties were a period when all the fruits of the recent victory seemed to have turned sour. The titanic struggle of the Great War had left France burdened with debt in addition to the costs of reconstruction. Unfortunately, financial policy during these years refused to grapple with these dilemmas. One result was speculation on the franc which led to a rapid deterioration in its value between October, 1923 and March, 1924. The fall of the franc and the deeper *malaise* which this symbolised was hardly encouraging

²⁶ For a summary of these doubts as seen by an astute observer, see P. Gentizon, 'Sur le Statut définitif de la Syrie et du Grand Liban' (extract from article 'Le Problème Syrien,' *Le Temps*, 28 July 1925), *Bull. UES*, IV, 4, 31 December 1925, 287-290.

to those French capitalists who were asked to sink their money in what was in itself a highly risky foreign venture.²⁷

For investors, another source of uncertainty revolved around French ambivalence regarding her Syrian venture, and many questioned the extent of her commitment. The doubts as to the wisdom of her taking on this onerous and expensive charge which had manifested themselves at the time of the ousting of the Faysalian régime persisted as the debts and responsibilities of the metropolitan government became ever more weighty.²⁸ As General Weygand pointed out whilst meeting with the UES in March, 1924, the arguments of such Cassandras hardly encouraged French capitalists to put their money in the Levant. He strongly urged the members of the UES to use their influence to counter them.²⁹

A third source of scepticism was tied to the evolution of the political situation within Syria during the first years of French rule there. When they observed the rocky course followed by the Mandate during its first three years, potential investors came to the conclusion that Syria was inherently unstable. Moreover they considered many potential Syrian partners to be extremely unreliable and even resentful of the hold foreign capital had over their country, although it was

²⁷ For the French financial crises of the early nineteen twenties, see Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Bernstein, *Victoire et frustrations, 1914-1929* (Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine, 12) (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), 223-30; 264-77.

²⁸ For these doubts, see Chaps. II and III *supra*.

²⁹ For Gen. Weygand's thoughts on the rôle to be played by the UES in support of the Mandate, see 'Réception de M. le Général Weygand, Haut-Commissaire de la République en Syrie et au Liban, par les membres de l'U.E.S.,' *Bull. UES*, III, 2, 30 June 1924, 90.

obvious to French eyes that economic improvements could not be made without it. As one observer succinctly put it: 'Capital puts up its guard as soon as passions appear'.³⁰

It is interesting to note that such questions about the safety of any foreign investment in the Levant manifested themselves even before the outbreak of the Druze rebellion.³¹ This political cyclone only served to confirm French investors in their fears.

Impediments such as these had put paid to any attempt to undertake the major development of the Ghab for cotton production, using French capital as the lever with which to launch this project. One observer felt that the only way to dissolve such obstructions was through the smack of firm government which would suppress dissidence whilst at the same time delivering the benefits of material progress: 'By instinct, France lies behind each act of order and authority directed at achieving practical results and great prosperity. Act, govern, achieve in the practical realm; at present, this is the essence of the Syrian question'.³² Unfortunately, in the domain of large irrigation projects, converse principles seemed to animate French policies.

³⁰ Gentizon, 288.

³¹ Note the date of Gentizon's prescient article which almost coincided with the outbreak of this revolt.

³² *Ibid.*, 290.

IV.4>A time for sowing--the Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques

The period between 1925 and 1934 seemed to be one where the animators of irrigation policy within the Mandatory administration merely marked time. In the second half of the nineteen twenties, there was great activity by private firms in the development of cotton cultivation, but no initiatives were launched in the field of irrigation. This seems particularly surprising because of the rising crescendo of voices calling for such steps to be taken, in the belief that irrigation would launch a renaissance in Syrian agriculture. In this regard, one can cite the opinion of C. Duraffourd who in the course of his cogent analysis of the benefits of irrigation stated that in countries like Syria ‘*...a careful and rational policy must be carried out in order to solve the water problem to which are linked agricultural development and the very existence of their inhabitants*’. [italics his]³³

Those who examined closely the reasons for the failure of irrigation to be firmly launched in the first years of the Mandate came to the conclusion that one of the major reasons for this lack of success was due to the fact that in reality there was little hard data on the hydrological and agricultural capacities of Syrian rivers. Indeed, in 1929, the only study of this nature which had any pretense of covering Syria *in toto* was the summary analysis done by Georges Carle in 1922!

³³ C. Duraffourd, ‘Notice sur l’orogénèse des pays syriens et le problème de l’eau en Syrie’ (extrait du rapport de Monsieur C. Duraffourd sur la Plaine de l’Amouk), September, 1928, 11. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 880 and Carton 1574. Parts of this most interesting study were extracted in *Bull. UES*, VIII, 7 (N.S.), 30 Sept. 1929, 190-202 and in *L’Orient* (Beirut), 16 November 1929.

The lack of reliable data was complemented by a dearth of carefully conceived plans to develop Syrian waterways as efficiently as possible. Such schemes were particularly necessary with regard to the great rivers, the Euphrates, the Yarmuk, and particularly the Orontes. Each of these could be fruitfully exploited in different sectors of their course and effective co-ordination was needed in order to gain maximum utility.³⁴

As with the propagation of cotton cultivation, the problem was how to achieve this co-ordination in the face of a multiplicity of states, each jealous of its prerogatives and concerned to assert its rights vis-à-vis its neighbours. The High Commissioner in consultation with his most senior advisors decided to divide potential irrigation projects within the Mandated territories into two sections. Smaller projects such as the development of the river of Damascus, the Barada, and the river of Aleppo, the Quwayk, were left to the technical services of the state concerned. For those rivers which passed through more than one state or which flowed beyond the confines of the Mandate, the High Commission decided to turn to a private company who would have the task of gathering hydrological and geographical data and outlining preliminary proposals. Administrators felt that the information needed could be obtained more efficiently, more quickly, and at less cost by turning to an organisation which stood outside the bureaucratic

³⁴ The first discussion of a general irrigation programme for the Mandated territories was contained in two notes written by Paul Vasselet, the Conseiller pour les Travaux Publics du Haut Comissariat, 'Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général,' 1>19 December 1928 and 2>8 February 1929. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1570.

machine, but nonetheless was subject to its guidance. Therefore they confided this task to a *société d'études*, the Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques (REH).³⁵ Just as the ACCS had been formed by a consortium of Alsatian textile mills to exploit cotton in the Alaouites, so was the REH created by a partnership of several French banks involved in the Levant along with two other interested parties in order to gather irrigation data for the Orontes, the Euphrates, the Khabur and the Yarmuk. The partners ensured that the REH. would have proper direction by hiring as its 'representative' and director of operations, an experienced and senior engineer.³⁶

After somewhat difficult negotiations, a contract was drawn up between the REH and the different states which made up the Mandated territories, and signed on 25 July 1929. The REH worked for the account of these states rather than directly for the High Commission, and was paid *pro rata* from their proper funds according to the services

³⁵ In France and in countries under French influence, a *régie* is a mode of managing certain state enterprises of general utility (such as public works, manufacture of war materiel, e.g. gunpowder, etc.) which because of excessive risk or urgency would be difficult, inconvenient, or improper to operate under market conditions. Such an organism was run for expenses only with sometimes a slight return above expenses allowed as compensation for the efforts taken. For the REH this amounted to ten percent.

³⁶ The partners were the BSL, the Banque Ottomane, the Crédit foncier d'Algérie et de Tunisie, the Régie générale des chemins de fer et travaux publics (a *régie* concerned with similar tasks within the *métropole*), and the Société des tramways et éclairage de Beyrouth. Like the ACCS, this company was capitalised at only 250,000 Frs., but should the the partners so decide it could be transformed into a *société anonyme*. This was duly carried out in the spring of 1931. See 'Statuts de la Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques dans les Pays du Levant sous Mandat Français,' 4 April 1929. For its transformation into a *société anonyme*, see the letter from Désiré Bourgeois, the official representative of the REH in Beirut to 'Monsieur le Conseiller pour les Travaux Publics du Haut Commissariat,' 7 May 1931. Both in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 373--Services Techniques.

performed. Originally the contract between them was to run for a period of thirty months. In June, 1932, this agreement was extended for a second period of thirty-three months, and the contract was terminated by mutual agreement among the parties concerned in June, 1934, primarily for budgetary reasons.³⁷

The creation of the REH was part of the preparations made for the launching of a General Economic Programme (Programme général économique) which was proposed during the course of the year 1929.³⁸ As conceived, this was to be the master plan for the development of the Levant states with provisions for the expansion of the port of Beirut and other ports; the construction and modernisation of railroads; the building of airports; improvement of the telephone system; and of urban amenities--all in addition to irrigation. It was felt that investment in such a programme could only bring economic benefit to the Mandated territories. One could also say, although the view was not usually expressed officially, that such schemes were a means of compensating for the failure to make satisfactory progress on the political front.

³⁷ For a full discussion of the negotiations, the contract, its provisions and problems, see the letter, 'Le Haut Commissaire P.I. de la République Française à Son Excellence, Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères--Afrique--Levant,' *Objet*: Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques, 13 August 1929. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1574. For its extension and a list of work to be undertaken, see the letter from Secretary-General Tétreau to Désiré Bourgeois, the Representative of the REH, 29 June, 1932. Attached to this letter is a copy of the original contract: 'Etats de Syrie, du Liban & des Alaouites: Convention'. All in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 365/2--Services Techniques. For its termination see the note from Paul Vasselet, 'Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général,' 29 June 1934. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 373--Services Techniques.

³⁸ For two versions, see 1>'Programme Economique: Rapport Vasselet (form primitive)'. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1575, n.d. (probably summer, 1929); 2>'Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français,' 10 September 1929 in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 697.

The cost of the programme was originally estimated at 924,000,000 F. The financial health of the Levant states was quite sound, but it was out of the question for them to provide for these vast improvements out of their own budgets. Nor was it seen desirable that the present generation pay for the future through means of a vast tax increase, particularly when the amount gained would be hardly sufficient for the task.

As the High Commissioner explained in a letter to his superiors at the Quai d'Orsay,³⁹ there was no fund available within the Mandated territories to finance such a programme of capital improvements. In 1924, the four per cent increase in the tariff from 11% to 15% had been used to establish such a fund, but with the outbreak of the Druze Revolt in 1925, this money was used to pay the expenses of suppression in order to relieve the French Treasury of this burden. The tariff had again been increased in 1926 from 15% to 25% to fund the vast increase in military expenditure occasioned by the rebellion.⁴⁰ Therefore since

³⁹ 'Monsieur Henri Ponsot, Haut Commissaire de la République Française à Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères: Projet d'emprunt pour la mise en valeur des Etats sous Mandat Français,' 18 February 1930. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 364--Services Techniques.

⁴⁰ This extraordinary contribution was some 72 million F in 1925-26. With the suppression of the revolt, this sum, rather than being reduced, continued to be allocated annually to the military budget.

In addition to this amount, the territories under Mandate made an annual contribution to the maintenance of French forces in the Levant drawn from their ordinary budgets. This sum had risen from 3,000,000 F in 1924 to 7,000,000 in 1925 and was finally stabilised at 94,000,000 in 1927.

At the time of the negotiations for a Franco-Syrian Treaty in 1936, officials of the Ministry of Finance estimated the total military expenditure between 1920 and 1936 to be 'in the order of' 2 milliard F. For this figure, see **Procès-verbal:** 'Réunion aux Affaires Etrangères au sujet de la créance de la France sur la Syrie,' 7 May 1936. MF. Dossier: Syrie: Finances des Etats--Créance de la France sur les Etats sous Mandat français (1926-36), Carton B 32.937--F³⁰ 2044.

there was no money available within the Levant for a huge economic programme, the High Commissioner and his advisors decided to turn to the expedient usually employed by French colonies in similar situations: a loan guaranteed by the French state.

In the meantime, the cost of the programme had risen from 924,000,000 F to 1,185,000,000 of which irrigation comprised 250,000,000. Nevertheless HC Ponsot admitted that the detail of many of these programmes (irrigation, for example) was not yet in place, and called for a first tranche of 510,000,000 to improve communications and trade. Funds were to be spent on the Port of Beirut, the telephone system, the railroads, and a seaplane harbour.

Nevertheless this tentative proposal to obtain funds was largely rejected in a quite peremptory manner by M. Decron, the high official of the Ministry of Finance sent out to assess the projects in the spring of 1930. When he came to examine the irrigation programme, he admitted that agricultural improvements utilising the water resources of the country should be placed in the first rank of projects to be realised. Nonetheless he asserted that, 'it was utterly premature to mobilise capital whilst the corresponding projects had been neither drawn up, examined nor adopted'.⁴¹

The onset of the economic crisis of the 1930's made the Ministry of Finance think hard before supporting a request which had to be

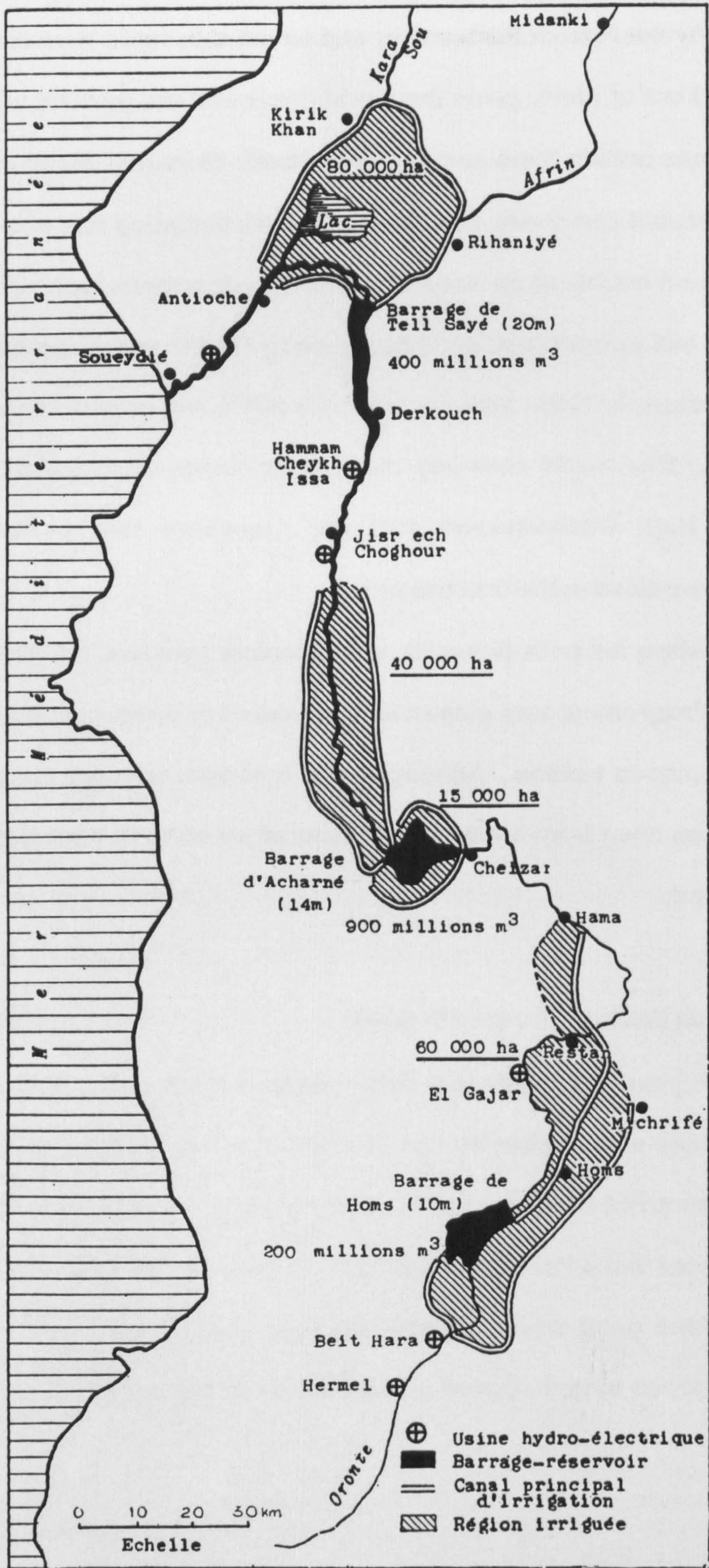
⁴¹ Untitled 'confidential' report, dated 4 June 1930, of conversations held with M. Decron, Inspecteur Général des Finances who was 'en mission' in Beirut during the months of April and May, 1930. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 364--Services Techniques.

approved by the French Parliament, and which was more than likely to be rejected out of hand, given the world crisis and the parlous state of public finance both in Syria and in France itself. Moreover the revenues of the Mandated territories had to go towards palliating the effects of the crisis, and could not be used to service an enormous loan. Finally, as Decron had pointed out, any money given for irrigation *would* have been premature in 1930 since the REH was still in the course of making its studies. One might even say that his strictures were quite unfair since the High Commissioner had not requested that money for irrigation be placed in the first tranche.

Therefore for both financial and technical reasons, the General Economic Programme was placed in hibernation to await the advent of a more propitious season. Although such a season seemed far away, like spring as seen from amidst the depths of winter; like spring, it too finally arrived.

IV.5>A time for harvest: irrigation triumphant

Three years later, matters had changed--technically, politically, and financially with regard to the prospects for irrigation. In June, 1934, the contract between the REH and the states of the Mandated territories was annulled due to reasons of finance. Nonetheless the REH had done good work in gathering hydrological and agricultural data about areas to be irrigated and the rivers to be employed in doing



this. Moreover it had drawn up a report elaborating on the projects to be undertaken.⁴²

Complementing this increased technical knowledge was a concatenation of political circumstances which ensured that such knowledge would be put to good use. First was the fact that in the autumn of 1933, High Commissioner Henri Ponsot was replaced by Comte Damien de Martel who had spent much of his career in the Far East, serving as Minister to China and in his last post, as Ambassador to Japan. This new proconsul had the reputation of a man of action, quick and decisive. And so it turned out to be.⁴³

Second was the fact that in the autumn of 1932, after years of vacillation, the French had presented the Syrian Parliament with a draft Franco-Syrian treaty whose object was to 'terminate' the Mandate and place the two parties on a more 'equal' footing. Although the French were inspired to act by the signing of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930 which gave to that country formal independence and a seat in the League of Nations whilst preserving British influence, the document which they presented for negotiation proved to be quite unacceptable to their tutee. The principal objection held by all shades

<---**Fig. 14. General plan for the development of the Orontes. Probably based on the report of the Régie des Etudes Hydrauliques. Source: Jacques Weulersse, *L'Oronte: étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et C^e, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), Fig. 30, 63.**

⁴² 'Rapport général sur l'aménagement hydraulique de l'Oronte et de l'Euphrate.' 159 pages + Annexes. This report in its entirety is not available for examination.

⁴³ For an assessment of the personality of de Martel, see Dr. George-Samn , 'Le Voyage de M. de Martel en France,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Paris), XXVI, 435, March, 1934, 97-101.

of Syrian opinion was that the treaty maintained the division of the country into separate zones with the Druze and Alaouite states retaining their autonomy under French control. Syrians were also not happy at the extent of French domination in the supposedly 'independent' region because the Mandatory Power had retained the right to intervene with armed force anywhere and at any time. Moreover the French had ensured that they themselves retained management of the Common Interests which gave them control over the Customs revenues, the most important source of income for the Mandated territories. All these factors led the Syrian Chamber to reject the treaty so unequivocally that on 24 November, 1933, the new High Commissioner suspended its sessions *sine die*, and two days later withdrew the treaty from consideration.⁴⁴

Thus after these unpleasant and frustrating episodes in Franco-Syrian relations there was every reason for HC de Martel to adumbrate a programme of large scale development projects in order to turn the minds of Syrians towards matters other than politics. As he himself put it, relying on his 'personal experience', "The population interests itself far more in the development of the natural resources of commerce and transit than in the sterile speculations of politics[!]"⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For the episode of the Franco-Syrian treaty and its rejection, see 1>Hourani, 194-96; 2> Longrigg, 189-99; 3>Khoury, 382-94. For the text of the treaty, see *Oriente Moderno*, XIII, 12, December, 1933, 607-12.

⁴⁵ Quoted in 'Le Haut Commissaire et l'essor économique,' *AF*, XXXIV, 318, March 1934, 96; also found in 'Une politique économique: les déclarations de M. de Martel,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Paris), XXVI, 434, February, 1934, 78.

It was also a hard truth that despite their vaunted expertise, the French had been able to do little to mitigate the effects of the world economic crisis. As a man of action, the High Commissioner sought to launch a programme which would go far to ensure that the future of the country would be more prosperous than the present. In some measure this would justify the French presence which was otherwise so widely resented. Fortunately, circumstances combined to give him the money with which to carry out his plans.

The year 1933 saw the final extinction of the Ottoman Public Debt.⁴⁶ This had not disappeared with the demise of the Ottoman Empire, but had been divided among the Republic of Turkey and the other successor states in proportion to the territories and resources of that defunct entity which each had acquired. Of this debt, Turkey held the lion's share, some two thirds. After complicated and lengthy negotiations about the terms of repayment, agreement between the European bondholders and the Turks was ratified by the Grand National Assembly in Ankara and took effect on 1 December 1928.

Following upon this, a contract and an accord annexed to it was signed on 19 January 1929 between the bondholders and the representatives of the Levant states. It was agreed that the percentage of the Debt due from Syria and the Lebanon would be 8.41% of the total,

⁴⁶ For the background to the Ottoman Public Debt and its relation to the Levant states, see 1>Raymond O'Zoux, *Les Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français* (Paris: Larose, 1931), 157-60; 2>Ch. De Saily, 'Le Règlement de la Dette publique ottomane,' *AF*, XXVIII, 264, November, 1928, 369-74 and *AF*, XXVIII, 265, December, 1928, 414-17; 3>'Le Règlement définitif de la Dette publique ottomane,' *AF*, XXIX, 269, April, 1929, 137.

and that the annuities to be paid would be done so on an ever-diminishing scale until the year 2015. To ensure payment, the Debt would have first call on the total net revenue of the Customs. For the first seven years, starting on 1 June 1929, the amount to be handed over was 244,000 Turkish gold pounds equal to some 27,000,000 French francs.⁴⁷

For the Levant states, the coming of the economic crisis of the 1930's proved to be a godsend. Starting in 1930, Turkey began to fall behind in her payments which led to a fall in the market value of the securities in which this Debt was held. As a result of this reduction, the Levant states were able to buy back those parts of the debt which could be amortised in this fashion at an extremely favourable rate. This meant that the burden held by the Mandated Territories was progressively lightened (by two-thirds in four years), so much so that the High Commission decided to repurchase the remainder of the capital of their debt. Therefore representatives of the Levant States under the aegis of the High Commission entered into negotiations with the Council of the Ottoman Debt, its governing body. These were facilitated by the fact that three fourths of the bondholders were French, and pressure could be brought to bear to ensure a favourable outcome.

The long term debt could be bought up, and the negotiators agreed that this transaction would be handled with a single payment.

⁴⁷ Under terms of this agreement, 1 Turkish gold pound=112.217 French paper francs. For this agreement, see 1>'Le Règlement définitif . . .'; 2>'Règlement de la Dette ottomane,' *AF*, XXXIV, 319, April, 1934, 122-23.

As for those other loans which formed part of the Debt, but which were not susceptible to retirement in this fashion (arrears bonds, the Turkish lotteries, irrigation of the plain of Konya), It was further agreed that the Levant states would make an advance payment equal to all the remaining annuities less a discount of 7.5%.

As a result, by a single payment of 32,850,555 F, Syria and Lebanon freed themselves from a debt which otherwise would have burdened them, in theory, until well into the first quarter of the twenty-first century. More immediately, they found themselves without public debt at a time when the world economy was collapsing about them. Indeed, they now had surplus funds which could be used for far more productive purposes than to service obligations which most Syrians and Lebanese felt were not theirs. Finally one might well say that of all the services performed by France for the Levant States, the extinction of the Ottoman Debt was perhaps the greatest since it ensured that when independence finally came, Syria and Lebanon were not burdened with the results of the financial miscalculations made by their Ottoman predecessors.⁴⁸

This conjunction of events impelled the new High Commissioner to resurrect the General Economic Programme in a form so modified

⁴⁸ For the crisis and resolution of the Ottoman Debt, see 1>'La crise de la Dette Ottomane,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Paris), XXIII, 402, June, 1931, 263-65; 2>'La Dette publique ottomane et les pays sous mandat,' *AF*, XXXIII, 310, May, 1933, 175; 3>'Dette Ottomane: le rachat de la part des Etats du Levant,' *Correspondance d'Orient* (Paris), XXV, 429, September, 1933, 130-31; 4>'Le Règlement définitif' Note that this article contains the complete text of the communiqué issued after the signing of the agreement on 29 July 1929 following negotiations between the Levant states and the bondholders held under the auspices of the High Commission.

that the revenues freed by the extirpation of the Ottoman Public Debt would suffice to pay for it. Since 1930, this programme of *grands travaux* had been progressively reduced in scope and in cost as financial realities set in. As conceived by the High Commissioner and his advisors, the programme finally laid down was to cost a total of 179,000,000 F and was to be spread over a period of six years, ending in 1939. The works to be carried out were to be covered almost entirely by those funds normally allotted from the Common Interests for the service of the Ottoman Debt, some 27-30,000,000 *per annum*. By using this money the Mandated territories would not need to have recourse to a guaranteed loan which everyone knew the French Parliament would still never approve. A further precaution was taken in that the programme of works was not mandated *ne varietur*. The details of each annual tranche were finalised only when the money was in hand, and it was certain that the works proposed for that year would be completed within the time set for them.

Such fiscal conservatism paid off. Although there were certain major changes to the original programme as a result of the negotiations for the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936 (notably the addition of important road improvement projects), nonetheless the three most important works--the enlargement of the Port of Beirut; the extension of the former Baghdadbahn from just beyond Nusaybin to the Iraqi frontier;

and the raising of the Homs Dam and the expansion of irrigation beyond Homs--were completed on time and practically within cost!⁴⁹

Of these projects, the most important from the agricultural point of view was of course the raising of the Homs Dam and the extension of irrigation in the Homs region. At least as far back as December, 1928, Paul Vasselet had enunciated what might seem to be a simple and logical proposition, but one which had not been adumbrated heretofore: to wit, that the Orontes could only be rationally exploited by moving from its source to its mouth since upstream alterations to its course would inevitably affect those below. Therefore drainage of the Ghab and the 'Amuq should not be done before the development of the upper reaches of the river. In a later note in the same series in which he elaborated his ideas for an organised plan of water exploitation via irrigation, he mentioned first of all, the 'raising of the dam at Lake Homs, development for irrigation, and possibly for the production of electric energy'.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For the adumbration of this programme, see 1>'Conférence économique tenu au Grand Sérail, le 23 octobre 1933,' 17-21, 25. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 697; 2>'Conférence tenue le 22 décembre à la Résidence des Pins pour l'étude d'un programme de grands travaux,' *passim*. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 365--Services Techniques; 3>**Letter:** 'L'Ambassadeur de France, Haut-Commissaire de la République en Syrie et au Liban à Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères (Levant) a/s Programme économique' and attached 'Note,' 26 January 1934. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 697. For the expenses as they were originally set out and as they in fact turned out, see 'Note pour Monsieur l'Ambassadeur. Objet: Programme des grands travaux,' 26 June 1939. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 364--Services Techniques.

⁵⁰ Paul Vasselet, 'Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général,' 19 December 1928; and 'Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général,' 8 February 1929. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 1570.

Vasselet's opinion carried weight: He had been one of Wilhelm's ablest assistants and several years later took over his post as Counsellor for Public Works in the High Commission. It was he more than any other person who was responsible for conceiving and administering the great public works projects undertaken during the later years of the Mandate. In the words of one of his younger admirers, writing in 1944: 'a great creator; a man of competence; one who forges ahead, and who draws requests for consultation'.⁵¹

Therefore in 1933, when the new High Commissioner asked him to produce plans for the programme of public works which were to be inaugurated, Vasselet placed the raising of the Homs Dam near the top of his list. He pointed out that the raising of the dam could be met at relatively little cost, and would produce excellent results unlike the drainage of the Ghab or the 'Amuq which would require an enormous amount of money because of the engineering problems involved. Moreover detailed plans for a barrage and a network of canals lay right at hand as a result of the labours of the REH, and once the administration gave its assent, work could begin immediately.

IV.6>The Homs-Hama project: an oasis in the steppe

On the face of it, the *qada'* of Homs⁵² appeared to be a most promising area for the implementation of a large-scale irrigation

⁵¹ Capt. G.M. Louyot, 'Rapport confidentiel sur le Congrès Agricole du Moyen-Orient tenu au Caire du 7 au 11 Février 1944,' 17 February 1944, 8. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 764.

⁵² Note that the *qada'* of Homs was one of two (the other being the *qada'* of Qaryatayn) which comprised the *liwa* or *muhafaza* (after 1936) of Homs.

project. This region embodied a mixed agricultural economy. On the one hand, it was a better watered area than that of Hama to the north, and was quite capable of supporting the cultivation of unirrigated cereals.⁵³ Yet on the other, its inhabitants were not unfamiliar with the problems and potentials of irrigation.

The area upstream from Lake Homs had long been intensively irrigated. Some of the systems were derived from the numerous springs which dotted the region whilst still others had their source in the river itself, making use of three ancient barrages which though in a state of disrepair, still functioned to supply the canals derived from them. The entire system resembled the Ghuta of Damascus and was similar in extent, some 6,000-8,000 hectares.⁵⁴

As for the old Homs Dam itself, it was one of the most visible works of the art of ancient engineering to be seen in Syria. Of great antiquity, built perhaps by the Romans, perhaps centuries earlier, it served as a testament to efforts made to give a steppe-like area sufficient fertility to support a major regional centre. Weulersse described this system as 'irrigations which until the Mandate constituted the most important overall effort for a rational development'.⁵⁵

⁵³ The average amount of rainfall in the Homs region was 592 mm for the thirteen years between 1932 and 1945 with a low of 409 in 1932-33 and a high of 806 in 1937-38. The comparable figures for the Hama region were 379 mm for the average with 216 mm for the low in 1932-33 and 492 mm for the year 1940-41. Data extrapolated from Gibb, Table No. 7: 'Rainfall in Millimetres,' 10-11.

⁵⁴ For the irrigations above Lake Homs, see 1>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 51-54 and map on 53; 2>Moussly, 238-39.

⁵⁵ Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 54.

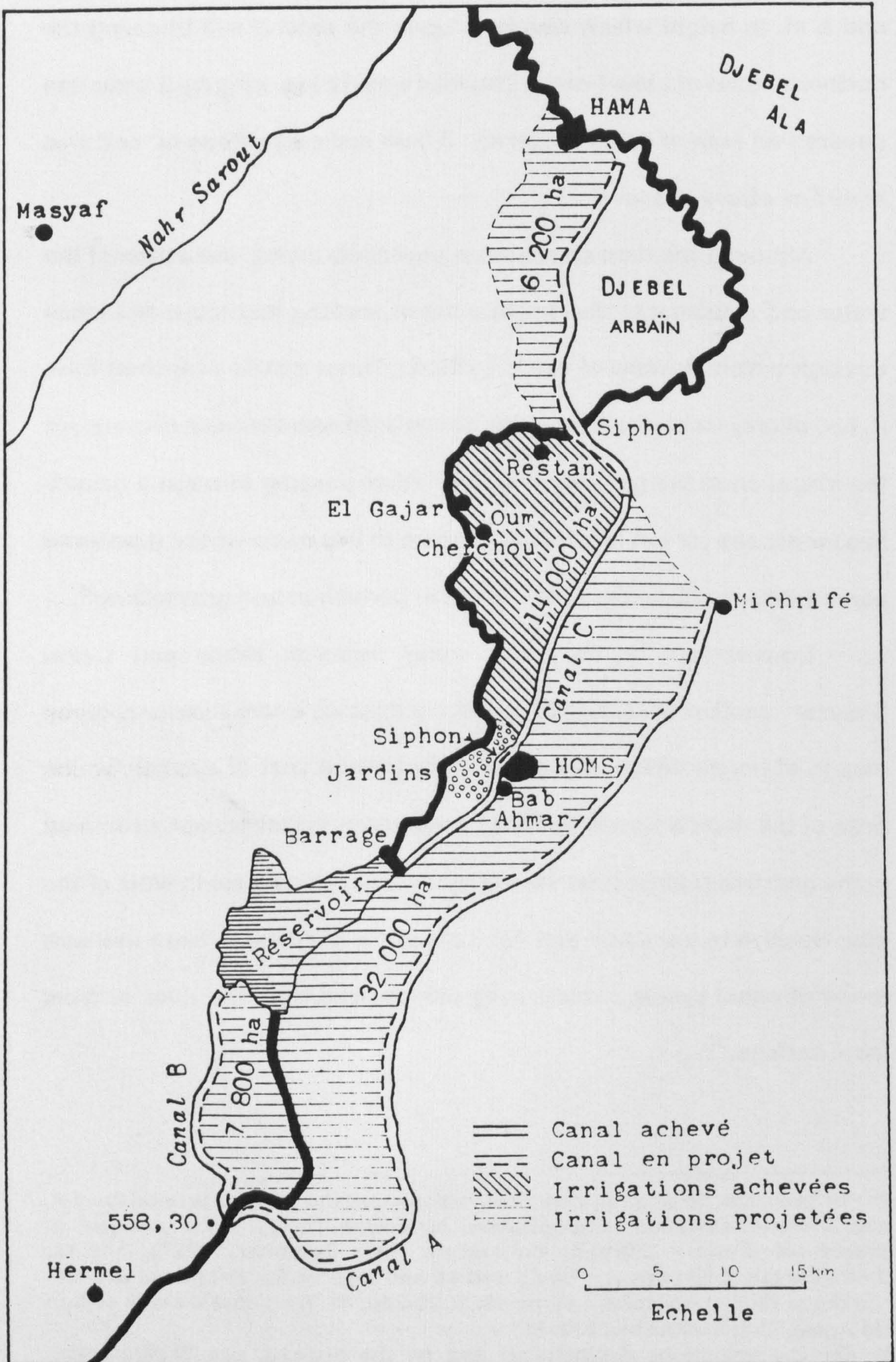
The dam itself was a remarkable basalt construction 850 m. long and 5 m. in height which was built upon the natural sill blocking the northern outlet of Lake Homs. The lake was 12 km. long by 3 wide and covered an area of 4,300 hectares. It held some 90 million m³ and was at 497 m. above sea level.

Although the dam appeared superficially intact, the action of the water had caused it to disintegrate below, making numerous breaches through which streams of water rushed. Three canals branched from it, two of only local importance whilst the third was the main channel for the irrigation of the gardens of Homs. After passing through a desert-like landscape for ten kilometres, it came to this oasis where it watered some 1,000--1,300 hectares by means of derivation and gravitation.⁵⁶

Downstream, in the river valley between Homs and Qal'at Shayzar, another 6000 hectares were irrigated, a large proportion by means of norias which observers considered a sort of symbol for the area of the middle Orontes. Finally, still more irrigation was practised in the districts (*nahiyas*) on the plateau--Qusayr to the south west of the city, Hassiya to the south and Ain Zath to the northeast. Here use was made of canal systems--some very old--derived from the river or from local springs.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For this dam, its origins, and the functioning of the system derived from it, see 1>René Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), 112-14; 2>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 54-55 and 65 and map on 53; 3>Léonce Brossé, 'La digue du Lac de Homs,' *Syria*, 1923, 234-40; 4> 'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 2-3; 5>Moussly, 239-40.

⁵⁷ For the irrigations downstream and on the plateau, see 1>Weulersse, 'L'Oronte . . .,' 55-59; 2>Moussly, 240-41; 3>Berthelot, 'Notes . . .,' 3-5.



In its original plan, the REH proposed to utilise existing constructions as a base whilst enlarging and extending them in order to irrigate a total of 60,000 hectares, a nearly fivefold increase.⁵⁸ On the upper Orontes south of Lake Homs, at the spot where the river emerged from the gorges of Hermel (altitude, 558.5 m.), two canals denominated A and B were to utilise existing channels. The former with a flow of 7.4 m³ per second for the irrigation of a total of 32,000 hectares was projected to run for 77 km. from the right bank of the river, ending at the village of Mishirfa. The latter with a flow of only 1.7 m³ per second for the watering of 7,800 hectares was to run for 20 kms. from the barrage to the lake. For whatever reason, these were never built, and the development of this part of the river was left to private initiative.⁵⁹

Downstream, the plan called for the construction of a much larger version of the Homs Dam immediately behind the old one which was used to support it. When finally completed, it was 1,500 m. long by 7 m. high; raised the level of the lake from 497 m. to 500 m.; and

←---Fig. 15. The planned irrigation projects on the upper Orontes. Note that Canals A and B were never constructed. *Source:* Jacques Weulersse, *L'Oronte: étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et C^e, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), Fig. 31, 67.

⁵⁸ For a summary of the irrigations which the REH projected for the Mandated territories, see 1>'Note sur les irrigations possibles dans les Etats sous Mandat,' 22 December 1933. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 373--Services Techniques; 2>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 65-66 and map on 63.

⁵⁹ For the projected canals upstream of Lake Homs, see 1> Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 65 and map on 67; 2>Moussly, 234-36; 3>Berthelot, 'Notes . . .', 75-76. Berthelot himself could not understand the reason for this, and gives as his view (76) that their 'completion seems to be rather easy and of relatively little cost'. For a brief discussion of the private initiatives which have developed this region since the Mandate, see Métral and Métral, 'Irrigations. . .', 402.

increased the amount of water impounded from 90 million m³ to 200 million m³ with a utilisable volume of 150 million m³. On the right side, there was an outlet which was employed simultaneously to release water for use downstream and to supply the principal canal (canal C). This cement canal first followed the course of the ancient canal to the gardens of Homs crossing them *via* a siphon 830 m. long. Its maximum flow was 6.4 m³ per second⁶⁰ and at the end of the first stage of construction in 1939, it had attained a length of 31 kms. From it were derived a network of 56 kms. of secondary canals and 250 kms. of tertiary canals which enabled a total of approximately 14,000 hectares to be irrigated between the city of Homs and the village of Rastan. Of these, 12,000 formed newly irrigated land whilst the remainder comprised the land of ancient watering, now much improved.⁶¹

In the second stage, starting in 1940 and extending to 1950, the principal canal was extended for a total length of 71 kms. It crossed the river by a siphon 3 kms. in length to proceed along its left bank to Hama. In the Hama region, another 6,000 hectares was made irrigable for a total of 20,000.⁶²

⁶⁰ This gave an irrigation module of 0 litres 20 per second per irrigated hectare with each hectare having the right to one hour of irrigation per week. In giving these figures, Gibert considered them to be 'modest' for the type of agriculture envisaged. Gibert, 154.

⁶¹ For the technical details of the Homs-Hama project, see 1>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 65-68; 2>'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 3-6. ; 3> Berthelot, 'Notes . . .,' 74-76; 4> Gibert, 153-54; 5>Moussly, 236-38.

⁶² For the second stage of the project in particular, see in addition to the sources cited in previous footnote, 1>'Note au sujet de l'irrigation de la région Homs-Hama,' 13 June 1939; 2>'Etats de Syrie et du Liban, 'Grands Travaux Hydrauliques,' February, 1944 and attached maps. Both in MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 444--Services Techniques.

Although one might think that previous exposure of the local population to irrigation of one sort or another would predispose them to accept government-sponsored waterworks, a close analysis of the progress made by the Homs-Hama scheme during its first ten years reveals a slow rhythm of exploitation for this newly irrigable land. The reasons for this stemmed from the failure of the architects of this scheme to fully understand the relationship between communalism and individualism in the Homs plain and by extension in the Syrian countryside as a whole.⁶³

IV.7>Communalism and individualism on the Homs plain

Both communalism and individualism informed agricultural life in the *qada'* of Homs. Here agrarian relations were more equitable than in the Hama region to the north where only six out of 114 villages had totally or partially escaped the clutches of local notables.⁶⁴ There the notability formed a caste of territorial magnates who derived both their income and their influence directly from possession of their *latifundia*. Homs, in contrast, was dominated on the whole by a commercial bourgeoisie with the exception of one or two families. They did own some agricultural land, especially in the areas of old irrigation in the valley of the Orontes, but derived most of their wealth and influence from trade. A large proportion of the cultivated area was divided into small and medium peasant holdings worked under the system of

⁶³ For a discussion of the structure of agrarian relations, see Chapter II *supra*.

⁶⁴ Anon. [Gaulmier], Map III, 132.

musha' tenure. Moreover much of this land was sufficiently fertile to support a peasant family even if its plot was quite small, and cultivators were better able to resist the encroachment of great notables.⁶⁵

In the Homs region, certain of these villages possessed a tiny portion of irrigated land. This was particularly true of those located in the centre of the *qada'* in the district (*nahiya*) of Homs City. On these well-watered parcels the villagers raised fruit trees and garden vegetables--broad beans, onions, garlic and the like. This irrigated land was the first to become fixed and delimited for all time because of what Latron calls a '*bouleversement* of agricultural technique' which came with the rejection of cereals and the traditional agricultural disciplines associated with them in favour of more remunerative crops. Anwar Naaman underlines this change by asserting that it was 'well understood that no discipline of this type [i.e. *musha'* tenure] has been observed on irrigated lands'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Gibert brings out this point. Gibert, 152. Figures for large, medium, and small properties of privately held land (i.e. not in State Domain) in the two regions give some support to those who noted that in Homs the small and medium cultivator was preponderant. According to Gibb, working in 1946, approximately 52% of these tracts in the Homs *muhafaza* were divided into small (< 10 ha.) or medium (10-100 ha.)-sized parcels whilst 48% were divided into large (>100 ha.) ones. The fact that 12% of the holdings were small and 40% medium shows the more equitable nature of the distribution here.

The figures for Hama *muhafaza* were 44% and 56% respectively. Of the 44%, only 2% (8,000 ha out of 348,000!) were small plots and 42% medium. Data extrapolated from Gibb, Table No. 10: 'Land Tenure,' 20. Note that this table is the ultimate source for nearly all the figures given for land tenure by Syrian and foreign authors in the next fifteen years.

⁶⁶ For irrigation in Homs *qada'* and the crops grown there, see Berthelot, 'Notes . . .,' 3-5. For the relationship between irrigation and stabilisation in this region, see Naaman, 54-55. Quotation on 55. André Latron points to certain factors which tended to disrupt communal agricultural disciplines in favour of individualisation, see Latron, *La vie . . .*, 195-96. Of course, it might be that Naaman misunderstood the situation, and that these irrigated gardens had been *mulk* all along. Latron supports this idea by commenting (143 and fn. 3) that in Homs and other places, agricultural irrigation was

Even though these irrigated portions were but a minute proportion of the total land farmed by the village community, the fixing of their boundaries and their ownership highlighted the possibilities of individuation, and so began to tip the balance against those communal principles upon which *musha'* tenure was based. For as Latron points out, the peasant was not adverse to the undermining of the community if it was to his advantage to do so--and if he could get away with it.

These villages whose irrigated lands had become fixed and delimited were the first to apply this principle to that portion of their patrimony which was dry-farmed, and this tendency became ever more pronounced during the creation of the Homs irrigation project. The Cadastral Survey made a special effort to divide and register properties within the purview of the new scheme: Of the 67 villages so treated in Syria up to 1945, 33 were within the *muhafaza* of Homs, covering a total of 75,325 hectares which was slightly more than half of all the village lands cadastred within Syria. In contrast, only four were delimited within the region of Hama-Salamiya for a total of 13,450 hectares.⁶⁷

That the French authorities encouraged individualism to the detriment of communalism in the Homs region was quite in keeping with received wisdom. From the very beginning of the Mandate, French

always a concession of the city, chief water user and 'mistress of the [water]works'. City gardens were always *mulk*, and perhaps this principle was extended to the 'suburbs'.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the land tenure system and agrarian relations in the districts of Homs and Hama with figures, see Naaman, 53-59; also Gibert, 152-53.

officials concerned with the problems of restoring Syrian agriculture saw *musha'* tenure as a form of unmitigated evil. Achard writing in 1925 condemned the principle of what he called 'collective' ownership and frequent repartitioning. He felt that such a system hardly encouraged the peasant to improve his methods of cultivation, an improvement which he believed necessary to intensify agricultural production and reduce its costs. Duraffourd concurred and also pointed out that fragmentation of the land lowered its value both because it was hard to work properly and because it was practically impossible to sell the segments piecemeal.⁶⁸

If the ideal of the individual smallholder could not always be achieved given the structure of landholding with its bias towards communalism, at least the operations of the Cadastral Survey could 'safeguard the social cell which makes societies strong' by encouraging and facilitating the stabilisation and concentration of parcels in the hands of family units.⁶⁹ Nonetheless even this reform tended to undermine the community because families with consolidated parcels were no longer forced to follow the common agricultural disciplines laid down by their fellows.

It was in this spirit that those who sponsored the irrigation scheme in the Homs region sought to break up the system of *musha'* tenure prevalent there because they felt that it would hamper the

⁶⁸ For such ideas, see 1>Achard, 'Propriété rurale . . .,' 13; 2>Duraffourd, 4-5; 3>the comments of M. Gennardi who was in charge of the *waqf* and land departments (*Wakfs et Services Fonciers*) at the 'Conférence économique tenu au Grand Sérail, le 23 octobre 1933,' 22-24.

⁶⁹ Duraffourd, 5-6.

development of the new régime to be put in place. Such wholesale transformations resulted in a certain amount of obstruction on the part of those who were supposed to benefit the most from them. Emboldened by the fact that they had successfully resisted the encroachment of city notables upon their holdings, they did not hesitate to balk at changes which appeared to bring no immediate gain, particularly since these were imposed by foreign masters whose time of dominance was rapidly drawing to a close. Thus the delicate political situation which existed during the last years of the Mandate compelled the French to proceed cautiously with their plans for wholesale transformation.

For example, in June, 1938, the gardens of Homs were deprived of water for two or three days at the time of changeover from the ancient system to the newly built Canal C. This produced howls of outrage from gardeners and property owners. More seriously, the village of Tal Bissa, whose lands were to be watered by the new scheme, absolutely refused to let their vineyards be cadastred, and the authorities were forced to give way. Nonetheless the irrigation network was traced out, in anticipation of a more propitious moment for action.⁷⁰

Of a piece with this more overt resistance was the fact that the cultivators were slow to take advantage of the opportunities for

⁷⁰ For French moves to dissolve *musha'* tenure in the area of the Homs irrigation scheme, see 1>'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 6-7; 2>Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 68, 70-71. For the political situation and local resistance, see Weulersse, *L'Oronte . . .*, 68 and fn 2; 70, fn 1. *Idem, Paysans . . .*, 206.

irrigation. In 1940, only 472 hectares out of a possible 2,460 hectares of irrigable land was actually under irrigation, some 19%. In the years 1942-45, the amount had increased to an average of 30.5%, and in the latter year, the percent of irrigable land actually watered was almost equal to this average--2,456 hectares out of 8,050.⁷¹ There were two reasons behind this hesitancy. On the one hand, those who farmed the irrigable land did not all demand that their own plots be watered, whilst the water which they did request was hardly sufficient to supply all the potentially irrigable surface .

One can see from these various forms of defiance that the peasants were not happy with the accelerated dissolution of a familiar and customary system of managing their land. Moreover they were not easily persuaded that it was in their interest to adapt themselves to the different disciplines of what was to them a complex and novel way of managing irrigation. The novelty lay in the sheer scale of the system envisaged, not merely the lands of one or two villages, but 15-20,000 hectares. If the peasants were capable of organising irrigation over a small area from a spring or a stream, they had had no experience in managing and co-ordinating a network as large as the Homs scheme. Even such marvels of ingenuity as the watering of the lands surrounding the upper Orontes, the gardens of Homs, or the Ghuta of

⁷¹ Percentages derived from figures in Gibert, 156. He gives no figures for 1941.

Damascus were essentially a series of small irrigations linked together, subtle and flexible, but requiring talents of a different order.⁷²

To order and elucidate the complexities of the new system, the state perforce had to fill the gap, but the problem lay in the fact that the state and its minions were not fully prepared to do so. As the documents attest, Vasselet and his colleagues had set in place a formidable physical network: a dam, a primary canal (Canal C), secondary and tertiary canals, canals to drain the excess water, siphons, bridges, sluice gates, canal regulators--all to be managed by the Irrigation Department which had been built up under their guidance. Nevertheless it soon became obvious that mere technical organisation was insufficient. Gibert pointed out that in this first irrigation project in the Levant with a genuinely 'collective character', the technical organism needed an economic organism to complete it.⁷³ As a result of this lacuna, the peasants were slow to learn of the different possibilities inherent in the new system..

For example, it was quite feasible to grow four crops a year, with unirrigated winter cereals to be followed by crops on a threefold division of the land during the irrigation season. By dividing the amount of water to which they had a right, the peasant could grow a spring crop (onions and beetroot) on one third; a summer one (cotton, maize, sesame, beans) on the second third; and an autumn one (maize, kidney beans) on the last third before sowing again for cereals.

⁷² For irrigation and the peasant mentality, see 1>Latron, *La vie . . .*, 141-181; 2>Thoumin, *Géographie . . .*, 108-111; 3>Weulersse, *Paysans . . .*, 34-43.

⁷³ Gibert, 156.

Whether out of obstinacy or ignorance, the peasants tended to use their entire allotment on a third of their lands during the summer. Perhaps they wished only to have a lush crop on a smaller portion, giving them more income for considerably less work. Yet there was still a lack of knowledge of the aptitudes of different types of terrain for different crops under irrigated conditions, and so it was difficult to find the proper harmonies. Here is where education was needed.

Another example lay in peasant ignorance of the relationship between price and demand which was revealed by his sudden exposure to market forces. Between 1940 and 1942, there was a large demand for onions to feed the soldiers then in Syria. As a result the area devoted to this crop went from 118 hectares in 1940 to 510 in 1943 whilst the price which was 60 Syrian piastres (40 francs) per kilo in 1940 plummeted, reaching 3 piastres (0 F 60) in 1945. Here again, the cultivator needed instruction.

As might be expected, the cultivators found it difficult to grow crops under an agricultural régime which was entirely new to them. Moreover they lacked fertiliser, and the extra hands to carry out the many more tasks necessary to raise irrigated crops successfully. Finally, the beneficiaries themselves were required to make certain financial outlays for capital investments and water usage fees. First, the authorities expected them to complete the system with their own funds, building the various ditches and drains necessary to bring and remove the water from their fields. This proved difficult because they had little money, and could not easily obtain it. Second, water was

supplied freely only until 1947. After that date, its users had to pay a tax, proportional to the irrigated surface which they cultivated, in order to cover the maintenance expenses and recoup the cost of the project. As might be imagined, the peasants were not happy about this.⁷⁴

Of course one can attribute many of these deficiencies to problems of start-up, complicated by the exigencies of the war years. Indeed Moussly, writing in 1951, noted that the irrigation project was in the throes of transforming the landscape of the Homs-Hama plateau. The canal system had led to the construction of a parallel network of paths and roads. Trees had been planted as windbreaks, which facilitated the spread of orchards. Inauguration of intensive irrigated cultivation had already attracted a labour force from the Jabal Ansayria and the surrounding steppe, and new villages were springing up throughout the region. Moreover for the first time, the landscape was becoming dotted with isolated farmsteads sited along the roads and canals as the importance of the village community for agriculture became ever less. Change was certainly coming to the countryside, and would continue to do so, but slowly.⁷⁵

Yet if one examines more deeply the problems attending the exploitation of the Homs-Hama scheme, one always returns to the contradiction between the ideological bias of those who proposed and put it in place and the methods needed to make it function properly. For a society of individual peasant smallholders, each acting in his own

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 155-57.

⁷⁵ Moussly, 242-44 and map on 243.

interest was hardly capable of managing an irrigation scheme distinguished by its 'collective character'. Even if the authorities had chosen to bolster that communal tenure so typical of the Homs plateau, this form of association could not direct an organism of which it was not the progenitor. The project was proposed and created by bureaucrats at the centre and perforce had to be administered by them. Yet those who were so eager to impose a complicated engineering network on a virgin landscape shied away from considering the implications of this act: that a complex physical system of barrage and canals could only function properly when complemented and supported by a social and economic administration which would reveal to the peasant beneficiaries possibilities which were outside their common experience.

IV.8>The Homs project and the Ghab project of 1923--a comparison

In assessing the Homs irrigation project, one should not allow such shortcomings to mask the successes of this large and complex undertaking. In comparison with Wilhelm's scheme to drain and prepare the Ghab, the irrigation of the Homs plain proved politically opportune; technically feasible; and financially viable.

The initiation of each project was due to the political support of the High Commissioner of the day, and to the tenacity and commitment of the subordinate charged with implementing it. That the Ghab project proved stillborn whilst the Homs scheme was carried through to completion, on time and under cost, was due not only to political will

and efficient administration, but to a favourable conjuncture of technique and finance.

The fact that it took nearly fifty years to drain and utilise the Ghab is mute testimony to the complexity of this task. In his enthusiasm, Wilhelm underestimated this, and put forth ideas based on insufficient data. Whilst the REH made no explicit critique of his solution to the drainage problem, the fact that it did not use it as a base from which to elaborate its own proposals is criticism enough.

Whatever the merits or demerits of Wilhelm's ideas in themselves, those who held the responsibility for the development of the Orontes basin believed that the most logical plan was to move from upstream to downstream rather than starting in the middle of its course. In designing the changes to be made to the upper and middle Orontes, the REH based its new constructions upon those already in place, of ancient provenance admittedly, but soundly conceived and built. These only had to be extended and improved.

The third and perhaps most important contrast between the two schemes lay in the realm of finance. The failure of the first Ghab project to become operational demonstrated conclusively to those responsible for the regeneration of the Mandated states that they could no longer rely on private capital to finance projects for public benefit, despite a long tradition of doing so. For such large sums could only come from abroad, and foreign investors offered their funds, more in the hope of accruing profit for themselves than with the intention of resuscitating the economy of a alien land through the activities which they

underwrote. Naturally, such men did not care to risk their money on propositions plagued with uncertainty, even though these proposals might eventually prove to be of genuine utility. It was this sort of reasoning which led to the rejection of the Ghab plan proposed by Ivan Wilhelm.

With the elimination of private capital as a source of funds for complex and expensive projects, some other method of finance had to be found. The individual states could manage and pay for small schemes within their own boundaries, but large ones whose elaboration affected the Mandated territories as a whole, necessarily fell within the province of the High Commission. For only the High Commission, working in conjunction with its superiors in Paris, could find a solution to this problem of finance.

Such involvement became imperative with the collapse of the capital markets during the economic crisis of the nineteen thirties. Although the intervention of the Quai d'Orsay was insufficient to secure the support of the French parliament for a large loan to develop the Levant states, the fortuitous extinction of the Ottoman Debt released money which could be put to more constructive purposes. This sudden infusion of funds allowed the High Commission to launch a long-prepared programme of capital intensive projects of which the Homs irrigation scheme was only one.

These sums were public monies which had been set aside to service a public debt owed by the states themselves as heirs to the Ottoman Empire. That the High Commissioner should use them to fund

a 'public good' seems natural given their provenance and the parlous finances of the Mandated territories. Nonetheless by doing so he set a precedent, asserting that Government was willing without demur to promote and fund works of public utility.⁷⁶ Admittedly two of the projects supported, the expansion of the port of Beirut and the extension of the railroad from Nusaybin to the Iraqi frontier, were enhancements of French concessions. Nonetheless this does not detract from the fact that the action of the French High Commissioner, in opting for the auto-generated finance of public works, inaugurated a trend which would eventually result in the economic independence of Syria, and the termination of the influence of his own country in the affairs of the Levant.

IV.9>The transitional nature of the Homs scheme

The Homs-Hama irrigation scheme was the centrepiece of French efforts to regenerate Syrian agriculture. The problems attendant upon its inception reflected the fact that it was conceived and built during a period of transition.

To begin with, at the political level there was the move from mandate to independence, from foreign tutelage to the emancipation of the tutee. This meant a gradual loosening of the tutor's hold over the wheels of government which was accompanied by a loss of influence

⁷⁶ The funding of the Hijaz Railway by the Ottoman government and pious Muslims everywhere was in fact the first public work financed in this way. There is no evidence that French officials during the Mandate used this enterprise as a precedent for their own actions.

and a waning of prestige. As a result, this 'lame duck' administration had to move carefully in establishing a project which demanded of its beneficiaries disciplines quite different from those to which they had hitherto been accustomed.

Next, at the economic level, there was the passage from an era of expansion by means of private capital towards one in which the state was forced to take the lead. During the former, private entrepreneurs, as were their wont, sought to exploit economic opportunities offered by the newly mandated territories. Even if French financiers moved cautiously into the arena because they hesitated to risk their money in a land under temporary tutelage which could never be their own private preserve, few among the closely intertwined political and industrial élites questioned the principle of development/exploitation through private investment.

Nonetheless the onset of the world economic crisis, demonstrated conclusively that such private capital, itself beset by failure and retrenchment, was unequal to this task. Therefore the *métropole* through its representatives in Damascus was forced to play the leading part in orchestrating those various elements necessary for the successful completion of vital capital-intensive projects such as the irrigation of the Homs-Hama plateau. Creation of a scheme of this complexity was an untried procedure, and it is small wonder that there were problems and deficiencies in execution. The fact that an economic support organisation was slow in arriving on the Homs plain

was perhaps due as much to administrative failure as it was to wartime exigencies.

Finally, at the social level, the Mandate era saw a re-orientation of the relationship between the individual and the community of which he was a part. The economic crisis of the nineteen thirties brought with it a gradual awareness that the interests of the wider society should at times override those of its constituent elements. When such interests were in play, it was for the state to hold the ring in their favour because it alone could understand the needs of society as a whole and act to fulfil them.

In the final analysis, it was the failure (or refusal) of French administrators to grasp this last point fully which encumbered the development of their finest creation. After all, in 1939, five years after its inauguration, they still proclaimed to the world (or at least to their superiors in Paris) that the destruction of *musha'* tenure would create a class of peasant smallholders fully capable of improving their lands and planting them with those export crops within which lay the future prosperity of Syrian agriculture.⁷⁷ Such attitudes blinded those who held them to a reality which was much more complex. It was not until this point of view had evolved into one which allowed that the state might have a positive rôle to play in the ordering of society that the irrigation of the Homs plain could achieve its full potential.

⁷⁷ 'Irrigation dans la région de Homs,' 7.

IV.10> *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in the Homs plain

The installation of the irrigation project on the Homs plain undermined the *Gemeinschaft*like structure of the *musha'* communities which flourished there. Certainly control of water allocation by technicians whose first loyalties were to efficient and rational agricultural production rather than to the needs of the village communities in their charge, moved a long way towards the *Gesellschaft* spirit. Now external purpose, market-oriented and impersonal, directed the strategies of cultivation, and sought to undermine communal disciplines because they were considered no longer germane.

Yet, the resistance of the villagers of Tal Bissa to the cadastration of their vineyards--the first step towards the rationalisation of production--demonstrated that they were unwilling to accept meekly the destruction of the *Gemeinschaft*like structure of their community and its mode of cultivation in order to further the economic relationship. Their actions recall those of the Hawrani peasants who revolted in the 1890's; those of the Druze who revolted in 1925; and those of the various village protests which took place during the nineteen thirties. For each of these sought to preserve their communities--*Gemeinschaft*like structures all--in the face of attacks by forces which represented, in one way or another, external purpose. These forces sought to impose 'a pre-established order' which was ultimately founded on bureaucratic norms and the cash nexus, and which struck

at the very foundations of those village communities whose routines and disciplines had served their members so well over time.

A fortunate combination of politics, technique, and finance ensured that the irrigation of the Homs plain was the first project of its kind successfully inaugurated in Syria. Moreover this was a Syrian project, which if directed by the French, was financed by Syrian funds, and built by Syrian contractors. In this respect, it epitomised those solid economic accomplishments which the French themselves believed were the most durable legacy of their twenty years of stewardship. They admitted that their achievements were certainly less spectacular than the transformation of Turkey and Palestine under the impetus of Kemalist revolution and Zionist colonisation respectively, but still profound and durable. Moreover, unlike the attainments of their neighbours, those in the Levant had been implemented with a minimum of disturbance--without war, revolution, or dictatorship.⁷⁸

If this assessment was unabashedly self-promoting, it nonetheless contained within it a hard core of truth. Much *was* accomplished during the Mandate in the way of solid economic development. One must remember that when the French arrived, whatever had been realised under Ottoman suzerainty had been largely negated by four years of ruinous war. Therefore they had to start from scratch in their work of regeneration.

⁷⁸ 'Réalizations françaises au Levant,' n.d. (c. spring, 1940).

Agriculture was the basis of the Syrian economy, and the work of improving it and expanding its capacity to enrich the country was a vital task. Writing some thirty years later, Syrian Ba‘thist revolutionaries pointed with some bitterness to what they saw as the deficiencies of this *oeuvre*. In essence, their criticisms focused on the favouritism which the French showed to the rich ‘feudalists’ at the expense of the humble cultivator; their failure to develop a rational programme to expand and improve agricultural production; and their inability to promote Syrian agricultural exports, particularly during the crisis years of the nineteen thirties.⁷⁹

The deficiencies cited were quite similar to those which Achard said must be addressed for Syrian agriculture to prosper. If indeed the Syrian nationalists were correct in their assessment, then one can judge French agricultural policy a failure.

Certainly in terms of the physical resuscitation of cultivation, this assessment seems overly harsh. The various initiatives undertaken during the Mandate--well-digging, *foggara*-clearing, and locust control; development of cotton production; expansion of irrigation; the opening of the Jazira--all gave agriculture a solid base from which to move forward. The rapid expansion during the years of the Second World War,⁸⁰ when necessity forced Syria to become self-sufficient in food,

⁷⁹ Office Arabe de Presse et de Documentation, *Etude spéciale sur l’agriculture syrienne*, 1st ed. (Damascus, 1964), A92-95.

⁸⁰ Cultivated area in 1939: 1,904,079 ha.; 1946: 2,290,000 ha. *Ibid.*, A95. This estimate seems a bit too large. Other sources give the total cultivated area of 1939 as 1,047,609 hectares and that of 1946 as 1,710,500 which appear more reasonable. Figures for 1939: Saleh Essaleh, *L’Etat actuel de l’Economie syrienne: Agriculture, Industrie, Commerce en comparaison avec les pays limitrophes* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1944), tables on 47-49.

would not have been possible had Syrian agriculture remained in the state in which the French found it in 1919.

Moreover, if the tutor largely failed in his efforts to defend the tutee against the ravages of the Great Depression, it was because the tutor himself became only gradually aware that ordinary measures would not suffice to meet an extraordinary crisis. Nevertheless this crisis concentrated his mind and led to the initiation of important development projects of which the Homs irrigation scheme was the most significant for agriculture.

Nevertheless the Ba'athists made one valid criticism, and it was perhaps the most telling of all: The French failed utterly to force change in agrarian relations, and to free the peasant from the oppressive ties which bound him to the great landlords. Edouard Achard, one of their most astute experts, had stated at the very beginning of their tenure that the liberation of the cultivator was the *sine qua non* for the reconstruction of agriculture. The fact that one of his intellectual heirs, Jacques Weulersse, writing at the very end of the Mandate, stated that to break the hold of the *latifundia* would require a 'veritable social revolution' underlines just how much this policy had failed.⁸¹

Although Achard saw clearly the need for some sort of social revolution, he was unable to accept it ideologically, and quailed before

Figures for 1946: Marion Clawson. Hans H. Landsberg, Lyle T. Alexander, *The Agricultural Potential of the Middle East* (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), Appendix Table C8-35, 260.

⁸¹ Achard, 'Notes . . .', '100-102; Weulersse, *Le Pays . . .*, 366.

its consequences. His beliefs were formed around those good bourgeois virtues of capitalism and individualism, and his horror of revolution was undoubtedly reinforced by the all too recent convulsions which had shattered the régime of France's Russian ally and had cost French bondholders a fortune. Moreover as a practical matter, he feared that the 'spoliation' of the great landed magnates would serve no purpose because it was only through their mediation that the new and alien masters could reach the mass of the peasantry. He feared that to alienate the notables would only lead them to rouse the cultivators, still bound to them by ties of obligation, against the foreign intruder.

The alternative to confiscation was purchase. Unfortunately, purchase on a scale to destroy the *latifundia*; put the newly released lands in the hands of their cultivators; and finance these cultivators until they could stand on their own two feet required sums which were not available. Thus practical necessity chimed with ideological conviction to forestall any forceful intervention by the Mandatory Power in the land question, a question whose resolution was at the root of agricultural revival in Syria. As a result, the individual *did* triumph in the countryside, but it was the wrong individual, the notable rather than the cultivator who consolidated his position.

It was the persistence of this inclination for capitalism and individualism coupled with an aversion to state intervention which hampered much of the work of rural regeneration during the Mandate. Moreover the very idea of 'regeneration' did in itself tend to impose a

linear view which saw movement from one *physical* reality to another and 'better' one paralleled by a movement from one *social* reality to another and 'better' one. Although the process was inevitably slow, those who held this view envisaged a transformation into a new form of rural society which had sloughed off the vestiges of its predecessor as did a python its old skin.

It is here where one might say that in the issues it addressed, the Homs-Hama irrigation project embodied in microcosm the Mandate as a whole, and beyond the Mandate the course of agriculture in modern Syria. For within itself, this irrigation scheme linked the individual peasant, his village community, and the wider society within which they functioned in a relationship new to agrarian relations in that country.

It is here too, where one sees the bond between the French Mandatary and the Ba'thist revolutionary. For each held history to be linear: Each was certain that the creation of his particular ideal--for the one, the individual capitalist smallholder; for the other, the cog in the machine of state socialism--would at one fell swoop solve the problem of the peasant and with it the problem of agriculture in Syria.

In their eagerness to impose their vision, both ignored the reality that was rural life, a life where there was a harmony between the individual cultivator and the community to which he belonged, where elements of individualism and communalism were inextricably intertwined.

Moreover this rural world of individuals and their communities was set within a wider society, one whose ordinary intrusions were

those of landlords and tax collectors (often one and the same) who held the threads of patronage which tied the peasant however tenuously to the larger world outside. At times this society played a more intrusive rôle when necessity or policy decreed that agriculture should be organised on a larger and more complex scale. In Syria, perhaps the only time this higher order was achieved before the era of the Mandate was during the period which saw the construction of the old Homs Dam and its associated waterworks.

This relationship between the three elements of individual, community, and society was not linear with one proceeding to the other, the whole process being surrounded by an aura of 'progress' or 'decay'. Nor, taking the longer view, could one say that the relationship formed a cyclical pattern with the elements continuously replacing one another over the centuries.

Rather each of them formed part of a social reality, and each was necessary for the existence of the others. At times, one element might have a certain preponderance. Nevertheless should it become too weighty, the balance would shift in favour of its fellows.

In Syria, the Mandate period was one of transition. In the countryside, the pre-eminence of the communal element gradually gave way to individualism. It was due partially to natural changes--the growing of export crops such as cotton and fruit; a shift to irrigation--and partially to the pressure of an outside element--the French authorities--who saw the drive towards the creation of individual smallholders as a form of 'progress'.

The intervention of the Great Depression and the creation of a large and complex irrigation scheme as a result of it, put a check to this element, and began to accentuate the interests of society as a whole. In a way, the state, in the person of the Mandatary, represented these interests and held the balance between individuals--peasants and notables--and the different communities to which they belonged.

Nevertheless because the Mandatary was an alien power, it was unable to fully represent Syrian society *vis-à-vis* its constituent elements, and therefore was limited in the areas of its intervention. If France could promote public works projects at little harm to itself and to the benefit of her tutees, she could hardly promote agrarian reform. For to do so would go against her *own* interests and alienate that social group which helped her control the countryside. If in the process, the peasants, 'poor devils', were left in misery, so be it!

This pattern of limited state intervention persisted during the first fifteen years of independence as the notable/nationalists succeeded the French at the helm of the ship of state. This period saw the extension and completion of the Homs project, and the initiation of other large scale irrigation schemes such as the long-sought drainage and development of the Ghab. Nonetheless the Syrian political élite rejected any proposals for even a modest land reform because such schemes would result inevitably in the undermining of its power over the inhabitants of the countryside.

If the influence of the state expanded during the years following independence in 1943, so did that of the individual entrepreneur. For it

was he who introduced cotton cultivation into the Jazira. In these vast underpopulated lands, production was necessarily capital intensive rather than labour intensive, and agriculture was transformed into agribusiness. Nonetheless in Syria as a whole, there was an increasing bias in favour of state intervention.. As a result, this blaze of capitalism flashed like a comet across the sky with no sequel. This trend culminated in the union with Egypt in 1958 and more particularly, the Ba'ath Revolution of 1963.

To revolutionaries, it appeared that the state control now triumphant in Syria was truly the wave of the future. Society was firmly in the saddle, representing peasants against landlords and capitalists whilst solidifying its position. It accomplished this by instituting a land reform; completing the Ghab scheme; and implementing the harnessing of the Euphrates for agriculture. Nonetheless the revolutionaries deluded themselves if in their *hubris* they, like the French before them, thought that they could overturn the ageold pattern of relations between the individual, his community, and society at large to the permanent advantage of one of them.⁸²

⁸² For insights into the changing pattern of cultivation over a long period, see Robert McC. Adams, 'Historic patterns of Mesopotamian irrigated agriculture,' in Theodore E. Downing and McGuire Gibson (eds.), *Irrigation's Impact on Society*, Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona, No. 25 (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 1-6.

CONCLUSION

Conclus.1>Individual, community, and society in Syria

During the period of the French Mandate and the eras which followed it, the process of agricultural development in Syria has displayed both continuities and changes. The most important pattern, the one which formed the foundation for these continuities and changes was the eternal, but ever-changing relationship of individual, community, and society.

Whereas the continuities and changes which one can see occurring as one sweeps through the different periods of modern Syrian history--Ottoman, Faysalian, Mandatory, Independent, and Revolutionary--are linear in the sense that each flows out of its predecessors, they are founded on the relationship between the individual, his community, and the society to which both belong.

Each element plays its own part, although at times one might be more dominant than the others. Since a social organism is not a machine, but a human formation, its components have a tendency to impose an ordering principle upon the pattern of its elements. They do this in order to understand it, and to guide it towards a preferred destiny. Yet the act of imposing such an ordering principle upon elements which are in equilibrium, causes the others to react against it, and in the end the human directors of that social organism are forced to acknowledge the validity of each element within it.

The changes and continuities which took place in the relationship between Syrian agriculture, society, and polity in the years since the coming of France to the Levant at the end of the Great War reflected the evolution of this relationship between individual, community, and society in certain ways. The late Ottoman period saw the beginning of the slow dissolution of communal structures in the countryside, with moves towards stabilisation and individuation. Moreover the insertion of Syria into the world economy in the eighteen sixties exposed her population to the impersonality of the cash nexus whilst subjecting it to the fluctuation of market forces. The frontier zone of the Hawran and Jabal Druz was a region where the communal structures of *musha'* tenure were particularly strong, and during the economic crisis of the eighteen eighties, the Hawrani peasants put up a vigorous resistance to attempts by the Ottoman government and urban entrepreneurs to beggar them and replace relations of patronage with ones of direct exploitation.

The trend towards stabilisation and individuation of properties in the countryside accelerated under the Mandate. This was expedited by the work of the Cadastral Survey which sought to promote the family cultivating unit as a replacement for the communal unit in the countryside through delineation and consolidation of properties. This emphasis stemmed from the ideological predilection of French agronomists for a commonwealth of independent self-capitalised smallholders.

Nevertheless the French were unwilling to attack the great notables who dominated the countryside and whose presence there ensured that this commonwealth could never be created. The failure of an alien power and temporary mandatary to institute an agrarian reform which would dissolve the great *latifundia* and rock the countryside to its foundations was quite understandable. Yet this omission meant that during the Mandate, individuation remained an ideal rather than becoming a reality.

The Great Depression began to bring another element to the fore as it became clear that society represented by the state could alone bring to fruition large capital-intensive agricultural projects. The state was forced to intervene because French capital refused to sink funds into projects which carried much risk with hope of little reward. Moreover the individual peasant and his community had neither the experience nor the funds to construct and to manage such complex schemes. Although the Mandatory authorities built the physical structure of the Homs irrigation scheme, their ideological predilections made them slow to create an economic structure to complement the physical one.

The Mandate era was one of transition. During its course, it became evident that the agricultural regeneration of Syria could only be achieved by the direct intervention of the state. Nevertheless under the Mandate, and during the period of independence which succeeded it, the dominance of the state over agricultural processes was still incomplete because those who held power refused to see that the

creation of physical structures to reorder the countryside required social structures to complement and complete them. Such a vision was not realised until the coming of the Ba'ath 'revolution' of 1963 when society and its pilot, the state achieved what was apparently secure mastery over the processes of rural change.

Conclus.2>Agriculture and politics in Syria under the French Mandate--a balance sheet

In concluding this study of the relationship between agriculture and politics in Syria under the French Mandate, it might be useful to tabulate the most salient features of French attitudes towards the agricultural regeneration of Syria; the policies they propounded to achieve this goal; and the problems which limited their achievement.

A>The French authorities had no great incentive to make improvements in a land over which they would hold sway for but a limited time. Nonetheless they felt that their duty as mandatary required them to make an effort to leave Syria more prosperous than it was at their arrival.

B>Due to the fact that these foreign officials were unable to communicate with the rural inhabitants, people whose language and customs they found utterly alien, they were compelled to rely upon the local élite of landowner-notables to act as intermediaries. Because of this dependence, the French were afraid to upset the established social order in the countryside even though they were well aware that any successful regeneration of agriculture owed as much to the improvement of the status of the peasant as it did to the construction of public works.

C>The French saw economic development as a form of substitution for political development rather than as another facet of it. They believed that the physical improvement of the land and livelihood of the inhabitants of Syria was the best means of diverting the minds of the

political class from the struggle to throw off the cords with which the mandatory bound their country. Such visible constructions as dams, roads, and wells were also a way for the French to justify their rule in the face of obdurate opposition. It was this insistence on separating economics from politics which made the undoubted economic successes of the French in Syria less than they might have been otherwise. Nevertheless it was perhaps inevitable that this should be so: France was a tutor for Syria, not a father, and had neither the will nor the authority to make a revolution in a foreign land.

D>In order to make such physical improvements to the agricultural infrastructure, substantial financial resources were required. Before the era of 'foreign aid', these could only come from private capital; from foreign loans; or from the internal revenues of the mandated states. Unfortunately, capitalists were loath to invest where there could be no guarantee of profit, and domestic revenues derived from tariffs and the like were too small to fund large capital projects. Thus less spectacular improvements were made than was the case in Kemalist Turkey or Zionist-dominated Palestine. It was only because the settlement of the Ottoman Debt released certain funds held in reserve that it became possible to implement such large projects as the irrigation of the land around Lake Homs and the extension of the port of Beirut during the last five years of the peacetime Mandate. Moreover, by extinguishing this charge upon the revenues of the mandated territories, France ensured that they would start their independent existence without being burdened with an obligation which most of their citizens felt was not theirs to bear and which had the potential to mortgage their future prosperity.

E>An overriding problem, one which tended to ensnare any plans for agricultural improvements, revolved around the organisational deficiencies of the French administration. France brought to Syria her bureaucratic traditions: a proliferation of departments ensconced in a multilayered administrative structure. Each *Service* was eager to carve an arena of action for itself, one which it jealously guarded against the encroachments of its rivals. Infighting ensued, as each department sought to push its own ideas and gain the ear of the High Commissioner. These bureaucratic clashes were compounded by a lack of decisive direction from the top because the chief French representative tended to be more preoccupied with managing the immediate and future concerns of politics *per se* than with selecting and promoting the various

economic projects proposed by his subordinates. The result was a certain *malaise* as over the years schemes were initiated, studied, reformulated, and revived over and over again.

F>Given these various handicaps and the fact that Syria had been so unevenly developed before the Mandate, the progress made during the twenty years of French administration was not negligible. A start was made in the expansion of agriculture onto virgin lands; new crops were introduced and irrigation works were begun. All these served as a springboard for further improvements after independence. Unfortunately, the fact that the French were unable to master the agrarian question set a limit to any change in the countryside.

G>As a matter of course, Syrian nationalists complained of what little benefits their country had derived from this tutelage. Yet one must ask whether any foreign tutor would have expended capital with such little hope of return. Clearly the answer is no. Even if France had sunk a fortune in the amelioration of Syrian life, no amount of money could render acceptable an administration which, for many Syrians, was illegitimate in and of itself. Moreover it is too much to expect an alien power consciously to destroy an agrarian structure which served as an important prop for its own rule. Such a radical refashioning of the countryside could only be carried out by a national government, but one which itself was committed to change.

In examining the French *oeuvre*, three aspects appear particularly significant. The first is the mixed and quite interesting impact of European capitalism on Syria during the Mandate and the way in which it facilitated the emergence of a vigorous local capitalism. The second is the problem of the relation between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between the organic community in the countryside and the administratively created one. The third is the intertwining of systems of knowledge, systems of power, and webs of expectation: For the manner in which the French apprehended Syria affected the way in

which they conducted their administration whilst the manner in which Syrians apprehended France affected the way in which they reacted to this tutelage.

Conclus.3>French capitalism, local capitalism, and the development of Syrian agriculture

The most interesting aspect of the impact of French capitalism on Syria during the Mandate is that it turned out, paradoxically, to be so minimal. Under the Ottoman Empire, French capitalists held a powerful position in Syria because the Ottoman authorities had granted them the right to create certain services which the government had neither the means nor the expertise to develop for itself. These so-called 'concessions' to construct and operate public utilities and communications, particularly railways, usually brought a certain amount of profit to their investors. By their very nature, concessions were relatively risk-free because they were involved in sectors which were isolated from the daily concerns of the majority of the local population. Such isolation meant that the concessions were less exploitative than they would have been were they enterprises which controlled vital sectors of the economy, but it also meant that the French capitalists gained little insight into the real problems of the Syrian economy and Syrian society. These problems revolved around agriculture, but the foreign concessionaires generally found such investments too risky because profits could neither be immediate nor guaranteed.

The coming of the Mandate apparently saw France master of Syria. At the same time, the events of the Great War had compelled her to seek autarky in those primary products best-suited to feed her home industries. These two factors in combination drove French entrepreneurs to the Levant in order to supply the *mère patrie* with the raw materials these factories required whilst making a tidy profit for themselves.

Nevertheless French capital was cautious. To hardened imperialists, the new and untried system of 'mandate' with its international supervision and principle of the Open Door seemed hardly to guarantee a *chasse gardée*. Moreover the temporary nature of French tutelage gave little assurance that investments by her nationals would remain secure once independence was attained--a conviction which the political instability of the early Mandate years tended to confirm. Finally, the lack of a coherent policy towards economic development on the part of the Mandatory authorities themselves tended to stymie the initiatives of their compatriots.

Despite such constraints, it appeared that by 1929, French capital was on the verge of achieving results in the one area in which it had focused its energies, namely the production of American cotton in the Alaouite State. Unfortunately the onset of the great Depression in the early nineteen thirties put paid to French economic ambitions in the Levant, for in anticipation of coming profits, French entrepreneurs had over extended themselves, and were unable to meet their obligations to the banks which had financed them. The fact that French capital had

just begun to root itself in the Syrian economy ensured that it would be easily be swept away by the first tempest to strike it.

If the world economic crisis destroyed French enterprises, local ones proved to be a hardier breed. Heretofore, local capital had not much interested itself in agricultural investment, with the exception of silk, much preferring the more familiar path of trade. The success of French capital in promoting the production of marketable cotton whetted the appetites of local entrepreneurs, and its failure emboldened them to enter the lists. Therefore when the crisis lifted, Syrian and Lebanese capitalists were quick to fill the gap left by the demise by their foreign competitors, building on the foundations which they had laid down whilst avoiding their costly mistakes. It was these men who produced and benefited from the cotton boom of the nineteen fifties, a boom which derived ultimately from the activities of those French entrepreneurs who had pioneered the cotton projects in the Alaouites some thirty years before.

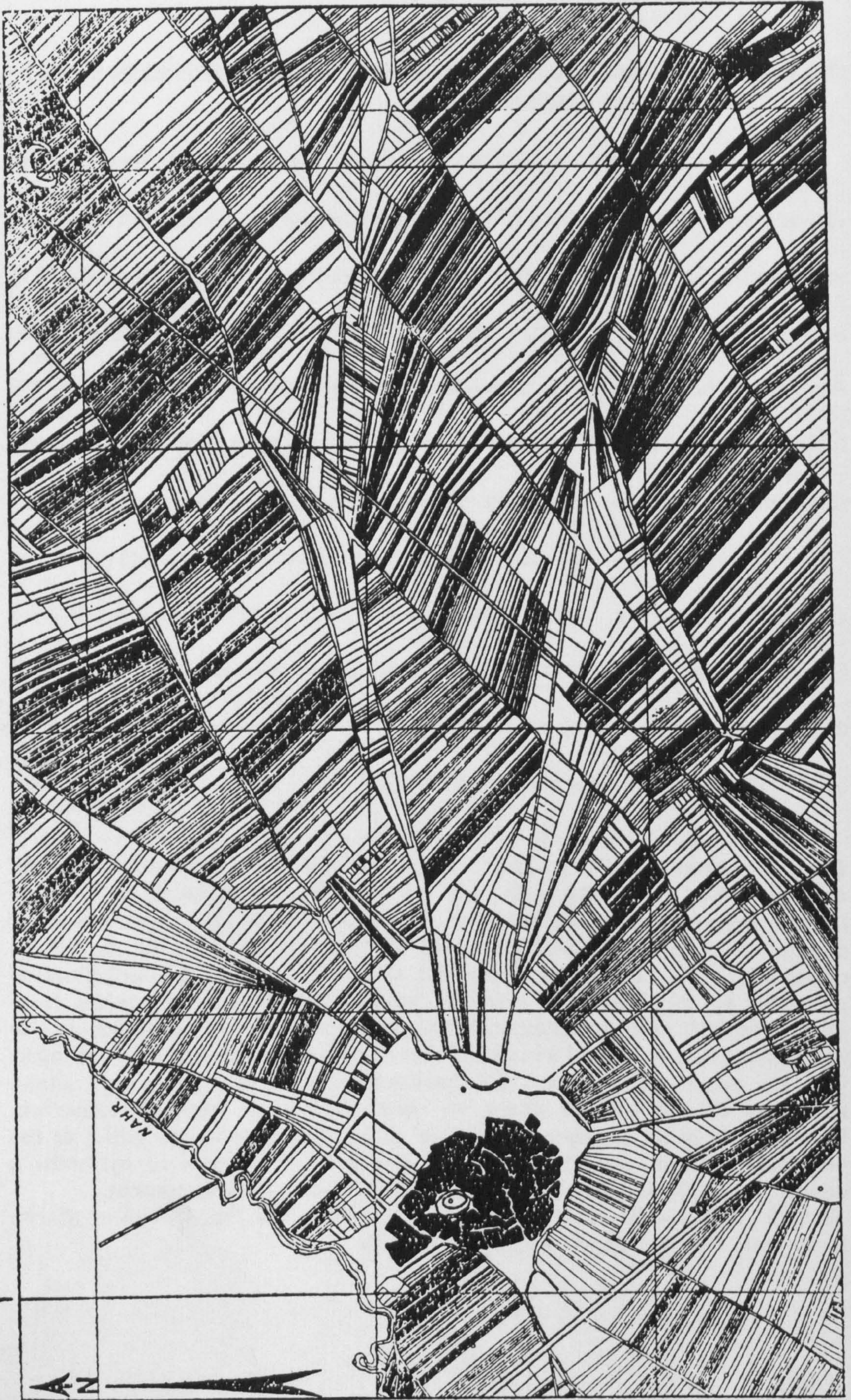
In sum, it was the Mandate system and the peculiar economic climate of the interwar period which prevented Syria from being turned into a French economic satellite. When independence came, French capital had no stronger position in Syria than the capital of any other country. Moreover if French capitalists did not themselves reap rewards in the sectors where they had blazed the path, the fact that they had done so enabled local entrepreneurs to follow in their footsteps. This ensured that the capital expended strengthened Syria rather than merely supplying profits to foreigners.

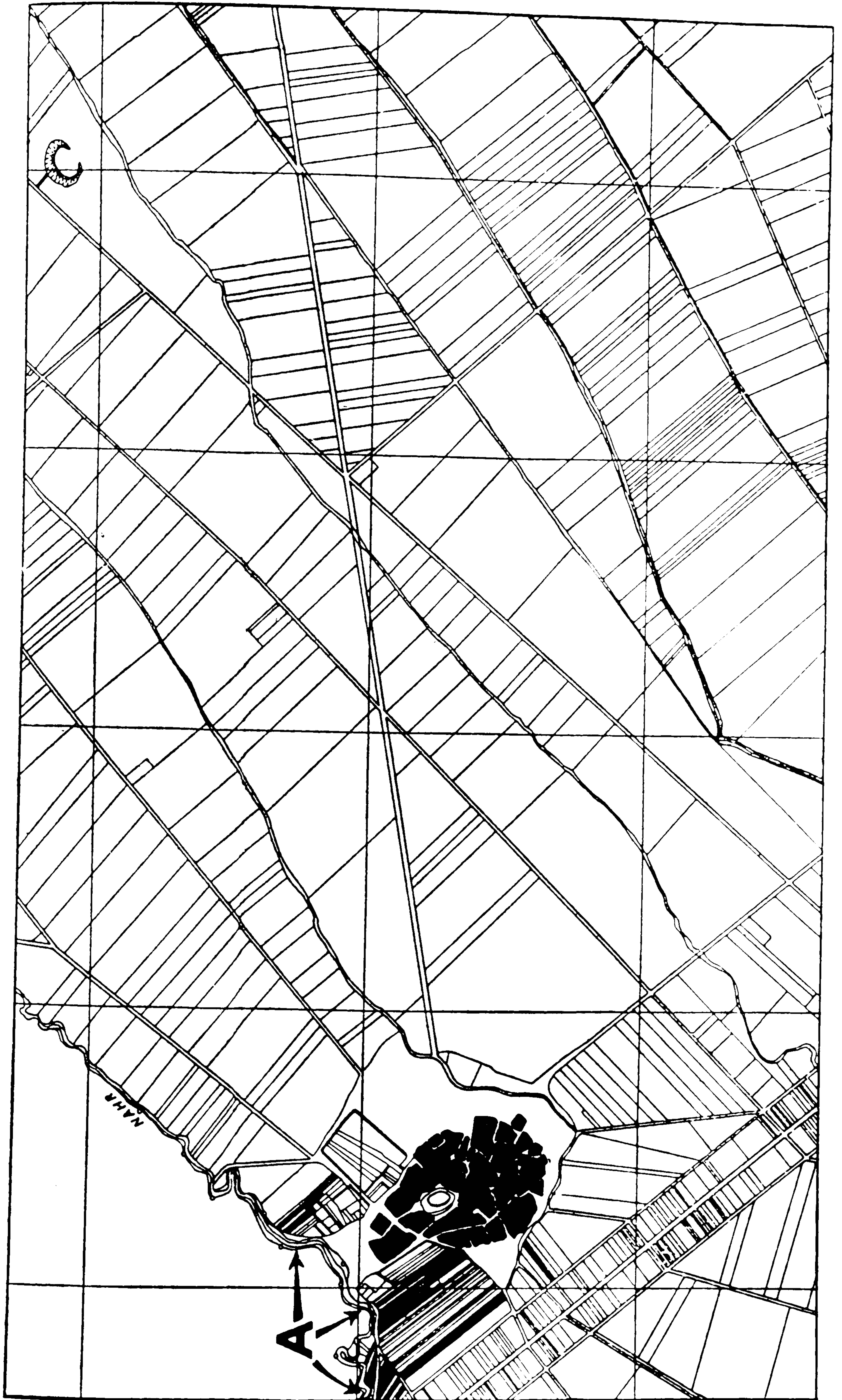
Conclus.4> *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as models for social change during the French Mandate

This work has demonstrated that in Syria during the Mandate the *Gemeinschaft*like structure of the village community founded on *musha'* tenure still dominated much of the countryside. Nevertheless, starting in the late Ottoman period, elements of *Gesellschaft* began to intrude. A spirit of individualism which was propelled by the attraction of profit from the sale of such commercial crops as fruit, nuts, and olives, slowly undermined the structure of the community.

The officials of the Mandatary promoted adherence to *Gesellschaft* norms. They sought to improve production by creating individual smallholdings owned by peasants who would treat their land as mere capital to be exploited rationally for profit rather than as part of the patrimony of their own community.

Between pages 371 and 372: Figs. 16 and 17. Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft on the Syrian plain. Fig. 16 (left) shows the village of Bar Ilyas (Biqā') before the individuation of properties when the organisation of musha' cultivation embodied the spirit of Gemeinschaft held by the village community. Fig. 17 (right) shows the same village after the individuation promoted by the Régie de Cadastre reduced the number of parcels from 32,643 to 950. Individual exploitation 'à la moderne' was now possible, for the Gesellschaft spirit had triumphed over that of Gemeinschaft. Nevertheless in some places (the upper right quadrant, for example), the map shows remnants of the parallel strips so characteristic of musha' cultivation. Perhaps this is an example of Tönnies' belief that even in the midst of the evolution towards Gesellschaft, there are those who wish to maintain a communal spirit, and do so by retaining Gemeinschaftlike structures. Source: Jacques Weulersse, Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), Figs. 37 and 38, 192, 193.





Another aspect of the reliance of the Mandatary on the principles of *Gesellschaft* lay in the firmly held belief that the road to agricultural regeneration passed through the fields of capitalism, whether the agent be the peasant on his private holding or the French financier placing large sums into modern irrigation works.

Nevertheless during the Mandate period, the peasant capitalist remained largely an ideal rather than a reality. The collapse of the international market during the economic crisis of the nineteen thirties effectively stifled any idea of creating peasant smallholders. Moreover it showed the weakness of capital worldwide and the error of the Mandate administration in relying on investments by interested entrepreneurs to develop certain aspects of Syrian agriculture.

The failure of private capital meant that it fell to the state in the person of the High Commissioner to take the lead in formulating and executing large agricultural improvement projects. Thus when the principles of *Gesellschaft* failed, the state found it necessary to intervene. Although officials of the Mandate authorised, designed, and created the physical structures of such schemes, schemes which in their very nature exemplified the principles of *Gemeinschaft*, these men could not see the implications of their acts. They shied from installing economic and social structures which would complement and complete the physical ones and create a *Gemeinschaftlike* organisation in the countryside. Indeed, so blind were they, and so wedded to the principles of *Gesellschaft*, that in the final report on the accomplishments and goals of the greatest of their irrigation projects,

the writers still spoke of their intention to *destroy* communal structures, and replace them with individual smallholdings owned by peasant capitalists.

Such policies and attitudes illustrate the transitional nature of the Mandate period, one in which elements of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were inextricably mixed. It was an era in which the organic community still retained its vitality despite all attempts to eradicate it, but one also in which the potential of the administratively created community first became apparent. Such a community could come into its own only under a system in which 'external purpose', i.e. the ideological conceptions and policies of central planners in Damascus, became more important than satisfaction of the genuine needs of communities in the countryside.

Conclus.5>Systems of knowledge and systems of power: France and Syria

When France agreed to accept the Mandate for Syria, she did so with a certain image of Syria firmly fixed in her mind's eye, an image which affected her plans to regenerate and modernise that country. She saw Syria as a land once so fecund, 'le pays du vin et du levain, le grenier de l'Empire Romain', which under Muslim and particularly Ottoman rule had sunk into a long decline. As tutor, her appointed task was to regenerate this land and make it once more a cornucopia, one whose products would enrich Syria, and France as well.

In seeking to regenerate Syria, French administrators and experts came with particular ideological biases fixed firmly in their

minds. Good bourgeois, transfixed by the horrors of the Bolshevik Revolution, they believed that rural Syria could only modernise through the imposition of the structures and processes of capitalism. By tenaciously pursuing this idea, even when they found it to be less than suited to Syrian conditions, they embodied those critiques which Georges Hardy believed limited the achievements of his compatriots:

Legislation in the abstract.
Collection of facts within systems of expectation.
Conception of a pre-established order rather than
reliance on a spontaneous organisation.
Foundation of colonial law on principles of absolute value.

Following the logic of these precepts, one could well say that the French might have achieved more, had they utilised the communal structures in the countryside instead of seeking to dissolve them. Such a criticism is too severe. Even had she been so inclined, France could not have modernised from below. She was in Syria for a brief period as a mere tutor, to guide rather than refashion. She had neither the will nor the resources to make a revolution.

Yet her aptitude at ordering and creating an efficient bureaucratic organism from above did bring some weighty achievements. This talent shone its brightest in the adumbration and establishment of the Homs irrigation scheme. One must not forget that this substantial project was constructed within both a specified time and an allotted budget. Moreover if conceived by a foreign administration, its construction was a truly Syrian enterprise, paid for by Syrian funds and built by Syrian contractors. In all its aspects, the Homs irrigation scheme served as a model, one which could only have

stemmed from the manner in which France conceived and conducted her rule.

Conclus.6>Systems of knowledge and webs of expectation: Syria and France

In addressing briefly the system of knowledge and webs of expectations through which Syrians apprehended France and her Mandate over them, one returns to the queries posed by Albert Hourani which inaugurated this work. How did Syrians, inhabitants of a land which for centuries had been a crossroads between East and West and between Christianity and Islam, react to the first systematic intrusion of a European power into their society?

The coming of France to the Levant only confirmed that this region, for good or for ill, was wedded permanently to the world economy, a situation which had slowly evolved since the middle of the nineteenth century. Syrians welcomed this marriage and, with their genius for trade, eagerly participated in it. Moreover they accepted the necessity for certain policies which French experts introduced in order to regenerate agriculture, the engine of their prosperity. Indeed Syrians themselves have continued to apply them in one form or another. Although those who controlled the land did not actively participate in implementing these policies, informed opinion constantly complained of what to its eyes was the slow pace and inadequate scope of progress.

These methods were and are what one might call applications of technique--irrigation, the expansion of production, and the introduction

of new crops. Nevertheless where the French failed, and were seen to fail, was in their refusal to overturn the inequitable relations of production between notable landowner and humble cultivator. The French did so out of self-interest because of those 'regrettable political repercussions' which such action would entail for their own position. Yet by refusing to do so--and the arguments used to justify this refusal were very strong--the French ensured that their *oeuvre* would be incomplete.

Writing in 1946, as the last French troops were finally withdrawing from Syria and bringing an end to the Mandate, Albert Hourani wondered which path the movement of 'Arab nationalism' would follow. He felt it might become one of opposition to the West using its technical skills to resist the political encroachments and spiritual challenges of Europe and America. Yet he also believed that this movement might become one which would use the skills acquired to reconstruct Arab society through assimilation and adaptation of those elements which are best in Western life.¹

With regard to Syria, her experience of Western tutelage during the French Mandate was a mixed one. Whilst she received many blessings--roads, irrigation schemes, new and potentially profitable crops--she also was subject to prolonged and inept political manipulation by administrators who were keener in preserving the privileges of their own country than they were in supporting and

¹ Hourani, 1-2.

promoting the political aspirations of their tutees. Nevertheless French tutelage, though often frustrating, did turn out to be a short one. A concatenation of circumstances revolving around Franco-British rivalry during the Second World War ensured that when France departed from Syria in 1946, she did so completely, leaving behind no residue of interests which might impel her to interfere in the affairs of newly independent Syria.

As a result of this timely departure, Syria was able to take her first independent steps, free from foreign tutelage. The mistakes she made, and they were many, were her own mistakes. In the final analysis, despite an erratic course which brought with it a commitment to Ba'thism and an attenuated form of State socialism, Syria was never alienated from the West. One can attribute this happy circumstance to a short and finite Mandate experience which, seen in the long term, proved to have had effects which were far more positive than negative.

FINIS

APPENDIX

STATISTICS OF PRODUCTION AND AREA OF WHEAT, BARLEY, AND COTTON (1325M/1909-10--1992)

NOTA: It is extremely hard to find accurate statistics about the area and production of Syrian agriculture, particularly for the Ottoman and Mandate periods. All of the figures given below are estimates only. Generally speaking, the statistics for the nineteen thirties are 'better' than those for the nineteen twenties simply because the Mandatory authorities were better organised. The French themselves admitted that the figures they issued for area and production were hardly exact, even though those presented were carefully scrutinised by the Economic Counsellors of the High Commission. They felt that figures for those crops which were either subject to 'fiscal surveillance' or to technical control on the part of the administration (e.g. tobacco and cotton) were more exact than those for 'ordinary' crops such as cereals (*Rapport à la Société des Nations . . .*, 1930, 20). Nonetheless the figures can serve as a rough guide to the effect of drought, and when broken down by region as they sometimes are, they can indicate comparative agricultural development or decline.

CROP PRODUCTION (thousand tonnes)

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Cotton</i>
1325 M			
(1909/10)	546.7	259.9	4.7
1920	249.0	162.0	
1921	220.2	134.9	
1922	345.0	182.5	1.2
1923	364.0	171.0	1.8
1924	325.8	190.3	3.0
1925	271.3	186.2	3.1
1926	375.5	236.2	1.7
1927	400.0	336.7	1.9
1928	200.0	298.0	.9
1929	453.1	530.8	3.1
1930	527.3	480.5	2.7
1931	386.8	311.7	4.1
1932	482.3	205.0	8.8
1933	326.3	273.1	9.3
1934	443.0	292.1	5.5
1935	504.0	347.1	5.5
1936	427.4	308.1	6.8
1937	468.8	266.3	5.6
1938	627.4	382.1	7.6

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Cotton</i>
1939	685.0	480.0	8.2
1940	602.0	338.5	7.6
1941	473.1	274.4	5.4
1942	507.4	248.9	3.2
1943	525.6	315.0	8.8
1944	438.8	250.3	8.7
1945	415.1	247.6	12.4
1946	577.9	284.2	14.1
1947	403.8	168.8	15.5
1948	656.7	305.1	25.6
1949	909.3	357.5	38.1
1950	830.0	322.0	100.3
1951	509.6	154.7	175.5
1952	900.0	466.9	176.4
1953	870.0	472.5	126.0
1954	965	635	220.8
1955	438	137	233.3
1956	1051	462	252.5
1957	1354	721	291.5
1958	562	228	249.8
1959	632	218	265.0
1960	555	156	278.7
1961	757	335	324.9
1962	1374	798	403.9
1963	1190	784	410.0
1964	1100	637	470.1
1965	1044	690	476.3
1966	559	203	375.3
1967	1049	590	329.1
1968	600	512	394.0
1969	1003	627	382.4
1970	625	235	382.6
1971	662	123	407.9
1972	1808	710	418.9
1973	593	102	404.3
1974	1630	656	386.5
1975	1550	597	414.3
1976	1790	1059	408.9
1977	1217	337	394.8
1978	1651	729	377.2
1979	1320.0	394.7	343.9
1980	2225.8	1587.7	325.1
1981	2087.0	1405.7	355.9
1982	1556.2	661.0	422.2
1983	1612.0	1043.3	526.5
1984	1067.6	303.5	450.6
1985	1714.0	740.2	486.9
1986	1969.0	1115.7	418.7

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Cotton</i>
1987	1656.4	576.3	351.0
1988	2067.1	2835.8	472.5
1989	1020.2	271.1	430.7
1990	2069.8	846.2	441.2
1991	2139.9	917.4	555.1
1992	3045.6	1091.4	688.6

	CROP AREA (thousand hectares)		
	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Cotton</i>
1325M			
(1909/10)	503.3	251.7	13.2
1922	380.0		
1923			
1924			22.0
1925	512.7	255.5	39.4
1926	463.9	252.7	31.9
1927	495.5	265.2	24.8
1928	414.4	360.0	16.7
1929	364.0	313.0	24.0
1930	520.0	349.0	31.0
1931	485.4	323.1	30.9
1932	481.3	321.0	8.1
1933	478.5	300.0	8.2
1934	555.2	295.4	13.2
1935	523.2	289.3	32.8
1936	532.6	294.3	40.4
1937	555.8	321.6	34.5
1938	538.0	337.2	37.3
1939	545.0	300.0	38.0
1940	616.4	371.0	38.6
1941	620.0	361.8	25.2
1942	648.5	336.4	15.5
1943	503.6	242.6	15.2
1944	570.7	272.7	16.7
1945	751.1	384.1	17.5
1946	810.5	370.8	19.8
1947	843.4	365.0	19.3
1948	788.1	341.6	24.0
1949	987.9	347.9	25.3
1950	992.2	416.4	78.0
1951	1036.7	343.6	217.4
1952	1167.2	396.7	189.3
1953	1314.4	428.0	127.6
1954	1347	543	187.3
1955	1463	614	248.8

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Cotton</i>
1956	1537	636	272.2
1957	1495	813	258.3
1958	1461	769	260.8
1959	1422	727	227.2
1960	1550	742	212.3
1961	1315	727	249.1
1962	1417	723	302.4
1963	1559	804	291.7
1964	1476	765	286.5
1965	1214	683	287.8
1966	1312	716	255.1
1967	1201	646	239.4
1968	934	656	288.4
1969	1221	626	299.1
1970	1341	1126	249.3
1971	1274	435	250.4
1972	1354	593	238.2
1973	1476	914	200.4
1974	1537	697	205.5
1975	1692	1011	208.1
1976	1590	1172	181.8
1977	1528	1021	186.5
1978	1555	1033	169.1
1979	1445.1	1102.2	154.8
1980	1449.1	1210.2	140.9
1981	1255.0	1347.0	143.4
1982	1222.3	1588.6	158.8
1983	1290.4	1520.3	175.7
1984	1107.0	1289.1	178.5
1985	1265.0	1385.9	170.2
1986	1098.3	1548.1	144.3
1987	1183.0	1569.9	128.7
1988	1100.8	1844.1	171.0
1989	1239.9	2891.7	158.1
1990	1340.6	2729.4	156.4
1991	1268.6	2233.1	170.4
1992	1380.8	2266.5	211.8

SOURCES: *Ottoman Period:*

1325 M/1909-10 (M=Mali or financial year)--Figures are converted from *dunums* (1 *dunum*=919.302 m²) *kiyyes* (1 *kiyye*=1.28 kg and *kiles* (1 *kile*=36.37 litres): Justin McCarthy, compiler, *The Arab World, Turkey, and the Balkans (1878-1914): A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982) Tables XIV.4; XIV.6; XIV.8, on 266, 268, 270. Note that 'Syria' comprises the *vilayets* of Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut, and the independent *sanjaq* of Zor, and thus is larger than either mandated or independent Syria because territory is

included which became part of Turkey, Jordan, and Palestine after the Great War.

Mandate Period:

1920-1930--Based on Norman Burns, *The Tariff of Syria, 1919-32* (Beirut: American Press, 1933; New York: AMS Press, 1973), Table I, 143 and notes on 288-90. Burns was a careful scholar, and his figures are judiciously balanced. Other sources are République Française, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *Rapport à la Société des Nations*, various years; *Bull. BSL*, various years, and *La Syrie et le Liban sous l'Occupation et le Mandat Français, 1919-1927* (Nancy--Paris--Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, Editeurs, n.d.), 238. Note that until 1938, figures for Lebanon and the *sanjaq* of Alexandretta are included in all totals.

1931-38--Based on the *Rapport . . .* and the *Bull. BSL*, various years. These two sources tend to confirm one another since they both used official figures.

1939--The most difficult year for figures since the *Rapport . . .* and the *Bull. BSL* stop with those for 1938. Statistics for 1939 come from 'Le développement agricole en Syrie et au Liban,' one of a series of official reports summarising the French *oeuvre* in the Levant. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 370.

War Period:

1940-42--Délégation Générale de la France Combattante au Levant, Affaires économiques, Section centrale, 'Rapport sur la situation économique des Etats du Levant,' 1940-1941; **and** 'Rapport sur la situation économique des Etats du Levant,' 1942. Figures are found in Deuxième Partie--Tableaux statistiques. MAE--Nantes, FB, Carton 764. Figures include Lebanon.

1943-45--International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Syria* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), Appendix, Tables 1 and 2 on 323-324.

Independence Period:

1946-1992--Republic of Syria/Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract*, various years. Also Marion Clawson, Hans H. Landsberg, and Lyle T. Alexander, *The Agricultural Potential of the Middle East* (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), Appendix--Tables C8-35, C8-37, 260-61, 264-65.

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Série E--Levant, 1918-1940.

Syrie-Liban, 1918-29, vols. 1-437

Syrie-Liban, 1930-1940, vols. 456-637

NOTA--There is not as much material here as one might wish, primarily because during the German occupation of France at the time of the Second World War, the Nazis stripped the archives of the MAE of much of the material from the interwar period. This was removed to Germany, and fell into Soviet hands at the end of the war. The Soviets brought the archives back to Moscow, and the French have been seeking their return for many years. Apparently the negotiations have finally reached a successful conclusion, and these archives are now being repatriated.

For the Mandate, in any case, the researcher will find much more information in the archives of the High Commission which are now housed in the archives of the MAE at Nantes.

Ministère des Affaires Etrangères [MAE]: Nantes

Série Fonds 'Beyrouth', 1920-1941: Archives du Haut Commissariat de France en Syrie et au Liban.

NOTA: This is an enormous archive, some 4,500 cartons, which contains the records of the French High Commission (1920-41), and those of the Délégation Générale of the Free French Forces (1941-45). These archives are much more complete than those deposited in the Quai d'Orsay itself. The Nantes trove was stored in the French Embassy in Beirut, and repatriated in three instalments between 1969-89.

These cartons contain fascinating material with regard to the inner workings of the Mandate administration, political events, economic and financial affairs, and other problems encountered by the French in Syria. Nevertheless, there is much that is not there--for example very little from the period 1921-26. Some was destroyed deliberately at the time of the Mandate, e.g. the archives of the Secrétariat Général between 1918-27 which were burnt over a two day period in March, 1946 by two officers of the Services Spéciaux. Some were destroyed by fire, for example, the fire in December, 1939 in the offices of the French Delegation in Damascus. Much appears to have vanished simply because of the enormous and constantly increasing volume of the archive itself--an archive which in the 1930's was minded by one archivist and a few helpers part time.

When the records were repatriated, the archivists of the MAE made a series of 23 inventories which contained a summary listing of their contents carton by carton. Schematic as they are, these are an essential guide to the contents of the boxes. Nevertheless the researcher should be aware that often there is only a vague correspondence between the contents of the cartons and the lists in the inventories.

1^{er} versement--Cartons 362-3002

Sous-séries: Cabinet Politique, 1920-48--Cartons 362-1271

_____	--	_____	1357-1370
_____	--	_____	1478-1530
Origines diverses, 1917-48--	_____	_____	1531-1561
_____	--	_____	2208-2458
_____	--	_____	2836-2850
_____	--	_____	2964-3002

Cabinet Ponsot/Renseignements

et Presse, 1924-45--	_____	_____	1562-1673
Conseiller financier, 1918-48--	_____	_____	2669-2385

2^{ème} versement--

Sous-série: Services techniques, n.d.--_____1-485

3^{ème} versement--

Archives du Haut Commissariat, 1914-56--Cartons 1-577

Sous-série: Conseiller financier, 1929-45--_____300-23.

Plus an additional 35 cartons of documents concerned with Services techniques which were integrated and numbered with that series, e.g. 365/2.

Ministère des Finances [MF]: Paris

NOTA: There is an enormous amount of material dealing with the economic development of the Mandated territories in the Levant in the Ministry of Finance [strictly speaking, the Ministry of the Economy, Finances, and Budget], much of it extremely interesting. When the Finance Inspectors examined the often convoluted economic affairs of the Mandated territories, they were hardly diplomatic in their critiques. Nonetheless for this thesis, this archive was only lightly probed, and they require a more systematic investigation in the future.

Cartons B 32.934-40.

Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Lyon [CCIL]: Lyon

NOTA: These archives are particularly good for the early period of the Mandate (1920-22) which saw a close involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in the affairs of the Levant. For example, they house the reports of members of the first French economic mission to Syria in 1919. Moreover by examining the deliberations of the most important of

the 'soyeux Lyonnais', the businessmen and educators who formed the élite of this important commercial city, one can gain an idea of the different shades of French opinion with respect to the Syrian venture.

Fonds Musées--Tissus CCIL 93C 1*1.

Fonds Condition des Soies 1*6, Cartons 1, 6, and 26.

Comptes rendus des travaux de la Chambre.

Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseille: Marseille

NOTA: Since Marseille was the principal French port on the Mediterranean, the archives of its Chamber of Commerce house much interesting material about the economic affairs of the Mandated territories from the perspective of the members of an institution which had been involved in the Levant trade ever since the seventeenth century.

Dossier MQ 5.4 Syrie Liban I, 1885-1926.

_____. _____ II, 1927-34.

_____. _____ III, 1935-59.

Société Industrielle:

Chambre de Commerce:

Archives Municipales: Mulhouse (Haut Rhin)

NOTA: There is a certain amount of material regarding the relations between the cotton magnates of Alsace and the Levant states, but not as much as one might have wished. Unfortunately, the archives of the **Société Industrielle**, which served as a sort of private club for the great industrialists of Mulhouse, have not as yet been classified.

The **Archives Municipales** contain notebooks of several important Alsatian cotton mills, listing their raw cotton imports from around the world, e.g.

SAIC [Société Anonyme d'industrie Cotonnière]:

Carnet: 'Approvisionnement de coton, août 1926 à décembre 1930'.

Filature et Tissage de la Cité:

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